

**Address by NFP President
NFP Convention 2017
Girmit Centre, Lautoka
3rd June 2017
By Lt-Col Pio Tikoduadua**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Ni sa bula vinaka, Namaskar, Asalam Malekum, Ni Hao, Noaia `e Mauri, and a very Good morning to you all.

I am deeply honored and privileged to address you today, as an Itaukei that is a proud member of the National Federation Party. My spirit is humbled at the expressions of confidence in me to co-lead the charge with you to CAUSE CHANGE at the helm of our national leadership in 2018.

Change that will put the people back at the centre of our national heartbeat. Change that will put Fijians back at the helm of decision making in Fiji. Changes that will help us accept that the true measure of our national pride are not derived from the lights that brighten up our towns and cities at night, but are from the flickering flames of candles and kerosene lamps that light up the darkest corners of our land.

Change that recognize that whilst we are one, we are also many. Change that recognizes that being different is healthy and that one size does not fit all. Change that will demonstrate that the sum of our national will to grow, is determined by the people and not by two people only. Change that recognizes that whoever or whatever is the loudest may not necessarily be best for Fiji

Change to demonstrate that throwing money at a problem does not necessarily solve it. CHANGE IS COMING....FIJI. Change is here and it is coming to your homes and to homes near you. And the driver for that change is Team NFP, Yes....We The FEDS are geared to make that change for you.

The changes we demand is a change in the national leadership from party's that have had a chance to make a real difference for our people

and have failed to unite us, to a breed of new leaders in a party backed up by more than half a century of experience, in Team NFP.

Since joining the Fiji Public Service in 1985, I have spent 30 years of my adult life serving the people of Fiji in more ways than one. 25 of those years in the Republic of Fiji Military Forces. The most memorable of those years in the force were when I was a peacekeeper for the United Nations in Lebanon and in East Timor. I have also served in Multinational Peacekeeping Forces in Sinai, Egypt and in the Solomon Islands under the Regional Assistance Mission. Throughout these peacekeeping missions I encountered the face of human suffering and death. Conditions that were brought about by human conflict that resorted to violence to address their grievances.

Also during my service in the RFMF I was involved in the political upheavals of 2000 and in 2007, contributing in ways that I could to restore civilian rule and true democracy. Similarly to my experiences in peacekeeping I witnessed how violence broke down the very fabrics that held our communities together. These were some of the saddest moments of my life. I witnessed how members of the same family were pitted against each other. I saw how people of different races living in the same communities waged violence on each other. At the same time, I witnessed many acts of courage displayed by many people that came to the aid of those who were victimized. I promised myself that I would do whatever it takes to stand up against discrimination, intimidation and violence. That I would propagate for understanding, tolerance, love and forgiveness.

These principles have influenced my decisions in the past and have contributed in a major way to my joining the National Federation Party.

Unfortunately for Fiji, I have witnessed how our governance today is slowly sliding Fiji back into that space where the darkness that led to 2000 and 2006 prevailing and rearing its ugly head again. Fiji needs bold, genuine, selfless leadership that will fairly address the grievances of all communities and compassionately consider issues on their merits. We have all experienced or witnessed the suppression of rights of the people to be heard. The nation in my view has been held to ransom by a dictatorial rule exploiting the very democratic process of parliament.

The time has come for all of that to change. The Indo-Fijian communities should no longer be duped into believing that their security is only guaranteed by a Bainimarama in power. The actions of the Itaukei in our history of upheavals must no longer be used as an excuse to building a physical security environment that will deter them from expressing their rights under the constitution.

It has been almost 20 years since 2000 and it has been 10 years since 2006. The same excuses to suppressing the itaukei interests cannot be used to protect the rights of Indo-Fijians. Under the 2013 constitution we are all apparently equals and our rights to self-determination are protected. Any government elected by the people must stand on its own two feet defending its own position without having to resort to employing or influencing the security forces to protect its interest.

With us in the crowd today are close to 300 people from Wainibuka in Tailevu. People that were branded as rebels from 2000. They are law abiding people who believe in the power of democracy, who believe in the power of the people and in the democratic process. They have not resorted to violence in a bid to have their voices heard. Their concerns in 2000 remains true today. However they have lost confidence in the government of the day and of those that exploited their good will in 2000 to protect their interest.

They have taken that bold first step to turn to the party they had once defamed, believing that their voices will be heard fairly with us, with a willingness to compromise on their hardened political views.

The itaukei and indo Fijians today must now take that first bold step to meet each other beyond half way. Fiji needs us to take these steps. Our government must do more beyond expressions in the law to build our society to one that is truly accepting of, and accommodating to our differences. Ultimately, our national security is guaranteed in each other. Our security is not guaranteed in expressions of equality and in the law that forces it down our throats. They need to come from the heart and our deep conviction and faith that all men are created equal.

Fiji is big enough to accommodate all our people. It is big enough to encourage respectful but honest debate and discussions on our unique situation. There is the political will in NFP to lead the charge to rebuild and change the views of our people. But first we must take that bold

step to leave our comfort zones and walk the talk. We need to believe that there is enough good will out there amongst our people to make it work.

The NFP through its leadership is committed to making it work. We have leaders who genuinely believe and trust in the goodwill of our people to accommodate and accept each other genuinely.

I have witnessed many an occasion where current and past political leaders use the race card for political gain. They speak one thing and do the exact opposite. Political leaders that exploited their powers and influence in the security forces to further their own personal ambition. The RFMF is a force for good and has a huge tonne of responsibility to protect all our people - from external threats. These powers should not be used by anyone as leverage to remain in power, or to suppress the human rights of our people. Therefore we must not be afraid to live our rights, to express our rights as guaranteed in the constitution. The media must be free of hassle to report freely on the sentiments of the people. The media must not take sides and deal and report on issues with fairness. They must represent the will of the people on government.

Fiji is a society of many different communities. None of these communities have rights that are more equal than others. All deserve to be heard fairly and to be treated fairly under the law. Therefore no one should intimidate indo-fijians anymore by proclaiming that they are their only guarantee of security. Your security lies squarely on the good will of all our people particularly the itaukei. The itaukei must be free to live their cultures and their traditions without being dictated upon. They need the space and the enabling environment to make all feel at home in Fiji - we are after all a very accommodating people.

We at NFP are committed to making this work. We have the will to make it work. I have the will to make it work. We will be hampered greatly if we are not in a position of power in 2018 to make it work. So I call on the electorate of Fiji, VOTE NFP to achieve this outcome for our people and for Fiji.

Thank you, Dhaniyavaad and Vinaka vakalevu.

