

# News story: British High Commissioner Fiji Speech at Queen's Birthday Party

Acting President Chief Justice Honourable Anthony Gates, Hon Vice President of Kiribati Kourabi Nenem, Attorney General Honourable Aiyaz Sayed Khayium, Hon Ministers & Members of Parliament, High Commissioners & Ambassadors, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Guests

Ni sa bula vinaka.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Gordon House to the 2017 Queen's Birthday Party, celebrating the 91st Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. For Alessandro and I, as well as our daughters Lara and Tess, this is the first time we will celebrate this occasion with you. I want to start by saying a heartfelt vinaka for the wonderful welcome that you have given all four of us in our ten months in Fiji. We were back in the UK in May, after a couple of days, my daughters asked "when are we going home?". They also asked when are we going to see proper weather and wear proper clothes again but I'll gloss over that.

For the United Kingdom, we see ourselves as strategic partners in the Pacific. Each of you are invited here tonight because you have contributed in some way to the deepening of this very special relationship. We see the Pacific as family – in good times and in bad. I want to thank the Prime Minister as well as Madam Speaker, and the Leaders of Opposition parties for all your messages of solidarity following London & Manchester attacks.

More broadly, it is impossible to talk about the UK-Fiji relationship without talking about sport. Despite the fact that I arrived after Fiji Sevens' Olympic Gold win, I get to watch the team thrash team GB in the final over and over again. And just in case, I didn't get the message, Fiji Airways show the match on all their planes, so I can relive that moment of defeat any time I want! But tonight, I want to acknowledge the presence of the Scottish Rugby team here. Fantastic to see your kilts. Delighted that you will use your day off tomorrow to visit Hilton Special School and Gospel School for the Deaf and Veiuto Primary School. This shows the power of sport for social good – we will continue to use UK sporting and high level visits to promote sport for social good. At last week's Italy match, I divided my half-Italian family by supporting Fiji. This week, I will of course support Scotland, although my children have asked if they can support Fiji. I would like to congratulate FRU for hosting two international matches and we hope this is the just the start for you.

Turning from sport to culture, this has been an incredible year. Dance Group VOU attended the Edinburgh festival, winning an award, and are again in the UK this week to attend a different festival. Last autumn, His Excellency the President visited London and met Her Majesty the Queen. He also opened the exhibition "Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific", at the University of East Anglia, the largest ever exhibition of Fijian artifacts. It is often said

that Her Majesty retains a soft spot for Fiji [reference to photo loops] and it was no coincidence that in January, Her Majesty undertook a visit the Fiji exhibition. I want to acknowledge the presence of Professor Hooper with us tonight – it is wonderful that you are now working as a cultural adviser to the COP 23 Secretariat to ensure that this important gathering sends a clear message on the deep cultural history of the Pacific. I am very proud that the British Government provided financial support not just for the exhibition in East Anglia, and for the Tabua exhibition here at the Fiji Museum, but to enable you to assist the museum with its strategic plan to strengthen this fantastic resource for all Fijians.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Ratu Meli Vesikula, of the Royal British Legion, representing the officers and families of Fijians who have served in the British Army.

For the next few minutes, I'm going to talk about the assistance that the UK provides in the Pacific. Rather than display a diplomatic beauty contest, I want to tell some of the stories of the individuals and events behind the headlines.

- Trade – Tate and Lyle, through its presence in the UK, has continued to purchase all of Fiji's sugar, and has recently undertaken further high level talks with FSC.
- Secondly, education – we offer approximately 16-18 scholarships per year. Masters level. Leadership. Acknowledge the presence here tonight. It makes us proud when we see our scholars do well in their studies. We had two such scholars, Krishnan Nair received a Distinction for his Master of Science in Sustainable Energy and Environment and Maika Tuicakau who was awarded the Dean's Award for Best Student on the MSC Structural Engineering programme. We were also pleased that we were able to award a scholarship to Krishneer Sen, our first Chevening Scholar from the Pacific with a disability who completed his Masters in Human Rights from the University of London. Krishneer started off as a student of the Gospel School for the deaf and is now UNICEF Pacific's Ambassador. In addition, the British Government – sole funder of Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, which provides approximately further scholarships per year in the region.
- Marine Economies – in 2015, the UK launched a new programme for Pacific Commonwealth countries. This opened up world-class expertise from the UK Hydrographic Office, the National Oceanographic Centre and the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science to the Pacific. At the heart of this program is an offer to help with gaps in hydrographic mapping and to use this to develop action plans which balance economic growth with environmental protection.
- Bilateral projects – support to UNDP/police – video recording; funded women's political participation through support to Fiji Young Women's

Forum; police leadership training done in collaboration with Australia and New Zealand; a growing defence relationship with an offers of places at Dartmouth Sandhurst, and regional courses on governance and strategic leadership; capacity building to parliament hosted by the Rt Hon Speaker.

- Multilateral – the most interesting part. Very proud to be a lead funder of the UN – UK funds between 9-13% most agencies. As a Board Member of the World Bank, the UK has pledged £3.3bn to the International Development Association between 2014-17. As the Pacific draws down more IDA, we estimate that there will be more UK funding to the Pacific than at any other time.
- In addition, I want to underline the contribution the United Kingdom makes to the European Union's support to the Pacific. I particularly want to underline the good work done through the Access to Justice programme, with UNDP, which provides a welcome boost to legal aid, the climate partnership with Pacific Small Island States, and the support to the Commonwealth's hub and spoke trade capacity building, including advisers to the PIF and to the Ministry of Trade. For the UK, whilst we are negotiating a new partnership with Europe, make no mistake, we will continue to be a leading partner on foreign and security policy, globally and here in the Pacific.  
Finally, I want to touch on climate. I wish to pay tribute to Fiji's Presidency of COP and leadership of last week's UN Oceans conference alongside Sweden. Attorney General, Ministers, I wish to congratulate you on an outstanding achievement including over 1300 new commitments to protect Oceans. The UK fully recognises the interconnectivity between oceans and climate, as well as the particular context of the Pacific, and warmly welcome this leadership.
- On COP, the United Kingdom is fully committed to the Paris agreement. We are delighted to support Fiji's COP Presidency, not least through our support to the European Union. We are ready to lead, shoulder to shoulder with our European partners. We are the 3rd largest contributor to the Green Climate Fund. We are proud that London is a leading centre on green finance. To have credibility internationally, it is vital to show leadership domestically also. As you may already know, the UK was the first developed nation to have legally binding targets for Greenhouse Gas emissions through our 2008 Climate Change Act. Last week, the energy mix from renewable overtook coal and gas for the first time. We are the first country to propose an end date for all unabated coal-fired power stations in this time frame as part of our plans for a cleaner energy future. This, ladies and gentlemen, is history in the making.

Before concluding, I want to look ahead to the coming year. I am delighted that the UK will host the next Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting in

April 2018 and will be chair in office of the Commonwealth for a 2 year period. As the much-needed reform program of the Secretariat moves ahead, I look forward to deepening our understanding of what Pacific States want to see from a reformed Secretariat.

In 2015, the Queen's Young Leader Programme was launched – we are honoured to have the Fiji recipients here tonight. [Elisha Bano and Luisa Tiulau both use creative arts to advocate social issues, including social inclusion and climate change. The Queen's Young Leaders are in the UK this week and will receive their awards from Her Majesty on 29th June. Next week marks the launch of the search for the Queen's Young Leader 2018 and we need to your help to publicise this life-changing programme and to nominate the very best young men and women.

We will have other opportunities to reflect on the depth of the Commonwealth partnership in the months ahead. The Commonwealth Games will be in our neighbourhood at the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia. The Queen's Baton Relay will be in Fiji in November this year. In another example of leadership, Fiji will host the Commonwealth Education Ministers here next February. Overall, the Commonwealth offers many practical areas of assistance in terms of trade policy support, parliamentary capacity building and other programmes associated with governance/rule of law, greater access to climate finance and election support, including observer missions. We look forward to working with all Pacific countries more closely in order to insure a dynamic Summit which renews the Commonwealth as an effective global institution, attuned to the particular needs of Small Island States.

In closing, I will be pleased to report to Her Majesty that we have celebrated her birthday in style in Suva – with Bula-Kilt combination found nowhere else on earth.

I also want to thank all the staff of the British High Commission Suva who have worked tirelessly to prepare tonight's event.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would now like to offer you a toast, if you could charge your glasses, The toast is: to the President, the Government and the People of Fiji. To Fiji.

Vinaka Vaka Levu.