



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND  
MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION**

**FIJI INDIGENOUS BUSINESS COUNCIL WORKSHOP**

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**May 28 2025**

**Novotel, Lami Bay Resort**

**9:00AM**

**Lami**

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Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi, Hon, Ro Teimumu  
Kepa,

Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts,  
Hon. Iferemi Vasu,

Chairman of the Fiji Indigenous Business Council, Ulaiasi  
Taoi,

Commissioner of Police, Rusiate Tudravu,

Respected Chief Executive Officers,

Invited Guests,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the owners of the land that we now stand on, Nadonumai, vua na Turaga na Tui Suva, its leaders past, present, and emerging.

Ki Burebasaga, vua saka na Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi, Ro Teimumu Kepa, whose traditional provincial domain lies the seat of all government stewardship.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Era Sa Bula Vinaka Saka!**

*Please allow me to extend the apologies of the Hon. Prime Minister, who unfortunately, due to other commitments, cannot be with us here today.*

Esteemed guests, industry leaders, and proud custodians of our land, it is a privilege to address you today.

Last year, we hosted the Fiji Tourism Convention, which saw over 200 participants. They were not just hoteliers and tour operators – but some of you, our resource owners.

One thing that came out strongly was the call for more indigenous participation in tourism and in economic development. And the need to have more regular dialogue with our tourism resource owners.

So when Mr. Taoi shared details about this Symposium, we saw this as an opportunity to work together.

This is because our intention at the end of the day is the same. To uplift the lives of our people, to provide opportunities, and to address what needs to be addressed.

*And under the Coalition Government, we are committed to ensuring that every iTaukei landowner and indigenous entrepreneur is seen not just as a beneficiary, but as a partner in national development.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Before I touch on tourism, I do acknowledge some of the systematic challenges we, as iTaukei, face in progressing growth.*

*We are influenced by a complex set of historical, institutional, legal, and socio-cultural factors.*

*Land ownership structure, lower representation in the formal sector, policy and institutional challenges, limited access to market and capital.*

*This is why forums such as this are important where we come together to network and in keeping with this year's theme, focus on creating and sustaining our future in business.*

## **TOURISM – A DRIVER OF INDIGENOUS EMPOWERMENT**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We know how important tourism is to us – to jobs, to the economy.

The most recent numbers show that in April this year, we received 80,363 visitors. This is 4% higher than April last year and about 26% higher than March.

This is the first time our April numbers have surpassed 80,000. And the industry will continue to grow. By 2027, our goal is to reach \$4 billion with 1.25 million visitors.

Global projections estimate that by 2034, the travel and tourism sector will supercharge the global economy with a staggering \$16 trillion, making up 11.4% of the entire economic landscape, providing 449 million jobs.

The President of the World Bank, in a recent interview has also identified tourism as one of the 5 pillars for growth and stability, and Fiji is well positioned to benefit from the significant growth forecasted for tourism.

Our tourism is world-standard and growing.

But for us, the 40% contribution of GDP comes largely from only 2 provinces. So we can only imagine if we spread tourism opportunities across all 14 provinces, we can have more inclusive growth.

*This is not just an economic strategy—it is a moral imperative of equity and national cohesion, championed by this Government.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A large part of this growing industry is the desire for more Indigenous-led tourism.

Recent reports emphasise the importance of supporting Indigenous tourism as the pathway to sustainable development, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment.

There are projections that this segment's market value will reach US\$67.05 billion in 2034; from its current value of US\$ 44.86 billion in 2024.

While the definition of indigenous tourism varies, what remains consistent is that it should be led by Indigenous peoples.

It has created jobs for Indigenous peoples, often in remote areas where other paid jobs can be scarce.

It is tourism that is owned, operated, or guided by indigenous people, ensuring that cultural narratives are presented authentically and respectfully.

For too long, the true stewards of our land, culture, and heritage, our indigenous resource owners, have been underrepresented in an industry built on their contributions.

**But the time for change is now.** It is time for our people to step forward, change our mindset, take ownership, and fully benefit from the tourism sector that thrives on their legacy.

*This Coalition Government believes that a prosperous tourism future must begin with empowering those who have always protected Fiji's greatest assets—our land, culture, and identity.*

## **GCC RESOLUTIONS: A CLEAR PATH FORWARD**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the recent Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) meeting in Suva, significant resolutions were passed—resolutions

that will shape the future of indigenous-led businesses in Fiji. Among them:

- The creation of Provincial Economic Units to coordinate landowner-led businesses and expand their market access.
- The establishment of the iTaukei Resource Owners Support & Development Fund, with a \$3 million allocation to empower indigenous resource owners and companies, and their contribution to the economy.
- Proposed legal reforms to empower landowners, giving them greater control over how their land is used for economic purposes.

*These initiatives reflect the commitment of the Government to recentre Indigenous voices and interests in the national economy.*

## **NATIONAL TOURISM ALIGNMENT**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These commitments directly align with the National Sustainable Tourism Framework (NSTF). This framework sets a bold strategic direction for the next decade, accompanied by an Action Plan that prioritizes sustainability, inclusion, and long-term prosperity.

This strategy is built on **4 goals**. Each goal strongly carries the participation and empowerment of indigenous communities in not just tourism, but economic participation.

**In goal 1** (Prosperous visitor economy) for example, we want to create laws that suit indigenous owned businesses and investments.

**Goal 2** (Thriving and inclusive communities) seeks to encourage initiatives like mentoring and training to ensure indigenous participation.

**In goal 3** (Visible and valued cultures), while we promote our culture and tradition, we want to ensure we safeguard it.

**And finally in goal 4** (Healthy Islands and oceans) – communities can develop ecotourism projects or monetise practices to help provide income while supporting the protection of natural resources.

## **EQUITABLE TOURISM GROWTH: A CALL TO ACTION**

We all know tourism contributes significantly to our national economy, but how much of this truly benefits indigenous communities? The answer is clear: not enough.

So from a tourism perspective, our next steps will focus on:

- **Equitable Laws:** Our laws date back to the 70s or earlier. We are currently working on a new Tourism legislation that can create pathways for indigenous tourism products such as village home stays, tours

and make our laws such that they create a level playing field.

*This new legislation will reflect the realities of today's economy—where local innovation and cultural integrity must be fully supported by enabling policies.*

- **Access to Finance:** This year, we rolled out a Tourism Micro and Small Enterprise Fund specifically to provide capital for MSMEs in communities to create new experiences and products.

*This is part of the broader MSME Development Strategy led by Government, which prioritizes grassroots entrepreneurship in our most rural communities.*

- **Capacity Building:** Together with access to finance, we are working closely with the private sector to provide training and capacity building. Just last month we hosted the first tour guide training where

we brought together MSMEs from across all provinces. And next week, we will be partnering with other Government agencies to provide basic financial literacy training.

## **A COLLECTIVE CALL TO ACTION**

To our landowners: Step forward and lead this movement. Your knowledge and leadership must shape our tourism future. While we have business experts with us today, there remains great wisdom in a bottom-up approach.

To the private sector: Build real partnerships with indigenous businesses. When communities thrive, tourism succeeds.

*And to all stakeholders: know that this Coalition Government is listening. We are legislating. We are investing. We are walking with you every step of the way toward a more just, more inclusive, more prosperous Fiji*

## **CONCLUSION: OUR SHARED FUTURE**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let's leave this forum united in action. The Government of Fiji stands ready to act, but real transformation will only happen when the government, the private sector, and resource owners move forward as one.

This isn't just about tourism—it's about who we are and where we're going as a nation.

*We have the tools, we have the talent, and we now have the political will. Together, let's shape a future where no Fijian is left behind*

**Vinaka Saka Vakalevu.**