

MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

8 April 2026

ON OUR COMMON IDENTITY: NATIONALITY, ETHNICITY & THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

A statement by the Paramount Chief of Lau, the Gone Turaga Bale na Tui Nayau, Sau ni Vanua ko Lau, Tui Lau — Ratu Tevita Lutunauga Kapaiwai Uluilakeba Mara

“The debate around our common identity in Fiji is one that touches the very soul of our nation — and it deserves honest, respectful, and consultative resolution. We owe that much to each and every one who calls Fiji home.”

“I speak as an ordinary citizen of Fiji, guided by conscience and civic duty, because questions of identity and belonging must be approached with honesty, humility, and respect.”

Nationality vs Ethnicity

“At the heart of this matter lies a distinction that is simple, yet continuously misunderstood: Nationality and Ethnicity are two entirely different things. We must separate them — clearly, firmly, and without further delay.”

“Nationality is the civic identity we share as citizens of this nation. Ethnicity is the heritage, culture, and ancestry that makes each of our communities beautifully distinct.”

“These are two distinct things. Conflating them - whether by accident or by design – is causing confusion and harm to our national unity.”

The 2013 Constitution - What Was Forced Upon Us

*“Before the 2013 constitution, our common nationality was **Fiji Islander** — a name that was universal, inclusive, and recognised the world over. I ask today, as many of our people have asked since: what was wrong with it?”*

*“Under the 2013 Constitution, our nationality was unilaterally changed to **Fijian** — stripping without consultation the ethnic identity of the indigenous people that has been in existence for over a hundred years, relegating them to the term *i-Taukei*. That was not nation-building. That was erasure.”*

“Our previous 1997 Constitution - which was widely and meaningfully consulted with the people - had clearly and respectfully laid out both our nationality and our ethnic identities. It was a model of inclusive governance that we should not have abandoned lightly. That is the standard of democratic process to which we must return. Consultation. People's will as the final word.”

Our Nationality: Two Options Worth Putting to the People

“I put forward two options that the constitutional review committee should consider for our national identity:

- 1. Option One - FIJI ISLANDER, our original pre-2013 national common identity. Universally understood, internationally recognised, and inclusive of all communities without displacing any ethnic identity.*
- 2. Option Two – FIJIAN, widely used and recognised globally. If this name is to serve as our national identity, it must be arrived at through genuine consent — not imposition.”*

“Either option is recognisable on the world stage. Either can serve as a unifying national identity. What matters most is that the choice belongs to the people of Fiji — arrived at freely, fairly, and through proper democratic process.”

Our Ethnic Diversity: A Beauty to Protect, Not Suppress

“Our ethnicities will always remain. They are not a division — they are our strength and our beauty. The indigenous Fijians or Fijian Taukei, Indo-Fijians, Rotumans, Banabans, and all our distinct communities — each holds a sacred place in the fabric of this nation. Ethnic identity, alongside gender and religion, is collected by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics to inform government policy, allocate resources, and serve all communities.”

“The Fijian i-Taukei, the indigenous people of this land - their ethnic identity must be honoured, protected, and never erased by constitutional sleight of hand. The Indo-Fijians, citizens whose ancestors help built this nation's prosperity - their place in Fiji's story is permanent and honoured. The Rotumans, Banabans, and many more distinct communities with their own languages, traditions, and customs have their rightful place within our national family.”

On the Great Council of Chiefs' Submission

“I acknowledge the submission made by the Great Council of Chiefs advocating for the word "Fijian" to be retained as the identity of the indigenous Fijian people. The spirit of that submission is correct, and I stand in solidarity with its intent. I do, however, wish it had been articulated with greater clarity as the resulting confusion has unfortunately added to disorientation that we should resolve.”

“The GCC's position, as I understand it, aligns with the broader principle I advocate for: that the ethnic identity of the indigenous Fijian people, and all our distinct ethnic communities, must be protected, recognised, and never again removed without their full and free consent.”

END

Issued by the Office of the Gone Turaga Bale na Tui Nayau, Sau ni Vanua ko Lau, Tui Lau – Ratu Tevita Lutunauga Kapaiwai Uluilakeba Mara