

Inaugural Address by Fijian Prime Minister Commodore Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama

54th Workshop Meeting of Heads of National Productivity Organizations, Sheraton Fiji Resort, Nadi, Fiji, 29 October 2013

APO Secretary-General Mari Amano;
Fiji National University Vice Chancellor Dr. Ganesh Chand;
Chairman of the National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) Advisory Board Nesbitt Hazelman;
Director of the NTPC and NPO Head for Fiji Kamlesh Prakash;
Distinguished Delegates and Advisers from APO member countries;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all. On behalf of the Fijian Government and people, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to Fiji for the 54th Workshop Meeting of Heads of National Productivity Organizations (NPOs). I also extend a very special welcome to new Secretary-General Amano of the Asian Productivity Organization (APO). We are very pleased to host this meeting in Fiji, and I sincerely hope that you will take time to enjoy our country and experience our world-renowned Fijian hospitality.

Fiji is fortunate to have been a member of the APO for nearly 30 years. We joined the APO because we wanted to take advantage of the large body of knowledge and experience in productivity that had developed within APO member countries. Asia was on the move. It was growing. It was a force to be reckoned with in technology, industry, and trade. Asian manufacturers were transforming the world marketplace, often displacing iconic American and European companies that had once been dominant. It was clear that this Asian resurgence was driven by productivity and, above all, quality. Today, we no longer talk about an Asian resurgence; we talk about an Asian standard in automobiles, electronics, optics, capital goods, and services, just to name a few sectors. 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 that 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 the 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 the APO in training and development in many areas which have helped raised the performance of managers, technicians, and CEOs alike in both the public and private sectors. Thanks to the 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 Roundtable 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, constant improvement, and 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 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.

Fiji is determined to link our name, or national brand if you will, with quality. I believe that we are achieving that in the tourism and hospitality sector, where we are competing with the most desirable, 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. 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 constant reflection, assessment, and critiques.

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 among 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.

We believe that 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. 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 needed to refine more efficiently, and we needed to take advantage of the by-products of sugar cane for other uses.

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. All nations, irrespective of size, location, or endowments, share the dream of creating more wealth and improving the socioeconomic 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 1.9%. This year, our economy is projected to grow by 3.6%. 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% of GDP, up from around 4% a few years ago.

Recognizing that infrastructure is one of our biggest barriers to economic development, we have already raised capital expenditures from 20% of budget to 32%. 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 toward a knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy.

Our education and training institutions have a key role to play in helping our employees, employers, the business sector, and governmental organizations become more productive. It was with this in mind, and with a view to realizing greater economies of scale and effect, that my government merged all the key higher educational institutions in the country to form the Fiji National University (FNU) in 2009. The FNU now is home to the NTPC, which is the NPO for

the country. It provides training and promotion in all things to do with quality and productivity. I am happy to note that 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.

Finally, I would like to talk a bit about political change. 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 socioeconomic rights. It recognizes the indigenous people 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 officeholders; builds strong, 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, stable society that could determine its own affairs and become a proud, responsible player in the global community.

This has much to do with productivity and quality, because a nation that is not at one with itself, a nation that has not established its values, a nation that does not have a clear legal and social framework that is based on equality will have a hard time being truly productive. To be productive, a nation must harness the talents, energies, and aspirations of its people. 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 toward the first democratic elections in our nation's history before October 2014 and an era of unprecedented productivity.

Secretary-General Amano, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen, with these few words, it is now my great pleasure to declare the 2013 Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs open. I wish you all an excellent meeting and great productivity. *Vinaka vakalevu*, thank you.