

TALANOA VI

Leaders Statement

*28 February 2004
Sheraton Fiji Resort
Denarau, Fiji Islands*

We met on 27 – 28 February for the Sixth Talanoa since this dialogue series began in late 2000. Talanoa VI was based on an agenda agreed to by Prime Minister L. Qarase and the Hon. M. Chaudhry, and focused on three reports written by a Talanoa bi-partisan Sub-committee that was established as a result of Talanoa V. The reports focused on land, non-controversial amendments to the Constitution, and the United Nations report on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination in Fiji. Both Leaders agreed to include the sugar industry restructure in this Talanoa dialogue.

In establishing the Sub-committee, Talanoa V sought to “deepen and strengthen the Talanoa to transform it into a more sustained, continuous and action oriented process.” The Sub-committee reported that it had worked on the three issues in a positive manner, seeking to maximize consensus around a positive program for policy action. The participants in Talanoa VI expressed their appreciation to the members of the Sub-committee, whose reports provided an informed and productive basis for the Talanoa discussions. The Talanoa decided that the Sub-committee should continue on specific issues. Examination by a small, bi-partisan group can help develop consensus and provide a further base for bi-partisan action.

The discussions continued to reflect the spirit of all our Talanoa sessions, namely that dialogue be both informal and frank. All participants approached the Talanoa with the aim of developing as much as possible a common view of the issues facing Fiji or, where a common view is not possible, of strengthening understanding of each other’s interests and perspectives.

The Talanoa had a full discussion of each of the issue areas. In many cases, the recommendations of the Sub-committee reports were generally accepted. Some other items were returned to the Sub-committees for further discussion. In addition, the Talanoa agreed that the important issue of sugar restructuring should be considered at a full Talanoa session. This session will take place in April after further consultant reports are received.

1. Land

The Talanoa spent most of its first day discussing land issues. The Talanoa came to a consensus on the basic principles underlying land decisions: that landowners need a fair return and tenants need security of tenure. The Talanoa also heard from the General Manager of the Native Land Trust Board, Mr. Kalivati Bakani.

It was agreed that the basic framework established by the Sub-Committee and the discussions in the Talanoa dialogue represent a sound basis for moving forward in this critical area. The issue is now ready to go to a Joint Parliamentary Select Committee for further consultation and deliberation. Members of the Talanoa agreed that the Special Committee of Parliament should include members of the Senate and government ministers in addition to the members of the House. The Talanoa asked the Sub-committee to prepare a draft on the terms of reference, the composition, and the timeframe for the Special Parliamentary Committee, to be presented to the leaders before the end of March.

2. Non-Controversial Amendments to the Constitution

The Talanoa examined the recommendations of the Sub-committee on non-controversial amendments to the Constitution. Most of the recommendations were

agreed to. In a few cases, there were further questions regarding wording or implications, and it was agreed that the Sub-committee will conduct further dialogue and report on these issues to the two Leaders for discussion at the full Talanoa in April. It was noted that the Government proposes to table a bill of non-controversial amendments in June.

3. UN Report on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

The Sub-committee thoroughly examined the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) report paragraph by paragraph. It made numerous recommendations with the view to ensuring that Fiji is meeting its international obligations to uphold principles of non-racial discriminatory standards and to ensure that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has accurate and full information on actions taken by the state to meet its obligations.

There was general agreement that Fiji should continue its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination whether in the public or private sector. It was noted that the Fiji Human Rights Commission, as a body established in the 1997 Constitution, has a constitutional duty to monitor human rights issues and act upon allegations of discrimination. It was also agreed that the government should be preparing information for the CERD on a regular and timely basis. The Talanoa noted that an interdepartmental committee of government has been established and has invited NGOs to help in the compilation of the reports to the CERD committee.

In view of the common commitment to addressing all forms of racial discrimination, it was agreed that the Sub-committee should continue its work and should undertake to meet with the Human Rights Commission concerning its work on this matter, with particular emphasis on CERD, and report back to the full Talanoa in April.

4. Sugar Industry Reform

The Prime Minister briefed the Talanoa on the difficult challenges faced by the sugar industry to maintain Fiji's position in an increasingly competitive global industry. He referred to a number of studies made by international organizations and specialists to assess Fiji's industry and recommend measures to improve productivity and market competitiveness.

It was agreed that this matter be considered in a full Talanoa scheduled to take place in April.

The Talanoa members thank the East-West Center, and its Pacific Islands Development Program, for its continued support of the Talanoa. We believe that the Talanoa process, particularly as enhanced by Sub-committee work, has proved to be a valuable process, not simply to build trust and understanding, but increasingly to lay a basis through study and informal discussion for bi-partisan cooperation on policy issues. We pledge to continue our Talanoa process as a way of building our consensus on ways to address the critical issues necessary for building a bright future for all in Fiji.

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27-28 February, 2004
Sheraton Resorts
Denarau Island
Fiji

PARTICIPANTS

Hon Mahendra P. Chaudhry

Hon Krishna Datt

Hon Poseci Bune

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Hon Pratap Chand

Hon Gyani Nand

Hon Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi

Senator Dr Atu Emberson Bain

Hon Laisenia Qarase

Hon Ro Teimumu Kepa

Hon Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu

Hon Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure

Hon Pita Nacuva

Hon Tomasi Vuetilovoni

Hon Kaliopate Tavola

Hon Senator Qoriniasi Bale