



Honourable Laisenia Qarase

Prime Minister and Minister for Fijian Affairs, Culture & Heritage,
Minister for National Reconciliation & Unity; ALTA & Sugar Industry Reforms

Remarks at meeting with Public Service Unions

Holiday Inn
Suva

10th January, 2006
11:00 am

A Partnership for Fiji **Creating a High Performing Public Service**

Hon. Ministers

Chairperson of the Public Service Commission

Distinguished representatives of the 6 Unions in the
Public Service.

I thank you very much for accepting the invitation
to this special meeting.

My recent Christmas and New Year holiday gave me an opportunity to think further about some issues affecting the Public Service.

Initially, the agenda for today was to be limited to outstanding matters relating to the implementation of the 2004 COLA award. That obviously remains an important priority.

But as we begin 2006, I want to share with you some additional ideas and thoughts.

I hope they will lead to a new and more focused attitude to managing and directing the affairs of the Service for the overall benefit of the country.

What I propose is a Partnership for Fiji.

This would be between the Government, representing the people; the Public Service Commission, as the employer; and the Public Sector unions, representing the workers.

If we can reach agreement on how to form such a partnership, the way will open to hastening reform, and curing the ailments that presently afflict the Service.

We should never underestimate the importance of the Public Service to Fiji. It is pivotal to the advancement of the nation.

It is our largest employer and service organisation. It takes the biggest slice of public funds. It has a wide impact on development and the orderly functioning of Fiji through delivery of essential services to the people.

An efficient Public Service is also vital for creating the right conditions for increasing private investment, jobs and exports.

We are engaged in a change process that entails moving away from a highly centralised and rigid bureaucracy. More authority and responsibility is going to the CEOs, the Ministries and Departments.

The challenge is to make the Service more responsive to the needs of the people and the Government of the day.

The Service operates in an era of unprecedented public scrutiny. The general perception of it is one of inefficiency, lack of accountability and growing corruption.

Increasingly, there are reports of corrupt practices; some of these even involve CEOs. This all serves to tarnish the image of the Service and to erode trust and confidence. These problems and shortcomings are not just for the Government to deal with. They are of concern to each one of us, and our organisations.

We are direct stakeholders in the Public Service. It belongs to us all. It is our organisation.

The people at this meeting possess the ability and the influence to lead a great transformation. I would like to see us working more closely together to build a Public Service noted for high performance and incorruptibility. It should operate in line with exemplary standards of professionalism and service and recognise its members as its most important asset.

There is an example for us to follow in the broad partnership that produced our first Strategic

Development Plan for the period 2001 to 2005, and its successor, covering the period 2006 to 2008.

Government, the Public Service, non-government organisations and the business community, combined successfully to create both plans.

The partnership principle operates well in other sectors, such as education, and rural development.

In the promotion of investment and economic reform, I receive invaluable advice from the Prime Minister's Think Tank, which also functions as a Government-private sector partnership.

The Partnership for Fiji I envisage for the Public Service would deal with issues as part of a coordinated and comprehensive policy. This would replace the current piece-meal and fragmented approach.

It would have three broad aspects:

- Firstly, to resolve all immediate industrial relations issues. I urge a rejection of the old-style adversarial approach that so often leads to confrontation. We need to break-free from this thinking and concentrate instead on co-operation for the common good.

- Secondly, to agree on a longer-term framework and system to govern industrial relations.
- Thirdly, a collective commitment to continuing mutual co-operation among the stakeholders. This would be directed towards the overall goal of achieving reform for a new-look Service with improved and higher standards of efficiency, integrity and performance.

More details of this proposed partnership are set out in the paper that is being distributed to you.

I ask you today to give serious consideration to what I am proposing.

We have an opportunity to forge a partnership that can be at the very forefront of our national efforts to rebuild Fiji.

I welcome your ideas. My team of Ministers and representatives of the PSC are ready for more detailed discussions. The Government would be happy to table specific details of its proposals for dealing with issues in the first two categories. These are pending issues of an immediate nature, and a longer term Industrial Relations Framework. The paper circulated to you this morning can provide the broad framework for the Partnership Agreement that I have proposed to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let's make 2006 a landmark year for co-operation to create a high performing Public Service for Fiji.

Thank you.
