

The University of Fiji

Welcome Address delivered at the opening of the Umanand Prasad School of
Medicine (UPSM), 24 October 2009

Professor Srinivasiah Muralidhar, Vice-Chancellor

To the sacred *vanua o Vuda, Na Momo levu na Tui Vuda* and the people of Vuda, the University of Fiji acknowledges with gratitude your generosity of spirit in allowing the University, a place of higher learning for the young people of Fiji and generations to come, to be planted, and take root and grow on your soil. We thank you for your wisdom, for this place of learning is situated on your land named *Sauva*, which, I understand means “specially chosen for a challenging task”. We are indeed thankful that you have enabled all of us, the people of the West and indeed the whole of Fiji, to face together in unity our many challenges now and in the future. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless you. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

The Chief Guest, the Honourable Prime Minister, Commodore Bainimarama, Honourable Ministers of Cabinet, Members of the diplomatic corps, Members of the Judiciary, Pro-Chancellor, Pandit Bhuwan Dutt, Dean of the Medical School, Dr Umanand Prasad, the Chair of the UPSM Advisory Committee, Dr John Fatiaki, Maulana Hafiz Musa Patel, Rev Maraya Nasenaivalu, Pundit Guru Dutt, Vice-Chancellor of USP, Professor Rajesh Chandra, Mrs Dharma Chandra, the Director of the Fiji Institute of Technology, Dr Ganesh Chand, the Dean of the Fiji School of Medicine, Professor Ian Rouse, Mrs Caroline Rouse, distinguished guests, parents, friends of the University, members of the University community: It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all this morning as we gather to celebrate the opening of the new facility for the Umanand Prasad School of Medicine. This is the first time that our Prime Minister is visiting the University of Fiji, and we are very pleased and honoured Sir that you were able to accept our invitation.

Mr Prime Minister, as we join in this celebration, it is appropriate for me to mention that just as your Government has attempted to create a national consciousness through the NCBBF and the People’s Charter, we, in a small way, are trying to promote understanding and tolerance among the young men and women at the University of Fiji through our innovative curriculum. For example, every student at this University must take a course on Contemporary Fiji and a course on Governance and Ethics. In addition, an introduction to Fijian and Hindi is compulsory for all students. We believe that these efforts will go a long way in creating “one country, one nation and one people” in time to come.

We are most grateful to the Government for supporting the University of Fiji through operational grants in the past two years, and through the scholarships made available for our students.

Mr Prime Minister, if we can be of any assistance to you and to your colleagues in the task you have begun, we would be honoured to participate and lend our support.

Dear friends: We are a very young University, having started our operations only in 2005, but we have achieved much already. We have campuses in Saweni and Suva with a student enrolment of 600 of which 40% are ethnic Fijians and 60% are women. We have a flourishing Law School in Suva with 70 students, and a thriving Medical School right here, with 63 students, including three students from the Solomon Islands. Nearly 80 students are enrolled in postgraduate studies in fields such as Educational Leadership, English Literature, Economics, Mathematics and IT, and there will be more next year.

Our B Com in Accounting has been accredited by the Fiji Institute of Accountants and our MBBS programme has been reviewed very positively by an international team of medical educators. We have had two successful graduations with the degrees and diplomas conferred by our Chancellor, the Turaga na Tui Vuda. We offer high quality tertiary education at an affordable cost. But for this University, many students would not have had the opportunity to undertake tertiary studies.

Two weeks ago the Hon Minister Samuela Saumatua addressed us at the Fiji Day celebration and launched the Fijian translation of Dr Rusiate Nayacakalou's book *Leadership in Fiji* produced by our Centre for Indigenous Studies. We have ambitious plans for the Centre which is the only one of its kind in Fiji. This facility, when completed, will develop into a major teaching, research, performing and exhibition centre for indigenous and multi-ethnic arts and culture for the whole of Fiji, and especially for the tourism belt in the West. Draft drawings for a traditional-style building for the Centre are ready, and we are eagerly awaiting the funding to be facilitated by the Government.

Dear friends: let me now turn to the subject of today's festivity. We are celebrating the culmination of a dream, the realisation of a vision, Dr Umanand Prasad had about four years ago. The distinguished Indian artist, M F Hussain, once said, "even dreaming is an art, and only those who are proficient in that art can capture and convert into reality what the eyes see when they are closed." It is also said that a dream is not something you have in your sleep, but a dream is something that doesn't allow you to sleep. I believe that both these statements apply in equal measure to Dr Umanand Prasad whose generosity, energy, dedication and unwavering commitment have not only given us a functioning medical school but a brand new facility which will be opened by the Prime Minister in a short while.

Dr Umanand Prasad, originally from Labasa, began his medical studies at the Fiji School of Medicine, and later went to Mumbai to complete a degree on a Government of India Scholarship. He returned to Fiji and practiced here for some time before leaving for Australia. Dr Prasad has been running a very successful

medical practice in Adelaide for over 30 years. He decided, about three years ago, to establish a medical school at the new University of Fiji, pledged an initial contribution of \$1million, and also agreed to provide the services as Dean of the medical school without any remuneration for the first six years.

So began the Umanand Prasad School of Medicine, UPSM as we affectionately call it, with 40 students in temporary accommodation in our neighbouring Pt Vishnu Deo Memorial College. The construction of the medical school building started in June last year, and it was our privilege to have had both the Hon Dr Jiko Luveni, the then Minister of Health, and the Hon Filipe Bole, the Minister of Education, at the foundation laying ceremony. That building is now ready for opening.

This is indeed a proud moment for everyone associated with the Medical School, the students, their parents, the teaching staff, the builder, Mr Ranjeet Singh and his team of workers, the Bank of Baroda, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji, the founders of the University of Fiji, our former Vice-Chancellor, Professor Rajesh Chandra, the first CEO of the University of Fiji, Dr Ganesh Chand, Dr Chandra Dulare, and above all, for the benefactor, Dr Umanand Prasad. This should also be a proud moment for the Hon Dr Neil Sharma, the Ministry for Health, and indeed for the Government as a whole to see how its own efforts in offering quality medical education are being complemented by private initiative at the University of Fiji through the UPSM.

In undertaking this project, Dr Prasad has sacrificed much in the past three years—his medical practice, his family, time, energy and health—it has truly been a labour of love. Dear friends, may I ask you to join me in conveying our profound appreciation and deep gratitude to Dr Umanand Prasad for his vision, generosity and drive that have not only provided an opportunity for young men and women from the West to study medicine at their door step, but also have given us a magnificent new facility for the School of Medicine.

Mr Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen, I once again welcome you to the University of Fiji and wish you all a very pleasant morning. Please enjoy the rest of the festivity.

Vinaka Vakalevu Dhanya Vaad Thank you