

**TALANOA STATEMENT
ON NATIONAL UNITY II**

10 MARCH 2001

*The Warwick Fiji
Korolevu, Sigatoka, Fiji Islands*

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We, representing broad segments of Fiji's society but expressing ourselves as individuals, met on 9–10 March 2001 in a second talanoa on national unity, following up on our talanoa of 30 November–1 December 2000. Our talanoa process has acquired all the greater urgency in light of recent political and legal developments in Fiji.

We affirm our commitment to building a united Fiji society based on respect for individuals and groups, for the cultures and traditions present in Fiji, on the principles of the rule of law and good governance, and on enhanced efforts to help each other, especially the disadvantaged of our society. This includes the need to educate the Indigenous Fijian society as well as other communities about their group rights and law.

Our Talanoa II deepened dialogue on issues relating to the rule of law and economic disparities and opened new avenues of discussion in the areas of administrative decentralization and political power-sharing.

Rule of Law

With respect to the rule of law and good governance, we agreed on the importance for national unity and economic and social well-being of having a constitutional, legal, and political framework that enjoys legitimacy among the leaders and grassroots people of Fiji. This framework needs to take cognizance of international standards of good governance and human rights, but must also be acceptable to and reflect the aspirations of the people of Fiji. It needs to incorporate effective protection for the rights and customs of indigenous Fijians, including the protection of their land rights, as well as protecting the rights and interests of all communities.

We agreed that many Fijians may not be familiar with the current provisions in our basic legal documents, including the Constitution, for protecting the rights and

traditions of indigenous Fijian communities. Special educational efforts are required to increase such knowledge. Since there is a strong feeling, however, that customary law is not adequately reflected or protected in the Constitution and laws and that the Constitution may not be adequate with respect to the protection of indigenous rights, this issue merits further consideration.

Economic Disparities

The issue of income and wealth disparities is closely related to that of the rule of law. The legitimacy of a political and legal regime that appears discriminatory is always in doubt. Promoting a better life for the disadvantaged is an essential element of good governance. Globalization is believed to provide greater overall economic opportunities, but it also accentuates disparities, adding to the urgency of addressing this issue.

These disparities and other inequities are found in both urban and rural settings. The Talanoa I Statement called attention to the critical importance of land in unity building. The efficient use of land and a fair return to owners and tenants of the product of that land is also critical to economic growth and reducing the disparities between haves and have-nots.

Administrative Decentralization

We believe that by empowering provinces and districts, a determined process of administrative decentralization is crucial to the enhanced efficiency of the human and natural resources of Fiji as well as to building a sense of national community. Virtually all political groups in Fiji have agreed that an excessively top down process of distributing resources and exercising administrative power has inhibited local initiative. Central government has an important role to play in redistributing resources, providing expertise often unavailable at the local level, and in ensuring appropriate accountability, but local village, district, and provincial governments need to have greater resources and political and administrative empowerment in order to more efficiently and equitably deploy those resources at the grassroots level.

Moreover, the greater exercise of local authority will encourage Fijians from different ethnic groups to work together in their local areas on the problems that face them as local communities. As indicated in the Talanoa I *Statement of National Unity*, the well-being of each group in our society depends upon mutually beneficial relations with the others. This is particularly true at the grassroots level where people of different races are facing difficult common problems in their local settings.

Political Power-Sharing

In the context of recent political developments in Fiji, we recognized the need for continued dialogue and desirable constitutional and political changes to encourage unity building as opposed to political fragmentation and tension.

In this regard, it was suggested at our talanoa that more thought be given to the proposal that the Prime Minister should be directly elected by majority universal vote, with provision for run-off elections in case there is no majority winner, rather than indirectly elected through the traditional Westminster system. It was also suggested that democratic processes could be deepened at various levels through the election of the Senate, provincial and district councils, and mayors of municipalities. Such changes should be explored carefully to determine their efficacy, compatibility with grassroots desires and traditional forms of governance, and, if adopted, how they should be phased in to avoid misunderstanding or social and political instability.

The Role of Leaders

As emphasized in Talanoa I, leaders play a critical role in building national unity. Our Talanoa II occurs at the time of great political uncertainty in Fiji. We are encouraged, and strongly urge the political leaders to hold their own talanoa and to develop a consensus among themselves on land issues and power-sharing. It was agreed that these two areas need further exploration. In this regard, the leadership has an urgent and special responsibility in taking the country forward. We believe such a “Leadership Talanoa” should be held at the earliest date possible to assist in the reconstruction of our inter- and intra-ethnic relationships in the days ahead.

TALANOA PROCESS
FIJI UNITY BUILDING DIALOGUE II

8-10 March 2001
The Warwick Fiji
Korolevu, Sigatoka, Fiji Islands

DAY 1 -- PARTICIPANTS

Hon. Dr. Ahmed Ali

Hon. Poseci Bune

Hon. Dr. Ganesh Chand

Hon. Krishna Datt

Ms. Tupou Draunidalo

Ms. Ema Tagi Druavesi

Hon. Dr. G. Gounder

Hon. Anup Kumar

Mr. Visante Petero Makrava

Hon. Adi Koila Nailatikau

Mr. Sukamanu Pene

Dr. Ropate Qalo

Ms. Mere Tuisalalo Samisoni

Hon. Jag Narain Sharma

Hon. Leo Smith

Mr. Paula Sotutu

Hon. Adi Finau Tabakaucoro

Hon. Adi Ema Golea Tagicakibau

Mr. Saula Telawa

Mr. Apiasalome Tudreu

EAST-WEST CENTER STAFF

Dr. Sitiveni Halapua

Dr. Kim Small

Mr. Scott Kroeker

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DAY 2 -- PARTICIPANTS

Hon. Dr. Ahmed Ali

Hon. Poseci Bune

Hon. Dr. Ganesh Chand

Hon. Krishna Datt

Ms. Tupou Draunidalo

Ms. Ema Tagi Druavesi

Hon. Dr. G. Gounder

Hon. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola

Hon. Anup Kumar

Mr. Visante Petero Makrava

Hon. Adi Koila Nailatikau

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