

# **2<sup>ND</sup> MELANESIAN ARTS FESTIVAL –VANUATU**

**18-28 August 2002**

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Civil Aviation

Hon. Konisi Yabaki

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DISTINGUISHED GUESTS LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE AS MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND HERITAGE TO CONVEY TO YOU ALL, GREETINGS FROM FIJI.

WE FINALLY MADE IT.

OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS YOU HAVE BEEN INTERACTING CULTURALLY WHILE WE WERE SORTING OUT OUR FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES COUPLED WITH SOME UNCERTANITIES. NEVERTHELESS, THE TRIP WAS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND WILL TO ENSURE FIJI'S CONTINGENT MAKES IT TO PORT VILA FOR THE SECOND MELANESIAN ARTS AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL 2002.

IT IS WITH DEEP REGRET THAT WE COULD NOT REACH HERE ON TIME TO TAKE PART IN THE OPENING CEREMONY, AND I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF FIJI TO APOLOGISE TO THE HOST GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF VANUATU, THE ORGANISERS OF THE FESTIVAL AND OUR FRIENDS FROM THE MELANISIAN REGION.

I WISH TO ASSURE YOU THAT FIJI IS OBLIGED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SPLENDID ARTS FESTIVAL AND MORESO COMMITTED TO THE REALISATION OF ITS OBJECTIVES WHERE WE AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS COME TOGETHER TO EXPRESS OURSELVES AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO SHARE OUR IDEAS AND TO RESPECT OUR UNIQUE CULTURES, TRADITIONS AND VALUES.

LADIES AND GENTLEMAN

FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, PEOPLE HAVE EXPRESSED THEMSELVES AND THEIR CULTURE THROUGH REPEATED PATTERNS OF SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCES AND EVENTS. THESE RITUALS ARE EXPRESSIONS OF PEOPLE'S IDENTITY; IT IS COMPLEX AND ALTHOUGH THEY MAY BE COMMON TO A PARTICULAR PEOPLE OR CULTURE IT IS NEVERTHELESS SACRED.

IN SUCH SYSTEM MANY FORMS OF COMMUNICATIONS ARE INVOLVED. THIS INCLUDES DANCES, TRADITIONAL COSTUMES, ARCHITECTURE, PROCESSION AND GIFTS AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN ITS MANY DIFFERENT FORMS SUCH AS LEGENDS, MYTHS AND SPEECHES. THEY EMBODY THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE IN ITS TOTALITY.

THIS SIGNIFICANT EVENT IS AN INITIATIVE OF THE MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP (MSG) AIMED AT THE PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MELANESIAN CULTURES. IT IS AN EVENT THAT PROVIDES THAT UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR STRENGTHENING, PROMOTING, PRESERVING AND DISSEMINATING MELANESIAN ARTS AND INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL CULTURES WITHIN THE MELANESIAN REGION, A REGION THAT COMPRISES OF THE LARGEST ETHNIC GROUP BESIDES POLYNESIA AND MICRONESIA.

THE 2<sup>ND</sup> MELANESIAN ARTS FESTIVAL WITH ITS THEME OF “BUILDING PEACE THROUGH SHARING OF CULTURES” BRINGS WITH IT MESSAGES OF HOPE AND PROSPERITY AMONGST OUR ISLAND COUNTRIES. THE THEME PERFECTLY MATCHES THE SPIRIT OF THE 2002 FESTIVAL. IT IS CONDUCIVE TO LONG TERM CONTEMPLATION OF MATTERS OF COMMON INTEREST FOR THE MEMBER COUNTRIES.

SOCIAL COHESION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ARE ENHANCED WITH GREATER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE REGIONAL COUNTRIES. A STRONG SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE ENHANCES NETWORKING AND CO-OPERATION AND CONTRIBUTES TO DEVELOPMENT. CULTURE AND ARTS IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS, PEACE AND ORDER.

IN REAL ECONOMIC TERMS, THE PROVISION OF CULTURE AND ARTS GENERATE GOODS AND SERVICES THAT FORM PART OF THE NATIONAL PRODUCT WHILE PROVIDING INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT FOR ARTISTS AND CULTURAL WORKERS AND THE MANY SUPPORT PERSONNEL THAT WORK IN CULTURAL INDUSTRIES.

A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURE COULD HELP IN THE ATTAINMENT OF LASTING PEACE WITHIN THE REGION BY FOSTERING GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE VALUE SYSTEM, BEHAVIOUR, AND TRADITIONAL ARTS AMONG OUR MEMBER COUNTRIES.

IT IS TIME THAT WE COME TOGETHER IN THE SPIRIT OF UNITY AND EXPRESS OUR CULTURAL IDENTITY AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER AS A BASIS OF OUR SOLIDARITY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMAN,

WE HAVE A DIVERSE MANIFESTATION OF OUR INDEGENIOUS HUMAN INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY AND THESE LIVING FORMS OF EXPRESSION MUST BE CONTINUALLY PRACTICED TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ITS ORIGINALITY AMONGST THE INCREASING EFFECT OF MODERNISATION THROUGH GLOBALISATION.

WE AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE IN THE PROTECTION AND EXPRESSION OF OUR INDIGENOUS CULTURE. WE ARE THE CARRIER, CONSERVATOR, PROMOTER AND EDUCATOR OF OUR

CULTURAL HERITAGE. AND IT IS WE WHO WILL ENSURE THAT OUR YOUNG ONES TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR INHERITANCE.

OUR CULTURAL MINISTERS WILL SOON BE MEETING AT THE SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION (SPC) HEAD QUARTERS IN NOUMEA TO FINALISE LEGISLATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF OUR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE. OUR HERITAGE HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO EXCESSIVE EXPLOITATION FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD OVER THE YEARS.

THE REGION MUST THEREFORE LEARN TO APPRECIATE THE RICHNESS OF OUR PROPERTY, OUR CULTURE, AND UNITE IN THE SPIRIT OF BROTHERHOOD TO PROTECT WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY OURS.

THE LIMITED RESOURCES OF BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTORS TO SUPPORT THE MANY NEEDS IN THE CULTURE AND ARTS REQUIRES THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS THAT WILL ENHANCE SUSTAINABILITY OF CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC WORKS.

CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IS AN AREA THAT WE AS A GROUP NEED TO EXPLORE SINCE I BELIEVE, IT IS CENTRAL IN PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND ENSURING DEMOCRATIC ACCESS TO CULTURE. IN OTHER COUNTRIES THEIR CULTURAL INDUSTRIES HAVE GROWN RAPIDLY IN

TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT CREATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR NATION'S ECONOMY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMAN, SOON YOU WILL ALL BE DEPARTING TO YOUR OWN COUNTRIES. THE FIJI CONTINGENT IS BLESSED WITH THE OPPRTUNITY TO INTERGRATE WITH YOU WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS BEFORE THE CLOSING OF THE FESTIVAL.

I THEREFORE WISH THE MEMBER COUNTRIES THE GOVERNMENT OF VANUATU AND THE ORGANISERS OF THE FESTIVAL A SUCCESSFUL AND MEMORABLE MELANESIAN FESTVAL OF PACIFIC ARTS 2002.

VINAKA VAKALEVU