



ENHANCING TRUST AND INTEGRITY FOR DURABLE PEACE

Address at the Pan-Pacific and South-East Asia Women's Association
(PPSEAWA) International Day of Peace Programme,
10.30am 21 September 2012, Peace Garden, Suva.

The President, Executives of PPSEAWA, invited guests, friends.

Ni sa bula vinaka; greetings and appreciation from Board members, staff of TI Fiji for this invitation to be here with you today at this special garden, to mark this year's International Day of Peace with you.

It is a special day for a world that is constantly in turmoil and uncertainty. We act in solidarity with the UN community of nations on a day set aside some 31 years ago to cease hostilities and focus on awareness and education for peace. We commemorate a day that can and should mean so much more to us, because we also join those of other nations that have suffered under unending conflict and war for generations, and thereby also accept full responsibility for consolidating our own opportunities for well-being and harmony. TI Fiji feels especially fortunate to connect with others here, who wish to inspire real passion for peace in our society.

We congratulate PPSEAWA for their many years advocating for peace and respect for human rights, being 'the light' and 'the salt of the earth' in our part of the world. I remember pioneers like Mrs Lolohea Waqairawai who were to me then as a young village schoolboy larger than life, and we all

commend the commitment and legacy that you continue today. I see clearly our part, as individuals and as a member of the civil society community here, of a movement that has so much relevance for our lives today and into the future.

In his message in June to launch the 100-day countdown to this commemoration, Mr Ban Ki-moon Secretary General of the United Nations, called on everyone to ‘reflect on the unconscionable toll – moral, physical, material – wrought by war’ and highlighted why, consequently, this year’s theme is ‘Sustainable Peace for a Sustainable Future.’ He emphasised that ‘we cannot possibly think about a sustainable future if there is no sustainable peace,’ sentiments that we chorus in this country in all our endeavours to build a better nation and a more successful life for our families.

The word ‘sautu’ means ‘peace’ and ‘the cessation of conflict and war’ in the Fijian language, and it also means ‘prosperity’ or ‘the sense of abundance and self sufficiency’. We therefore also express solidarity today with our own people in all spheres of life in this country, wherever their livelihood and security is compromised or threatened by unacceptable and unethical behaviour, especially of those who serve them, those that are entrusted with their wellbeing and the development of their resources. As we reflect on our experience as a society, we do well to recognise the disastrous impact of the abuse of official duties and entrusted authority directly on individuals, families, communities and national resources. As in other countries, we know too well the enormity of their economic and political consequences.

TI Fiji has always spoken out about the rule of law in the enforcement of acceptable standards of integrity and the importance of popular access to mechanisms for transparency and accountability under a representative government. These ensure respect for human rights, and rein in excesses particularly in public administration, and require necessary discipline. We reflect today and should be concerned about repeated offences by officials and the apparent impunity, especially where this affects the most vulnerable in our society. In her Nobel lecture at Oslo in June this year, Aung San Suu Kyi questions whether we are ‘still guilty .. of recklessness, of improvidence with regard to our future and our humanity’ since ‘ wherever suffering is ignored, there will seeds of conflict, for suffering degrades and embitters and enrages’. We appeal therefore to those of us in public office, in leadership roles, whether in the government, in the commercial and private organisations, in the community at large, including religious entities, to enforce integrity standards and promote necessary reform, to work with others in ensuring participation by all sectors. This is our commitment to peace building, promoting durable peace for a sustainable future.

I recall when I first became conscious in the 1977 election about my doubts about the poor public service, that they were perhaps below par and that I could vote in a new leadership to improve performance to receive service worth the year’s budget, then around \$200,000 the campaigning politicians had said. Later, I was even more disturbed when there were accusations about scholarships being awarded illicitly to members of the families of senior civil servants and some ministers. They were never proved but there was a clear impact on the trust that the ruling party elections with unprecedented political consequence thereafter.

That such abuse of duty for selfish gain and diverting of opportunities to persons other than legitimate beneficiaries, through the years that followed, often from our own religious, ethnic, or other interest groups could be legally explained away simply added to the frustrations and sometimes a deepening sense of discrimination. Here in Fiji, we have had direct experience in major and smaller incidents and witnessed their part in the political crises since independence. We have also seen the turbulence and upheaval in other countries in our region. Further away, the 'Arab spring' and the financial crisis and turmoil in the USA and the EU nations play out what abuse of power and authority causes. That powerful officials enjoy impunity has eroded the trust of the people and caused uncertainty and turbulence in our island nations and everywhere else. Our attempts at rebuilding our nations have not been successful and have ended in a relapse after a few years.

Our purpose is to build sustainable peace and we have noted that it is about a fresh mindset. In this time of transition for our nation, it is imperative that we truly commit ourselves to peace building, to reconciliation, to recovery and reconstruction as only we can. Our aim should be to move away from the fragmented existence that has deepened over time, to replace the fragile veneer of calm and harmony which we have lived with for many years. Which is why TI Fiji calls for a movement, and believes that there is a special contribution that women and youth can make, towards durable peace by pursuing integrity and promoting a culture of outrage against corruption in every sector.

During the reconciliation programme of government some years ago, there was strong support for the vision of achieving sustainable peace of the Pan

Pacific South East Asia Women's Association and the Suva City Council in the establishment of this Peace Garden. Apart from its use as a conducive space to promote private peace initiatives in the technical and cultural or religious structures we may employ, we wish to recommend that it incorporates a mission of 'enhancing trust and integrity for durable peace' and 'ensuring that corruption is a high risk venture'. Let us use it more effectively in the days ahead and be reminded as we are doing today about how important, how central that vision is for our children, our grandchildren, for our families, for this nation and for our world.

Vinaka vakalevu; God bless us, and our nation.

Apisalome Tudreu

Chairperson, Transparency International Fiji