



COMMODORE JOSIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA

Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, National Planning, Public Service, Peoples' Charter for Change and Progress, Information, Sugar, Indigenous Affairs and Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Provincial Development

**ADDRESS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FIJI
UMANAND PRASAD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE**

Saweni Campus
LAUTOKA

Sat. 24th October, 2009
1000 Hours

The Pro-Chancellor, Pundit Bhuwan Dutt;
The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Muralidhar;
The Dean of the Medical School, Dr Umanand Prasad;
Cabinet Ministers;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Members of the Judiciary;
Ministers of Religion;
Distinguished Guests;
Students and Staff of the University of Fiji.

It gives me much pleasure to speak at this opening of the University of Fiji's, Uma Nand Prasad School of Medicine ('UPSM'). It gives me particular pleasure because this School represents the commitment of a son of Fiji to the land of his birth.

Dr Uma Nand Prasad represents the many thousands of former Fijians who have succeeded professionally and financially abroad yet have never forgotten their love and duty to Fiji.

He is not alone. There are many former Fijians who would come back if they could. So deep is their love and affection for the country of their birth.

It is for this reason that Government has implemented a multiple citizenship law, to encourage former Fijians to return and invest both emotionally and economically to build a new Fiji.

This investment by Dr. Uma Nand Prasad is not just any investment. It has been chosen wisely. It will strengthen and extend tertiary education in Fiji. It will lead to the education and training of new doctors. /

Any investment in education must be encouraged and applauded. Why? Because it is education which will lay the foundations for a population which is enlightened and broad minded. It will also lead to economic growth and prosperity.

Fiji has suffered for too long from narrow and insular thinking - thinking which is locked into communal and prejudiced theories

about why human beings behave in the way they do. Why is it that conduct in Fiji is often explained or discussed on the basis of ethnic or religious background?

We human beings, complex as we are, are influenced and persuaded by far more important issues and determinants than our ethnic or religious backgrounds. And it is only education, the pursuit of knowledge and an open mind which will create an enlightened environment to foster greater understanding of human behaviour.

Ladies and Gentlemen Fiji is in dire need of doctors and medical specialists. The training of new doctors through the UPSM will contribute to the fulfillment of that need. These new doctors need to remain in Fiji after their training, to staff hospitals in order to provide the much needed medical services to our people.

My Government is committed to improving education and medical care. Through the Ministry of Health we will be allocating sufficient funds through the upcoming Budget to ensure that basic medical infrastructure is in place both in the rural areas and urban centers.

This is my first visit to the University of Fiji, and the vision of the founders of this University continues to resonate today. That vision is

to provide tertiary education to all Fijians; education which is easily available, affordable and contemporary.

The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha ('the Sabha') has been a pioneer in education for over 100 years through its primary and secondary schools across Fiji. It is interesting to note that the Gurukul Primary School across the road was established and registered as early as 1918 by the Sabha. This shows the long term commitment of the Sabha to education in Fiji.

In 2004 the Sabha decided to take an unprecedented step when it established a university in Saweni. The rest is history.

With two campuses, five academic schools, and centers of Excellence such as the Centre for International and Regional Affairs, and the Centre for Indigenous Studies, the University has truly come of age. I am particularly pleased with the pioneering work done by the staff of the Centre for Indigenous Studies in the promotion of written resources and literature in *vosa vakaviti*. The objectives of the Centre are admirable and worthy of our support.

Indeed the University established a law and medical school within 3 years of the establishment of the University itself. This is a remarkable achievement and deserves our commendation.

My Government is pleased to have provided operational grants to the University of Fiji in the past two years and I can assure the University that this assistance shall continue in the future.

In many ways my Government and the University of Fiji share a common philosophical approach to education in that we see a moral purpose for schooling and education. That purpose is to increase access to quality education by reducing the gap between the rich and the poor, the rural and the urban, and male and female.

It is precisely for this reason that my Government has decided to provide free bus fares for students attending school for the rest of the school term.

We are here today to celebrate a success story, which marks a milestone.

The vision, generosity and dedication of Dr. Uma Nand Prasad over the past three years have made this medical school a reality and a success.

I am told that the University of Fiji as required by the Fiji Medical Council commissioned an independent external evaluation of the MBBS program in August this year. The three member international

team of medical educators spent two weeks at the University and produced a comprehensive report based on standards set by the World Federation for Medical Education.

This Report found that the medical school at the University had surpassed expectations by already achieving global standards in several areas. It found that the UPSM has been founded with a clear mission and is supported by a talented group of people. It also found that these committed individuals have invested their skills, resources and energy in this important effort; one that shall create opportunities for quality medical education dedicated to the improvement of medical care in Fiji. The report concluded that the school will have no difficulty in meeting global standards in all areas by the end of the school's first curriculum cycle.

This Report acknowledges the potential of this Medical School and indeed of this University.

Encouraged by the positive findings of this Report my Government will continue to support the Medical School through the award of scholarships and through the facilitating of the clinical training of its students in Government hospitals.

The opening of this medical school is not just a proud moment for its students, staff and the University of Fiji, it is also a proud and momentous occasion for Fiji. It represents the triumph of dedication, good faith, perseverance and vision.

I congratulate the Dean of the UPSM Dr Uma Nand Prasad for this achievement. I congratulate the Sabha for its vision. I also congratulate all the students of the Medical School and look forward to seeing you joining the ranks of the medical profession upon graduation.

We all look forward to seeing you in our hospitals.

Vinaka vakalevu.
