



RATU INOKE KUBUABOLA
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION &

CHAIR OF MSG FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

OPENING STATEMENT- FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING (FMM)

VALE NI BOSE COMPLEX, 8AM, MONDAY 26 MARCH, 2012

- Minister for Foreign Affairs of Vanuatu – Hon. Alfred Carlot;
- Minister for Foreign Affairs of Papua New Guinea – Hon. Ano Pala;
- Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of the Solomon Islands – Hon Clay Forau;
- The Head of FLNKS Group at the New Caledonia Congress, Madame Caroline Machoro ;
- Your Excellencies;
- Director General of the MSG Secretariat;
- SOM Chair;
- Senior Officials;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka! I wish to extend to you all a very warm welcome to this Special Foreign Ministers Meeting here at the Vale Ni Bose Complex. I wish to express the Fiji Government's sincere appreciation to you all for accepting our request for this special session of the Leaders Summit and related meetings. We had intentionally requested this

Special Session because we would like to see the progression of a few but key mandates set by our Leaders.

Colleague Ministers, you will recall that when the Leaders Summit Chair opened the 18th Leaders Summit in March last year, he stated and I quote:

"I have directed my Government to exhaust all efforts in terms of time and resources to make the MSG an internationally recognized organization, by lifting its political profile as the voice of the Melanesian Region, and be a strong advocate for:

- **Growth and development to meet the challenges of the 21st century;**
- **Integration into a prosperous economic union with free movement of goods, services, capital and labor across our borders;**
- **Long term political stability and unity amongst all people and countries of the region;**
- **Recognition and pursuance of MSG interest in broader regional forums such as the Pacific Islands Forum and multilateral bodies such as the WTO and the UN;**
- **Preserving and safeguarding Melanesia's fragile eco-system, biodiversity and mitigating the devastating effects of climate change; and**
- **Promoting and preserving the unique Melanesian history, culture and heritage and enhancing Melanesian bonds and commonalities. Unquote.**

It was in this spirit Colleague Ministers that our Prime Minister and Chair of the MSG had sought your permission to convene this special session of our constituent bodies to take

stock of progress in these priority areas. Fiji is indeed honored and humbled by your presence here today, particularly when there are so many urgent domestic issues demanding your personal attendance in your own capitals.

We do have a number of substantive items to consider. Firstly, we will be receiving a report by the Chair of the inaugural Environment and Climate Change Ministers Meeting held in Nadi Fiji on 26-27th January 2012. Ministers will recall that our Summit Chair had sought your Governments' approval for this meeting to be convened following concerns expressed by our membership that our region's environment and climate change issues interest were not being given the prominence it deserve at regional and international meetings.

Further, we will also be considering the report of Chair of the Ministers of Culture and Arts on their meeting in Honiara on 6-7 October 2011. This report is important as we will be updated with issues concerning the advancement of our cultural cooperation, more so, when one of our Member, the Solomon Islands, will be hosting the next Festival of Pacific Arts in Honiara in June this year.

Over the past few days, our Senior Officials and the Secretariat have worked tirelessly to deliberate on a range of political, trade, economic, social and Secretariat organizational issues of interest to our membership.

Colleague Ministers, I believe that you have all been thoroughly briefed by your respective Senior Officials on these issues. As such, this should make our deliberations on this range of issues more expeditious and efficient.

Please allow me to briefly highlight some of the pertinent issues which our Senior Officials will be putting forward for our consideration.

In the course of our deliberations, we will be considering:

- (i) The various Committee Chairs' reports on issues pertaining to the FLNKS aspirations for de-colonization, our membership's legal and Institutional Issues, Security issues, the Police Commissioner's Conference, and the Trade and Economic Officials Meeting;
- (ii) Cultural issues in particular the Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation and Guidelines for Participating in Future Melanesian Arts Festivals;
- (iii) Our Colleague Environment and Climate Change Minister's request for a joint MSG position on the Zero draft document, "The Future We Want", which will be discussed at the Rio Plus 20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio Brazil in June this year;
- (iv) Organizational matters pertaining to the operations of our Secretariat; and
- (v) Initiatives to Strengthen our MSG Cooperation.

Colleague Ministers, our organization has stood the test of time, but despite being confronted with multitude of challenges, we have demonstrated a strong resolve and unity as a region bound by a common cause. A cause that is clearly articulated in our Agreement Establishing the MSG. I wish to highlight that the purpose of the MSG as stipulated in the Agreement Establishing the MSG is to promote and strengthen inter-membership trade, exchange of Melanesian cultures, traditions and values, sovereign equality, economic and technical cooperation between members, and the alignment of our policies in order to further MSG members shared goals of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.

I am pleased that major progress has been achieved in laying the necessary building blocks for advancing the purpose of our organization. In a true spirit of Melanesian tradition, custom and values, we have managed to resolve contentious issues amongst ourselves. We have also managed to reach consensus through dialogue and solidarity.

Next year, marks our organization's 25th Anniversary. I believe it would be an opportune time for us to reflect on our achievements as a region and set a vision for our future. One of the areas that had benefitted from MSG cooperation since its founding in 1988 is the inter-membership trade which is being developed through the MSG Trade Agreement. The Agreement is being reviewed and will be tabled for our consideration at this meeting. We will also be considering a Skills Movement Scheme which will demonstrate our commitment to source skilled labour from within our region. Colleague Ministers, this will be a landmark achievement.

In further advancing the preservation, protection and promotion of our Melanesian tradition, cultures and values, I am also reminded that some of our Leaders are expected to affix their signatures to the MSG Framework Treaty on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture.

As we look ahead into the next 25 years, it may be useful to ask ourselves where our MSG cooperation needs to be heading? And what is the desired outcome of that cooperation? In defining a vision and mission of our Group, it may be useful to reflect on the anticipated challenges and opportunities which we will be facing as a Group in the years ahead.

I understand that the SOM Chair will be briefing us on SOM's proposals for setting our vision as an organization for the future. As our organization turns 25 years, it would be also appropriate to organize a celebration befitting of our past achievements. Such a celebration must mark the original objective of the establishment of the MSG, that is, to spearhead the aspirations of our Kanaky brothers and sisters to achieve freedom. It is therefore only fitting that this celebration is held in Kanaky land, New Caledonia.

With this few words, I have the honour of officially declaring open this Special MSG Foreign Ministers Meeting.

Tankiu Tumas

Merci Beaucoup

Tankyu Tru

Tangio Tumas

Oleti

Vinaka Vakalevu!