



Nadudukilagi

Na Nodra i Tikotiko Vakaturaga na
Gone Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi
Lomanikoro, Rewa

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P.O. Box 3554, Nausori
11th April, 2012

Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama
Government Building
SUVA

I Voreqe

Re: THE ABOLISHMENT OF THE GREAT COUNCIL OF CHIEFS

The Chiefs have, from since early settlement to ceding of Fiji to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria of Great Britain and Ireland have always had a voice in the governance of this nation. Despite the shallow criticisms against the role of traditional Chiefs, they are the stabilizing factor for Fiji and they have helped to control the ethnonationalism and facilitate conciliation in ethnic relations in Fiji.

The recent findings of the ECREA and CCF research in three provinces in Fiji confirm that indigenous people continue to make their decisions through their Chiefs. This is not to imply that Chiefs manipulate this form of respect towards their own ends, but rather suggest that a truly empowered Fiji can only occur if there is a genuine appreciation of our traditional structures, amply harnessed towards enlightening our people.

The obsession to remove racial issues from the governance of this nation is short-sighted and ill-conceived, for ethnicity is a fact of life. Internationally, ethnicity and culture are recognized and valued, for it is only through racial and ethnic diversity that we can realize civic strength. It is when our nation fully appreciates the different ethnic communities and their culture and learn to accept the different cultures and religions, then only, when we will have everlasting peace in Fiji.

Much has already been said about indigenous rights and it is a fallacy that we as the first people have continued to be prioritized. For as much as our people have sacrificed towards the development of our great nation through our benevolence in bequeathing traditional land, waterways and i qoliqoli, little returns can actually be accounted for in the differences made to lives. These were the very real challenges that we Chiefs lived and breathed every time we sat together.

The Great Council of Chiefs has a role to reconcile the rights of indigenous community with the development of an equitable national society. It remains my steadfast belief that we Chiefs have a moral obligation to cultivate the concept of shared interests and values to transcend the differences that exist in the different societies in Fiji today. Only the Great Council of Chiefs has the capacity to help preserve a viable democratic political system for our nation.

The Leaders of our Indian Fijian community have made public pronouncements on the vital role of Chiefs in Fiji; both the Leaders of the National Federation Party, Mr. Jai Ram Reddy and the Leader of the Labour Party, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudary have declared their unwavering support to the Chiefs of Fiji re "Chiefs are not only chiefs of indigenous Fijians they are Chiefs for all communities who have made Fiji their home".

The Coalition of Indian parties in their presentation to the Constitution Review Commission in 1995/1996 advocated for a strong position for the Council of Chiefs, understanding the vital role they play and compromising the human rights principles for the sake of "national unity and harmony". They went further to say that "The Bose Levu Vakaturaga has an important role in healing racial wounds. It should be given a special responsibility to encourage the growth of multiracialism and national unity".

I have reflected on your decision to abolish the Great Council of Chiefs and maintain that the unique roles which the Great Council of Chiefs have played in reconciling the cultural differences and bridging social and political cohesion in Fiji, fully warrants their rightful place in the governance of this nation.

Some changes have been made over the years in the format, membership and administration of the GCC.

On the eve of the political takeover of the elected Government of this nation, the Fijian Administration was on the verge of being reformed further. The natural outcome of the reforms would have put in place the "invigoration" of the GCC that would have been made with proper consultations with stakeholders including the Chiefs themselves.

The revolutionary changes that you are making in Fiji cannot be made without the involvement of the Great Council of Chiefs of Fiji. They are the source of peace, stability and unifying factor for the different communities living in Fiji.

As you are well aware of, any calamity between the races in Fiji or even between indigenous Fijians themselves can only be resolved with the involvement of the GCC.

I outline below some of the major decisions undertaken by the Great Council of Chiefs which have contributed to the improvement of the welfare of not only indigenous Fijians of our beloved nation but inclusive of all the people of this nation:

1. Their resolve to cede Fiji to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria on 10th October, 1874 and thereby bringing about civilization to our beloved nation.
2. Their decision to establish the Native Land Trust Board and to lease 'native lands' for the use of all communities to develop our nation.
3. Their support for the establishment of the ALTA legislations.
4. The establishment of the Fijian Development Fund Board which has supported the education of many indigenous Fijians as well as the construction of improved houses in rural Fiji.

- 5 The establishment of Queen Victoria School and Adi Cakobau School as training ground for indigenous leaders.
- 6 Their support for the instrument of Independence of colonial Fiji.
- 7 The establishment of Fijian Holdings Limited as the vehicle to allow indigenous Fijians to penetrate into the commercial sector and benefit from their investment earnings.
- 8 The creation of Yasana Holdings Limited to support the role of Fijian Holdings in creating wealth for indigenous Fijians and Rotuman institutions.
- 9 The construction of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga Complex to be an emblem of the unique role of the Chiefs in bringing about civilization in Fiji.
- 10 The creation of the Fijians Trust Fund as a means of supporting matters Fijian including their aspirations.
- 11 The directive to establish Ratu Sukuna Memorial School (1958) at a time when there were only 28,000 indigenous Fijians studying at primary level and 439 at secondary level. The levy of one shilling per Fijian raised the initial sum of 8,135 pounds that established the school.
12. Their support on the establishment of Scholarship Fund for indigenous Fijians.
13. Supported Governments in relaying their policies to indigenous people and their institutions.
14. Their support for the constitutional amendments resulting in the amended 1997 Constitution.

All in all the Chiefs have facilitated the creation of economic and educational democracy for indigenous Fijians and these have provided some comfort in understanding and in bridging the ethnic divide.

The path on which you are taking Fiji can only be meaningful with the involvement of the Great of Council of Chiefs, firmly backed up with the respect for the rule of law.

The destiny of our beloved Fiji lies in involving the Chiefs of Fiji and the Leaders of other races in Fiji.

I will end this communication with a quote from the late paramount Chief of Burebasaga, Ro Lady Litia Lalabalavu Mara upon officiating the opening of the GCC at Viseisei Vuda in November, 2003:

"..Obviously there have been much changes over the years. We have had to endure trials and tribulations. There have been shortcomings and there have been successes. These changes have affected all aspects of Fijian livelihood....."

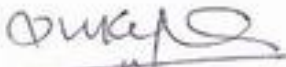
The challenge that is before us is to create an environment where all the people in our diverse communities can co-exist peacefully and work together to ensure a bright future for our children.

I have full confidence that the Great Council of Chiefs will, as it has shown in the past, to rise to the occasion and make decisions for the benefit of all the people of our great and wonderful country Fiji.

Voreqe, the Great Council of Chiefs and their role in society lives forever in the hearts of the people who have the interest of the welfare and good governance of our nation.

You, together with those who made the decision to abolish the Great Council of Chiefs as well as your advisers have made a serious error of judgment in the governance of our beloved nation of Fiji.

Yours faithfully,



Roko Teimumu Kepa
ROKO TUI DREKETI