

MR PRIME MINISTER, MINISTERS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS.

It is a great honor for me to be here today to address the Inaugural Meeting of the Pacific Islands Development Forum. Your collective presence here today is proof positive of the critical nature of this subject to the very lives of Pacific Islanders, and I am humbled to have been invited.

But first, a disclaimer: I am not nor purport to be an expert on the entire Pacific Region - but do admit to having a relatively lengthy and in-depth knowledge of the Fiji Islands that comes as a result of my 40 year love affair with this beautiful country and her beautiful people. As many of you may know, I have lived, worked and invested in Fiji for each of those 40 years, and have started businesses as diverse as FIJI Water, The Wakaya Club & Spa and Wakaya Perfection. Each year I have become more and more convinced of the potential of this Nation and the South Pacific region to be the global model for sustainable development, especially in the face of climate change that presents this region with the most complex challenge of our time - so have eagerly been awaiting our few minutes together today. But please do forgive me in advance if my comments are primarily focused on Fiji - not that I wish to ignore the rest of the region- only that my experience is here, and I do very much believe that the lessons learned and strategies implemented in Fiji could have far-reaching implications for the rest of the South Pacific. By way of illustration, I am now living in my ninth decade, and have travelled over 7 million miles over the course of my lifetime, and have visited the majority of the nations on earth. What all that travel has taught me (other than the vast virtues of patience), is that this very region, the Pacific, has more human, social and overall development potential than any place else on earth.

But with that vast potential come vast challenges and vast responsibilities. And so with that in mind, please allow me to begin by quoting the 30th President of the United States, Mr. Calvin Coolidge, who said once during his presidency, "All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually [or economically] without effort, and effort means work."

And thus it is for us today, gathered here to discuss how to grow our economies in ways that are actionable, sustainable, economically sound and replicable throughout the South Pacific region. What a tall task - but one that can and must be met with the very hard work that President Coolidge wrote about over 75 years ago. Nothing comes easy - so it is for all Nations and so it has been specifically for Fiji. However, those who share the great fortune to reside with us here in the Pacific have distinct advantages relating to our geography, population, climate and economy, and it is those very advantages and their concomitant challenges that I wish to speak about briefly. In summary, I believe that Fiji (and other Pacific Islands for that matter) must decide, and decide quickly, what their pivot point of development is and will be for the foreseeable future, and once decided, must make every conceivable effort to live, breath, speak about and fund those priorities that surround that pivot point.

It is clear to me that for Fiji, that pivot point must be sustainable agricultural and tourism development that can serve as a model for the region and as a focal point around which investment, policy, economic and tourism decisions can and must be made.

I have noticed that over the years, many people in Fiji discuss Singapore and its points of comparison with Fiji. I have always been intrigued with these discussions for a number of reasons; primary among them that I think the comparison is accurate to a significant extent!

Let me be more specific, Singapore (and more specifically Lee Kuan Yew) made the decision not too long after independence that the region's key to success was in becoming a global center-point - a hub of commerce and manufacturing that could rival the existing and traditional economies of Asia, Europe and America. As Singapore developed, it became clearer that its success would come as a result of very strategic decisions relating to the financial sectors and the distinct advantages Singapore has relative to geography and population, Singapore is on that dividing line between East and West, and so served as the ideal pivot point around which currency and trade could circulate. But the bottom line remains that Singapore made a decision as to its future and put all its energy and resources into making that decision turn into a reality. As Lee Kuan Yew said, "We had no reason to believe we could go from a per capita GDP of just over a thousand, to now around \$54,000. What was the miracle? Globalisation. I'm very determined. If I decide that something is worth doing, then I'll put my heart and soul to it. The whole ground can be against me, but if I know it is right, I'll do it. That's the business of a leader."

So how does this relate to Fiji, the South Pacific and the subject of this short discussion? Quite simple really - it is my contention that Fiji and her leaders should decide that the Country's pivot point will be sustainable development - specifically the development of biodynamic organic agriculture and sustainable, green tourism, and that those concepts should guide and focus the vast majority of investment, spending and development for the years ahead. In this way, Fiji can and will differentiate itself and by doing so set an example and create a model that can be emulated around the South Pacific and the world.

A quick but related digression - another Company that I own that is positively affecting the global ecosystem is called ZINIO.com – the world's largest on-line store for magazines (all your favorites from The Economist to National Geographic are on Zinio.com!) When I realized that 35 million trees were being cut down per year to supply the magazine Industry in the US alone, I decided it was time to find another way. Zinio now publishes over 5,000 magazines and delivers them to the South Pacific and throughout the world the day that they are published and can be seen on any computer or device that has access to Wi Fi. Imagine you have access to your favorite magazine the day it is published and don't have to wait heaven knows how long for a damaged parcel to arrive delayed and expensive to you and the environment. Leadership is all about charting the unknown and taking a stand for what we believe is right...and so it must be for Fiji and the South Pacific.

Tourist development in Fiji should only be about funding and creating the global-standard for environmentally sound facilities that leave a small footprint but a big impression. From the food to the accommodations to the recreation, families coming to Fiji should leave believing that they have truly found a Paradise, a Paradise without equal and with a sustainability model for the rest of the world and even their own hometowns. Let me be even more blunt, we need to attract a high-quality tourist who wants to come to the Pacific for the very reasons we have discussed, and who is willing to pay top-dollar for that experience. In focusing on and attracting the consumer at the top of the economic and social pyramid, Fiji and her neighbors will find that just one of the tourists like I am mentioning is worth fifty of the ones heading elsewhere whose sole focus may be to flop and drop a few dollars - not to stay and spend and even perhaps ultimately invest in the economy.

As for agricultural development, the Pacific and Fiji must commit to producing and exporting the very finest products available that can set new standards for global expectations relating to natural and organic produce. New Zealand lamb may be famous, but have you tried a Fiji papaya or some Tongan vanilla recently, or how about some of our Wakaya Perfection Organic Ginger? Focus and strategy will prevail every time, just look at Singapore if further proof of this maxim is necessary.

For example, on my island of Wakaya, we have made a set of strategic decisions that affect and inform everything we do, from the experience our guests will have to the products that make up the new Wakaya Perfection Suite of Organic Products that are taking the marketplace by storm - we know what we must do and we know we must be the best at it bar none - and so it must be with Fiji and the Pacific. On Wakaya we are committed to providing a Resort experience like no other on earth, with organic food fresh from our garden, salt taken from our own lagoon and venison raised on our own organic farms. Similarly with Wakaya Perfection, our commitment is to produce and export the world's very finest ginger, turmeric, dilo oil and sea salt - products that have passed the rigorous organic inspection of the worlds' authorities but more importantly provide consumers with the peace of mind that comes from knowing they have in their hands and on their shelves the finest and most healthful products on earth. Focus and strategy – applicable equally to a region, a nation and a Resort.

If anything, I hope that I have inspired you just a bit today to go home to Suva or to Samoa or to Port Vila and help your communities, your Nations and your leaders focus-in on what truly matters to the future of this region - and by doing so help develop new models that can resonate around the world.

Thank you! If there are one or two questions, I would be happy to answer them.

"Eat less than you want to, work more than you need to and sleep well."

Thank you and good night.