

Speech: Ben Vakaloloma, representative from the informal settlement

The Constitution Commission, Guest Speakers, Members of the Community, ladies and Gentleman.

It is an honor to be representing all the Informal Settlements in Fiji today, sharing with you their challenges of Poverty which they believe needs to be addressed in the Constitution.

For the past 50 years, I was really sad to witness how the poor and marginalized people of this Nation are living and also saddened by some of their stories I heard and I could not comprehend by some of our most vulnerable people received so little from the Government.

To name a few:

- 1) An old lady caring for 2 grand children applied for family assistance from Social Welfare Department in 2000, still awaiting for result in 2005.
- 2) In Tauvengavenga, Ba an old couple in their 80's were receiving \$30.00 per month which is about \$7.50 a week to live on had no other option but to send their grandson to beg on the streets every day.
- 3) In Valebasoga, the whole Community of cane farm hands had no water supply but had to pay to drink from a nearby borehole.
- 4) The saddest was witnessing families scavenging from the dump to put food on their table.

Ladies and Gentleman poverty through the eyes of the poor to us means:

- Not having decent homes to live in, e.g a father of nine build an air – condition home for them in the Central Division using make shift materials where they would find comfortable places whenever it rains because of the holes on the roof;
- Not having a job or not getting just wages, don't have capabilities to meet their criteria because of their standards are high. Most of us just complete Form 4 and employers want Form 6 and Form 7 to apply;
- Not being able to send our children to school or they drop out because we can't pay fees;
- Not being able to provide nutritious food for our family;
- Not being able to get medicine when our children are sick (and seeing them die);
- Feeling humiliated, worthless and excluded, Being voiceless, powerless, dependent, feeling helpless and hopeless because there seems to be no future for us or our children because in recent years headline in the papers that we the poor

marginalized in the Communities are branded as Social ills, eye sores, haven of criminals and so forth;

Before I end today, we the marginalized would like to make it known to all that Poverty is a reality in Fiji.

We would like to see that Poverty issues are being addressed in the Constitution

Vinaka Vakalevu.