

## LAUNCH OF NFP MANIFESTO, GENERAL ELECTIONS 2014

Fellow Fiji Islanders, Party supporters, workers, volunteers, stalwarts and, invited guests. I have great pleasure in welcoming you too this evening to the launch of our party Manifesto for the 2014 General Elections.

I will speak in both the English and Fijian language today.

Since our election at the end of March, the party leader and i have travelled around the country and met very many people to gauge your views, leading up to the elections.

I have referred to these meetings as the listening tours and, information sessions.

Your views have guided us in the drafting of this party manifesto. It is what it is – the big picture statements of what we will do after we are elected to government.

I wish to deal with two issues that have come through strongly to me during the listening and information tours. I have had the pleasure of reading the Leader's speech and he addresses the same and other issues of relevance to the manifesto.

The first, i wish to address is the land issue. As you all know, our party proposes the 'Master Lease' concept.

I read a message late last night from a relative who promptly informed me that a candidate from her neighbouring village in Nadroga was equating our Master Lease policy to the Land Bank initiative of the interim administration.

I laughed it off but i was also flattered by that sure sign of desperation and 'clutching at straws' – because you wouldn't need to mislead people if the facts are on your side.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our Master Lease policy is a "leasing" policy – for the government to "lease" all available "agricultural" lands from the Native Land Trust Board.

It does not deal with commercial or special purpose leases.

The master lease, like all leases, will be negotiated between the government as intending lessee and the Native Land Trust Board as legal owner and "Trustee" for the Taukei in the landowning units in the Vola ni Kawa Bula.

As an indigenous person, i trust the Native Land Trust Board to carry out its duties as Trustee – independently and competently in the best interest of its beneficiaries.

That is the reason why the Board was set up. To jealously guard the interests of beneficiary landowners in the handling of all matters to do with their very valuable resource.

If some erstwhile members of the other political parties cannot trust the Board to carry out those duties in the negotiation of leases between the Board and the government then i suggest that they look inwardly first at their own conduct while in government or at their policies before they go further because their insecurities may spring from their own experiences with the Board as a first hurdle to removing the plank from their eyes.

Back to the policy, i would have thought that the negotiation of lease term, payment, management positions for landowners, scholarship trust funds for landowners, joint venture status for landowners and the like under the Master Lease would be easier for the landowners and their lawyers through the Board to negotiate with their own government needing their support then it would be to negotiate with individual farmers or parties who come to the negotiation table without the resources, clout and political interest of the central government.

I hope that the lawyers for the landowning units are paying close attention to what i have just said. But I cannot say anymore as i will be sitting at the other end of the table in the negotiations for leasing under this policy.

Our manifesto also clearly states that a National Federation Party government will not use the powers of “compulsory acquisition” over any land including native land as allowed under sections 27 and 28 of the military constitution, 2013.

No other political party has made these commitments of dialogue, agreement, investment and respect to the native landowners. Investment in their communities and investment for the future. Respect for their ownership of native lands and respect for their Trustee, the Native Land Trust Board.

Ladies and gentlemen, the National Federation Party is a fifty one year old conservative party of principle and consistency.

We do not believe in cheap political tricks and cheap talk. We urge you to judge us on our 51 year old record. We are the party that agreed to and worked hard for the enshrinement of indigenous rights in the 1970 and 1997 constitutions.

We are the party that negotiated ALTO and ALTA with the Alliance government. We are the party that gave Fiji its biggest current investor – the FNPF. We are the party that gave Fiji the Housing Authority to provide housing for very, very many Fiji islanders especially the Taukei.

We are the party that has never supported any coup in this country because we respect the rule of law and the inherent principles of natural justice and human rights and freedoms; peaceful negotiation and cooperation.

And i urge the people of Fiji to also judge the other political parties on their record. Have they been consistent and principled? Have they always supported the rule of law? Have they had a history of addressing land issues calmly and sensitively, with respect and dignity for landowners together with human compassion and respect for the multiracial tenant community? Have they been able to calmly and rationally deal with the other political parties in parliament for the betterment of Fiji?

The NFP has.

The NFP shall continue in that vein.

After 51years – it's hard to kill old habits.

Next ladies and gentlemen, i wish to address the second issue i have taken away from the hustings – another issue dear to my heart as a youngish person with a few more decades to live in this country, god willing.

It saddens me no end to hear so many of my generation speak of their disillusionment with the body politic in this country.

It saddens me because i know that feeling well. You see, we turned 14 or thereabouts, give or take five to ten years, when the first coup happened in 1987.

Our whole lives lay ahead of us and all we got was 27 years of the coup culture. The leaders of this country responsible for the coup culture failed us.

That coup culture robbed our generation of life under the rule of law and democratic governance.

You may ask, why and how is that so important?

I like to tell the story of Fiji and New Zealand and Mauritius in 1986 that our leader also tells the hustings. Fiji was on the track to be on par with New Zealand on important economic indicators and ahead of Mauritius.

At present, if we take the three hour flight to New Zealand and some more hours to Mauritius – we will all see that those two countries have move forward ahead of Fiji, leaps and bounds on the important social, political and economic factors .

Their economy (employment, wages, dollar strength, investment levels), political foundation and social services – hospitals, schools, water, housing and roads are much better than hours (and they do not get fixed in anticipation of general elections).

If you ask how and why, ladies gentlemen – there is a very simple answer – they have not had military coups instigated by selfish, short sighted and incompetent politicians to disrupt their progress and maturity.

The next question would be, how does the National Federation Party propose to tackle that matter?

Ladies and gentlemen, we have been telling voters right around the country that the first step is for you to not vote for the coup maker as that will send all of the wrong signals to the military camp.

There are captains, majors and colonels sitting in the camp and as history has shown in this country and other countries that have had military coups – they watch carefully and take their cue from how the electorate, you the masses treat a usurper from their ranks.

If you elect the usurper, you embolden others with that thinking ‘if he can do it and get away with it, so can i – and I need not worry as the electorate will later legitimise me through elections.’

Believe me, that is not the message we wish to send to the military camp.

Just as importantly – if you do not vote at all, you will be sending the same message to the military camp.

You will be raising the white flag of surrender on behalf of the children of Fiji.

Our manifesto states that we will support continual and relevant training for our armed forces on their role under a democratic government. That is, to take this coup culture mentality out of their ethos.

They need to know that we the people are their masters and we speak through general elections to defer to our elected leaders to run the country for us.

Yes, i also have relatives and friends in the uniform and my father proudly wore that uniform for many, many years and distinguished himself there.

And so i wish to speak directly, firmly but with a lot of love to the armed forces when i say the following – when you put on that uniform, you are no longer just our relative, family or friend – you are also subject to very particular laws of this country.

And like me and every other citizen including our leaders and chiefs – you are beneath the law. The law is above you and each and every one of us.

If the Queen of England humbly subjects herself to the laws of her country and the sovereignty of her people then i humbly suggest to you that you do the same.

As the great English Judge, Lord Denning once commented ‘Be you ever so high, the law is above you’.

Only when you do that, will you allow this country to flourish socially and economically as a democratic country.

Yours is not a position from which you second guess the elected government of the day. Your role is to follow orders that come from the elected cabinet who represent the people.

Again, that is said with a lot of love.

And i am sure that the men and women in uniform would be proud to play their proper role in ensuring that the coup culture ends so that social, economic and political development progresses –uninterrupted.

As our Leader has previously said, we welcome the commander’s assurances to respect the result of the general elections.

Before i end under this heading i also wish to tell the people of Fiji that we must always speak our minds to each other.

Being in a state of denial or burying our heads in the sand and wishing things would just go away won't do any good. We have to make things happen.

For all of those reasons, we urge the people of Fiji to vote wisely. Look at the history of our party and look at the history of the other parties that are standing in these elections. Look at our policies and the policies of the other parties. Look at our candidates and the candidates of the other parties.

Compare and contrast us then do your civic duty to your country and to the children of this country, for now and into the future – Go and Vote.

Thank you very much.

**Tupou Draunidalo**

**President**

**NFP**