

OPENING OF THE KALEVU SOUTH PACIFIC CULTURAL CENTRE, SIGATOKA

January 2002

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Civil Aviation

Hon. Konisi Yabaki

Honorable Ministers

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and Performers

It gives me great pleasure to be here today as Minister responsible for Culture and Heritage, on the kind invitation of the organisers, to the grand opening of the Kalevu **South Pacific** Cultural Centre.

Ladies and Gentlemen

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.

Such activities: welcoming visitors (as we have witnessed here today), cultivation of land and the recognition of the cycle of seasons; transitions between life and birth; initiation into the adult world; marriage; acquisition of chiefly or other status and ultimately death form the system which shape our perception of who we are and what we may become in a world of change.

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.

The question is whether these traditional systems or rituals have a place in the modern world of technology, tourism and its push for globalisation?

At the international level the World Commission on Culture and Development and more recently the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development has demonstrated even more forcefully that sustainable development and the flourishing of culture are interdependent. Not only are investments in cultural resources indispensable, but sustainable development also requires the strength and vitality of cultures themselves.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Government recognises the intrinsic and economic importance of culture as a development asset. Cultural heritage presents one of the most potent assets that Fiji as a developing nation can participate in the global economy thereby increasing the well being of its people. Within this context the integral link between Culture and Tourism cannot be overemphasised.

Tourism as the fastest growing industry in the world relies to a large extent on cultural heritage for its life blood. Tourism can create its own decline if heritage, both natural and man-made, is not respected. Tourism must fit the

physical and cultural landscape of which it is a part, complementing the character and sense of place of the local community. To disregard these can have substantial social, cultural and environmental consequences.

My Ministry is mindful of this and work is currently underway to develop policy guidelines in this area. The Department of Culture and Heritage, birthed out of the need by stakeholders to establish a national coordinating body at the policy level, is committed to the preservation and development of our cultural heritage.

The protection of indigenous rights and freedoms deserves particular attention. This includes the freedom to preserve their culture, and express and develop their cultural identity, the protection of their rights to collective action, to profess and practice their spiritual beliefs, and to the use of their language.

Fiji is a multiracial, multicultural country. My Ministry is committed to a culture of peace and harmony based on the strengths of the diversity in its multicultural society. A basic principle of development is the fostering of the respect for all cultures that have made Fiji their home. The Department will work towards fostering a sense of **national identity that is all-inclusive and cohesive.**

Today we witness how these ideals at the national level can be achieved at the local level.

The Kalevu South Pacific Cultural Centre has clearly demonstrated today that culture and heritage can and will continue to be relevant in the modern world. In fact, this Centre is strategically placed, along this Coral Coast, to take advantage of the tourism market and its potential development.

The Kalevu Centre has changed its focus from that of presenting itself as a group focusing on traditional Fijian culture, to both locals and tourists alike, to one which is now the focal point for the Melanesian and Polynesian island states to have their cultures showcased through dance and songs.

In this competitive world where increasingly there is an increase of the educated unemployed workforce, the Centre is providing a new lease of life and opportunities to the youths within the surrounding areas. Through its programmes and activities it is also contributing to the preservation, promotion and development of the cultures represented here. Something I can assure you, as Minister for Tourism, Culture and Heritage is what the tourists are increasingly looking for - **that authentic experience which can only be experienced through the people and their way of life.**

On behalf of the Government I wish to congratulate the founders of the Kalevu Centre for taking such initiative and have not waited for Government to provide the necessary incentive, which I must add, happens too many times nowadays. You have recognised the need and the opportunity and have stepped in to fill that vacuum – VINAKA VAKALEVU. The Centre is a symbol of hope, commitment and dedication in a time where these virtues are not common place and my Ministry is proud to be associated with it.

On this note I must applaud in particular the leadership and foresight of Ms. Soana Vakautua, to make what I am certain, was once only a dream become a reality today.

To you the performers I commend you for your commitment and dedication. CONGRATULATIONS. The group is a living testimony to our youth groups in Fiji and how creative energy, community involvement, perseverance and sheer determination can impact on the lives of families.

A testimony of this is what I am given to understand we will witness today - a visual feast of an array of performances from our polynesian island nations spread across the Pacific - The Fijian Meke, The Hawaiian Hula, The Maori Poi ball and Haka, The Tahitian Tamure, The Tongan Taulunga and the Samoan Fire dance.

As Minister responsible for Culture & Heritage, and on behalf of the Government of the Fiji Islands, I wish you all the best in your great venture.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WITH THESE CLOSING WORDS IT NOW GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO OFFICIALLY DECLEAR THE KALEVU SOUTH PACIFIC CULTURAL CENTRE OPEN.