



Asian Productivity Organization “The APO in the News”

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Fiji plays a pivotal role: APO

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The Asian Productivity Organisation says Fiji plays a pivotal role in the region as the lone Pacific Island country under their umbrella.

APO Secretary General Mari Amano says although they would like more countries to join the organisation they see us as a significant partner.

“Fiji acted as if the sort of pivot between the APO and the surrounding countries which are not members of the APO so that is a very sort of important part of the role of Fiji being a member of the APO.”

Amano says Fiji has played a great role in expanding their activities with countries that are not part of the group.

He says although the expansion of membership is a major challenge for them they would like to see more countries being part of APO.

The 54th Workshop Meeting of Heads of National Productivity Organisations in Nadi will end today.



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We wanted to be a part of that movement. We wanted to capture the energy, optimism, and spirit of innovation that was driving Asia for ourselves—and I believe we have. We still have a lot of work to do, but there is no doubt that we are a different country than we were when we started with APO. Fiji wants to compete with the best in a global marketplace that is more competitive and includes more players every day.

Over these past 29 years, we have received a great deal of support from APO—training and development in many areas that have helped raised the performance of managers, technicians and CEOs alike—in both the private and public sectors. And thanks to APO's strong role in building the capacity of our own NPO, we Fijians have advanced our own efforts to be more productive and efficient, to encourage better management, and to stay abreast of the changes that affect the world's economy.

We owe a great deal to the lessons we have learned from our fellow APO member countries in making Fiji more productive and committed to quality. The services you have provided in Business Excellence have been particularly useful to both the private sector and my government.

We began with the recommendations for quality awards for the private sector that emerged from the first Round Table Conference on Productivity, in 1995. By 2005, we had developed a similar recognition program for government. Participation in the Service Excellence Awards is now mandatory for all government ministries.

Our goal is to institutionalize the commitment to quality, to constant improvement, and to commitment to excellence. We hold up the best performers as examples for the entire country not just to pat people on the back. We do it not just to show how well people have completed steps in a process. We do it because the public needs to know in concrete terms what quality and excellence look like. They also need to see that behind every quality program, product or service, there are people of character, people who persevere, who know how to lead and share, who work with integrity, who do not rest until they have accomplished something that is truly good and worthy—and most importantly, who have their minds firmly focused on how they can do even better.

Ladies and gentlemen, Fiji is determined to link our name—or national brand, if you will—with quality. I believe we are achieving that in the tourism and hospitality sector, where we are competing with the most desirable and sophisticated tourist destinations in the world. This is one of the first truly world-class industries we are creating in Fiji, using a combination of foreign experience, local know-how, and our people's innate sense of hospitality to build something that gives us great pride. And we have done so without sacrificing our natural environment; in fact, Fiji's natural beauty and the variety of experiences it offers are a big part of our brand in tourism.

However, there is room for improvement in many areas within this industry. The goal of productivity in itself means a constant reflection, a constant assessment and critique.

We have seen though how one very important and highly visible industry like tourism can inspire and drive quality in other areas. Every business now has a high standard to meet, and as I talk to our private sector leaders, it is clear that they want both the challenge and the opportunity of meeting that standard.

Our Fijian Made campaign is an important step in that process. It is not just a campaign to encourage Fijians to buy products made in Fiji and therefore amongst other things, protect Fijian jobs. It is also a program to promote the quality of Fijian goods at home and abroad. Products must meet quality standards before they earn the Fijian Made label, whether they are manufactured in Fiji, designed in Fiji, grown in Fiji, crafted by hand in Fiji, or assembled in Fiji. In textiles, food processing, apparel, personal products, and many other areas, "Fijian Made" must be a synonym for quality.

My government sees it as our duty to give our citizens what they need to meet the high standards we expect from them. Our main priorities have been to improve the roads, reform the ports, develop a robust wireless broadband regime that connects the entire country, wage a relentless fight against corruption, and invest in education.

And we believe getting top performance out of our state-owned industries is more than just good sense; it sets an example. In that regard for example, we have both created and reformed the Fijian mahogany industry. We made the hard decisions, we made strategic investments, and we engaged all stakeholders in the effort. The turnaround has been dramatic and real.

And we reformed our sugar industry to make our farmers and our mills more productive. Sugar is a big part of our economy, providing livelihoods for thousands of people. There are many sugar-producing countries in the world, and complicated and at times skewed international agreements governing trade in sugar. Nonetheless, our farmers needed to increase yields, our mills need to refine more efficiently, and we need to take advantage of the by-products of sugar cane for other uses.

Ladies and gentlemen, it takes a national commitment to build a nation, and improving national productivity is no different. All of us—producers, retailers and wholesalers, government, labor, the financial community, the business community, employee organizations, the education sector, trade unions and consumers—have to be fully engaged in the effort.

Ladies and gentleman, all nations—irrespective of size, location and endowments—share the dream of creating more wealth and improving the socio-economic conditions of their people.

We understand well that our ability to increase wealth depends in no small part on our ability to raise productivity in all walks of life.

Fiji has made substantial progress in recent times, thanks to the collective efforts of our citizens.

We have created a strong economic platform for growth. Last year, our economy grew by 2.2 per cent. This year our economy is projected to grow by 3.6 per cent.

We have noticed great optimism in the private sector. Investment is increasing and businesses are expanding. Private sector investment this year is expected to reach 13 percent of GDP, up from around 4 percent a few years ago.

Recognizing that infrastructure is one of our biggest barriers to economic development, we have already raised capital expenditures from 20 per cent of budget to 32 per cent of budget.

This long-term investment in capital works, which I alluded to earlier, is unprecedented and will bear fruit in greater productivity. It will also provide a more favorable environment for business and citizens alike as we move towards a knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy.

Our education and training institutions have a key role to play in helping our employees, employers, business sector and governmental organizations become more productive. It was with this in mind, and with a view to realize greater economies of scale and effects, that my government merged all the key higher educational institutions in the country to form the Fiji National University or FNU in 2009.

The FNU now is home to the National Training and Productivity Centre, which is the National Productivity Organisation for the country. It provides training and promotion in all things to do with quality and productivity. I am happy to note the FNU has made a mark not only nationally and in the region, but internationally as well, and I thank the Vice Chancellor and his team for that.

And finally, I would like to talk a bit about political change. Ladies and gentleman, Fiji reached a pivotal moment in its history last month when His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji promulgated the nation's new Constitution.

This Constitution introduces Fiji's first genuine democracy since we gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1970. It is a Constitution that upholds the legal and moral basis of a common and equal citizenry without denying anyone's individuality or culture.

It enshrines principles that are at the heart of the world's great liberal democracies – an independent judiciary, a secular state and a wide range of civil, political and socio-economic rights.

It recognizes the indigenous peoples of Fiji and their customary practices; enshrines and safeguards the ownership rights of the predominantly indigenous landowners and at the same time gives unprecedented protection to lessees of land; demands accountability and transparency from public office holders; builds strong and independent institutions; and replaces our old electoral system with one based on the principle of one person, one vote, one value.

This historic achievement is the culmination of a path that Fiji embarked on in 2007 to establish a modern and stable society that could determine its own affairs and become a proud and responsible player in the global community.

This has much to do with productivity and quality, because a nation that is not one with itself, a nation that has not established its values, a nation that does not have a clear legal and social framework will have a hard time being truly productive.

To be productive, a nation must harness the talents, energies and aspirations of its people. And the people will freely give of those talents and energies if they know that their government has established a level playing field, that they can get substantive justice, that they will not have to overcome corruption, that they can have access to credit, and that they will be rewarded for their effort.

We now move with great optimism towards the first democratic elections in our nation's history which will be held no later than 30 September 2014, and an era of unprecedented productivity.

The Secretary General, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen with those few words, it is now my great pleasure to officially declare the 2013 Heads of National Productivity Organizations' Workshop Meeting open.

I wish you all an excellent meeting—and great productivity.

Vinaka Vakalevu, Thank you.