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PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP

LUNCH IN HONOUR OF PRIME MINISTER SITIVENI RABUKA OF FIJI
CANBERRA, 1 SEPTEMBER 1992

Prime Minister, Mrs Rabuka, Foreign Minister Bole, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, Prime Minister, on your first visit to Australia as Prime Minister.

Mrs Rabuka, I am also delighted to welcome you.

The friendship between our two countries is a tradition.

It is a friendship of trust and cooperation.

The formal relationship goes back to 1964 when Australia's first post was established in Suva. This became our High Commission upon your independence in 1970.

Our commercial and business connections go back much further, to the last decades of the nineteenth century - when we were all British colonies.

As a close neighbour, over the years we have watched your development as an independent nation and major player in South Pacific affairs.

Strong ties have evolved between us in so many areas.

They have stood the test of time, and the test of politics - and the test of rugby.

Prime Minister - we followed Fiji's recent elections with interest and we were impressed with your conciliatory statements after your appointment.

Your Prime Ministership marks a new beginning in Fiji's political life, and with it the new hope that accompanies a renewal of representative and responsible government.

It also marks the beginning of a new phase in our relations.

Relations between Australia and Fiji have been fully normalised following our meeting in Honiara last July.

The final step in the process was our agreement to resume defence links.

Australia looks forward to working with you once more to strengthen the security of our region.

Security requires not only defence preparedness and cooperation, but also internal security and domestic stability.

We are greatly encouraged by the assurances you have given that you are resolved to maintain dialogue with all communities in Fiji, and to further expand opportunities and political participation.

Just as we welcome your commitment to national reconciliation, we are impressed by your pursuit of economic and trade reform.

We in Australia have been engaged in this process for a decade.

The effort to make Australia a more efficient and competitive economy is not without its costs.

But the effort had to be made - and we are now seeing some of the benefits.

The Australian economy has been transformed: it is more flexible, more open to the world, and much more oriented to the Asia-Pacific region where our future substantially lies.

Prime Minister, in the last three years we have witnessed a transformation in international affairs unequalled since the end of World War II.

Most nations are coming to realise that cooperation, trust and closer integration provide the only sure road to peace and prosperity.

Events in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa confirm this by their tragic negative example.

Fiji has made an outstanding contribution to the cause of international peace over many years and in many centres of civil and international conflict.

Fijians have served with distinction in peace-keeping operations in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Namibia, the Sinai and Iraq.

On several occasions, Australian and Fijian troops and personnel have served side by side.

In the United Nations and in other forums, Fiji has contributed as a responsible member of the international community.

In the Asia-Pacific region too, there is an opportunity to constructively contribute to development and prosperity.

We can only do so, however, in partnership.

After our discussions in Honiara and again this morning, Prime Minister, I know that our relationship is renewed on a basis of equality and respect.

In the years ahead it will be strengthened in such areas as trade, development assistance and defence.

In whatever ways are practical, Australia is ready to help Fiji achieve balanced, sustainable economic development.

We will continue to cooperate in such multilateral bodies as the South Pacific Forum, the South Pacific Commission and United Nations.

Mr Prime Minister, let me say again how pleased I am to welcome you and your party to Australia.

I trust that what remains of your stay will be pleasant and productive.

I now invite Senator Robert Hill, representing the Leader of the Opposition, to join me in this welcome.

Thank you.

CANBERRA

1 September 1992