



HIS EXCELLENCY RATU EPELI NAILATIKAU

CF, LVO, OBE (Mil), OSJ, CSM, MSD

President of the Republic of Fiji

ADDRESS AT THE LAUNCH OF THE HONOR FIJI JOURNEY

Novotel Entertainment Centre
LAMI

Thursday, 19th April, 2012
7.00p.m.

The Honour Fiji Journey Ambassadors

Representatives of Government Ministries

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Sponsors

Partners

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening

Ni sa bula vinaka

Namaste

As someone who has long championed causes to ensure the sustainability of our rich, but seriously threatened, island way of life, the “way the world should be”, I greatly welcome this unique opportunity to serve as Patron of the Econesian society’s Honour Fiji Journey, a journey that, of necessity, will be sailed on both chartered and uncharted seas. To ensure success, we must chart the right course using the best combinations of time-tested and traditional knowledge and up-to-date modern science. This will require the youth of today to become hybrid pacific leaders and thinkers who value and know traditional knowledge and who can marry this with cutting edge scientific knowledge of a rapidly changing world. This encapsulates the vision of the Honour Fiji Journey, something to which the Econesian society has been dedicated since its inception in 2007, when it first set sail under the school of islands and oceans at the University of the South Pacific after inspiration from a South Pacific Regional Environment Programme –the Environmental Youth Leaders Summit - in Samoa.

The name “Econesian” is derived from the Greek words “eco” for home and “nesos” meaning island. “Eco” is also the root of the words ecosystem and ecology, the study of the interrelationships between

life and their habitat, the study of ecosystems. The society's founding vision was to bring together, under one unified umbrella, students and future leaders from the 12 member countries of the University South Pacific – like-minded young men and women, dedicated to applying their education, in very practical ways, to the wellbeing and future sustainability of their Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian homes. Many of them now work with your organisations.

In these times of enormous environmental, economic and political challenges, the in-depth knowledge of the earth that indigenous peoples have gained over millennia can no longer be dismissed. It must be embraced as central to achieving sustainability.

Sadly, the lands, waters and rich cultures of indigenous peoples have been plundered worldwide due to increasingly short-sighted, destructive and unsustainable use of mother earth.

Today, many indigenous peoples and their cultures and languages are on the brink of extinction. For some peoples, where irreversible signs of breakdown are daily blazoned on our TV screens, it may be too late.

But, for the Pacific, and Fiji, which is arguably still among the most peaceful and sustainable areas on planet earth, there still is time, if we act now, to preserve our ancient wisdom as a basis for moving forward.

Here in Fiji there has been growing concern from Government regarding cultural revitalization.

This is reflected through continued government support towards cultural heritage activities such as heritage site management, artistic promotion activities, developing creative industries, preservation and protection of artefacts and archaeological documentation, safeguarding and promotion of language.

With the impact of climate change and natural hazards, it is prudent that we pay close attention to the traditional agricultural practices, food preservation methods and early warning systems that used to work extremely well with our forefathers, and their integration with today's scientific and technological expertise.

Tourism, as the fastest growing industry in the world, relies to a large extent on cultural heritage for its sustainability. Due emphasis should be taken towards listing the cultural and natural heritage sites of our islands and the establishment of a proper heritage management system including the necessary infrastructure to ensure that benefits do flow into the local economy and thus also ensuring the sustainability of tourism-based activities.

The challenge is to develop and engage in both the formal education curricula and the non-formal activities and programmes for young people and to provide a catalyst and an enabling opportunity for them in instilling a sense of values and cultural identity. The relationship between gender, culture and the environment also needs serious consideration.

Biodiversity alone is considered the life support system of the planet – we depend on it for the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink. The connections between biodiversity and our sustainable future must be fully appreciated by all. We literally need to conserve biodiversity as our lives depend on it.

This evening, I wish to highlight the critical importance for young people to re-connect with their cultures, traditions and elders and, more importantly, to understand that we, as custodians of our living world, must accomplish this if we are to achieve a sustainable island and ocean life. I encourage communities in Fiji and elsewhere in the Pacific to act now to protect and respect their identities - their islands, waters, forests, animals, plants and, most important, the knowledge that their ancestors have for these kindred living souls. I invite you, as individuals and international and national organisations, to partner us as we undertake this journey.

There are two underlying principles of the Honour Fiji Journey I wish to bring to your attention:

One, our indigenous knowledge has helped us to lead largely sustainable island lifestyles, lifestyles that are clearly far more sustainable than most current development models that have threatened the very sustainability of life on earth. But this knowledge and their associated values are seriously threatened, as the last remaining members of the generation that had this knowledge pass away.

We must empower this and future generations of emerging leaders to save, learn, embrace and apply this time-tested wisdom to solving the development dilemma of our times.

Two, even if we are able to save and apply traditional knowledge to development, this, alone, will not guarantee sustainability. Increasing population and urbanization; increasing poverty; rapid expansion of hyper-consumer societies and associated hunger for natural resources; environmental breakdown and loss of biodiversity; climate change; increasingly destructive natural disasters; epidemics of non-communicable and communicable diseases; invasions of our islands by alien plants and animals; and, the recent global economic and social breakdown clearly show that we must find new hybrid development solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen, in short, if we are to realize the illusive vision of sustainability in a rapidly modernizing and highly threatened world, we must learn of the best, and from the worst indigenous and modern science.

In addition to promoting a "blue-green economy", we must preserve and develop blue-green cultures, true-blue and vibrant-green, island, forest and ocean cultures and economies that are truly reconnected and interconnected with their island and ocean homes!! This is the elusive, but, we believe reachable, destination towards which we are charting our Honour Fiji Journey, a journey that will attempt to fill our "modern sails with time-tested ancient winds" in a voyage across the most peaceful ocean on earth, the pacific ocean - an ocean that we must keep conflict and pollution-free, rich in biodiversity and culture, and sustainable for all life.

The Honour Fiji Journey will commence today, at this launch.

It will involve a series of activities leading up to selected youths boarding the tall ship Alvei on June 9th, 2012, on an 8 weeks epic journey of discovery and learning to Dawasamu in Tailevu, a world-recognized protected area for dolphins; to Taveuni, Fiji's "garden isle"; Kia island on the Great Sea Reef or Cakau Bula, Naividamu in the Macuata waters and to the "blue lagoons" of the Yasawas, a world renowned area where culture and nature meets.

A World Oceans Week "Vaka Festival" is being organized at the University of the South Pacific's Laucala Bay foreshore from June 8th to 16th. This will involve, for the first time in Fiji, all 7 "Vakas" of the Pacific Voyaging Society berthed for a one week celebration of their recent epic trans-pacific voyage and of traditional navigation, arts, dances, songs and the staging of another acclaimed musical and dance "Drua: the wave of fire" produced by USP's Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture (OCAC).

There is also the proposed construction of a "Tagimaucia Eco-library" in Southern Taveuni to promote rediscovery and practice of native traditional ecological knowledge. More importantly, and an ongoing emphasis of Econesian society activities, is engagement with local communities, governments and other NGO and private entities, through a range of key areas of opportunity to address key developmental issues of our times.

We are afraid that if we don't address these issues with the best mix of traditional and modern science and wisdom, future generations of "Econesians", our children and grandchildren, will be resigned to live with the stark realities of areas where long-term environmental, social and economic sustainability appears problematic, if not, impossible in the long run.

Ladies and gentlemen, it will not be an easy journey. There will be rough seas, countervailing winds and more modern vessels, vessels from larger continental worlds and from various schools of thought, leading us astray. But we must be strong and trust the time-tested elements of our own island traditions and blend them with the best modern science and technology to ensure a safe journey and smooth sailing for future generations.

There are many examples of this being done, many of them by you who are here tonight, the "converted". We congratulate you, but ask you to join us on this Honour Fiji Journey, to further enrich such efforts so that all of your organizations have sufficient future leaders who share our vision.

I must thank the Econesian Society and their partners for their foresight and diligence in identifying an area that has been neglected for far too long. I also wish to thank our two sponsors thus far, Namosi joint venture and Port Denarau Marina for their timely sponsorship. Really they have come aboard without bounds.

Ladies and gentlemen, as earlier mentioned, the time to act is now. Join us as we chart our future.

It is, therefore, my honour as patron, to officially launch the Honour Fiji Journey.

I will now unveil our logo, a sculpture by Saimone Fong and artwork by Brian Mangi.

Donu toka na madigi, cagi donu na laca ni nomuni waqa vaka turaga!!

Thank you

Vinaka vakalevu

Bahoot dhanyavaad
