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150th IPU Assembly – Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Parliamentary action for social development and justice

- Honourable Chair and President of the 150th Assembly
- Hon. Madam President of the IPU and Secretary-General of the IPU
- Honourable Speakers and Members of Parliament
- Distinguished Guests

It is my great honour to address you today on an important issue to the Fijian Parliament — our commitment to advancing social inclusion and leveraging technology to bridge gaps in our society and region.

First and foremost, I would like to highlight our efforts towards social inclusion through strengthening our parliamentary democracy and ensuring that the needs of all Fijians are catered for.

Whilst we acknowledge that our journey with parliamentary democracy has been eventful, Fiji has continued to make significant progress in rebuilding democratic institutions and achieving political stability.

Parliament has focused on reinforcing parliamentary democracy by actively promoting citizens engagement in the democratic process and advancing social inclusion.

We have taken significant steps to make our Parliament more gender-sensitive, including incorporating gender analysis into parliamentary oversight and scrutiny, especially within our Standing Committees. By embedding gender-based analysis into the legislative processes, we aim to ensure that our laws and policies are equitable and gender-inclusive.

We have also mainstreamed oversight of the Executive's commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals, through the publishing of a guidance note on the SDGs for Committees. These are social inclusion initiatives that we are engraining into the legislative process to ensure that no one is left behind.

In addition, two significant Bills aimed at safeguarding children's rights and well-being were enacted unanimously in December 2024 – these were the Child Justice Bill and the Child Care and Protection Bill. The Parliament in so doing, is contributing to the national initiative to reform legal frameworks concerning child protection and family welfare, strengthening Fiji's compliance with international laws and standards.

Honourable Chair, Speakers and Members of Parliament, we recognise that our investment in ICT infrastructure and digital tools plays a vital role in promoting social inclusion by bridging divides and creating opportunities for marginalised communities.

We firmly believe that widespread access to digitalisation and technological advancements is vital for the growth of our parliamentary democracy. As a small island developing state, we also acknowledge the challenges faced by many of our remote communities in accessing participation and information related to parliamentary processes.

A central strategic priority for us is enhancing public engagement and empowering citizens to actively participate in and contribute to our parliamentary democracy – this is why we have made substantial investments in our Parliament’s ICT infrastructure and digital technologies.

Our Parliament has a hybrid system and studio setup that supports live streaming, sign-language interpreters, and two-way virtual communication, making our Parliament more accessible to citizens and stakeholders. The hybrid system and studio also facilitates the free-to-air **Parliament TV channel** which broadcasts parliamentary proceedings and committee sittings to enhance transparency and public engagement.

We are now deploying multi-language translations and captioning systems to allow citizens to better understand proceedings in the vernacular languages.

Our endeavour to progress with digital transformation reflects our resolve towards fostering meaningful public engagement and good governance – these efforts reflect our unwavering commitment to fostering an inclusive society and leveraging technology to bridge gaps.

It is with some satisfaction that we note in the IPU World e-Parliament Report 2024, Fiji score is 7/10 in the top 20% under the Decile ranking of digital maturity index for all Parliaments.

We remain committed to leveraging technology to its fullest potential, ensuring that every Fijian can actively engage in and contribute to our parliamentary democracy.

In conclusion Honourable Chair, Speakers and Members of Parliament, the Fijian Parliament, has this week signed a Cooperation Agreement with the IPU for the purposes of establishing a partnership, working together towards achieving the objectives of the IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament where the Fijian Parliament will coordinate a CIP Hub for the Pacific Region, entitled the Pacific Parliamentary Innovation Hub, and where the

Fijian Parliament will facilitate the exchange of experience and expertise between Pacific Parliaments on digital transformation and innovation. In doing so, the Pacific Regional Hub will help Pacific Parliaments to be more efficient and effective in their work, and to be more open and transparent to citizens.

The Fijian Parliament remains dedicated to advancing digital transformation, fostering greater public engagement, promoting transparency, and strengthening good governance in the Pacific region to ensure impactful parliamentary contributions toward social development and justice.

Thank you.

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