

iTaukei Trust Fund Board - TTFB

HIS EXCELLENCY, MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) JIOJI KONUSI KONROTE CF, OF (Mil), MC, SBSSt.J, MSD, OMRI, NOC

President of the Republic of Fiji



ADDRESS AT THE LAUNCH OF THE ACCREDITATION OF ORGANIC ROTUMA AND ROTUMAN PUBLICATION 'RAK LA FAEAG ROTUAM'

Holiday Inn, Thursday, 21st October, 2021, Suva, 1100hrs

The Assistant Minister of iTaukei Affairs, Honourable Adi Selai Adimaitoga;
The Acting Permanent Secretary of iTaukei Affairs, Mr. Pita Tagicakirewa;
The Permanent Secretary of Education, Heritage and Arts, Dr Anjeela Jokhan;
The Chief Executive Officer of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board, Mr. Aisake Taito;
The Chairman of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board, Mr. Fatiaki Misau;
Board Members and Management of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka, Namaste, Noaia 'e Mauri and a very Good Morning to you all. Ladies and gentlemen, it is such a pleasure and an honour for my wife, Sarote and I to join you this morning in my capacity as President/Head of State to officiate at this ground breaking ceremony to launch two important, historic and pioneering initiatives that will undoubtedly benefit our Beloved Nation – Fiji, but more so our small Rotuman Community - The Official Accreditation of Rotuma's Organic Status and the launch of the Rotuman Publication "Rak La Faeg Rotuam".

Rotuma's Organic Journey

The promotion of Organic Farming is embedded in our Beloved Nation – Fiji's 20 Year National Development Plan on Food and Nutrition Security, where the production of traditional food crops and niche Agricultural and Fisheries products should be promoted to enhance Government's overall Efforts to effectively deal with the detrimental and harmful Impact of Climate Change and at the same time preserve and protect our pristine Environment. The Accreditation of Rotuma's Organic Status and corresponding discussions on Rotuma's Organic Certification began in earnest around fourteen years ago.

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to declare my personal interest and share with you my initial experience when I was a Community Worker and Adviser to the Council of Rotuma, and became very unpopular following my advice and efforts to ban the use of Weedicides in Rotuma during Subsistence Farming on the Island.

In fact, I was part of this Organic Initiative Programme and today, I am so happy and equally grateful to all of you for your individual and collective efforts in formalising Rotuma's new status as an Organic Source of Agricultural and Marine products.

Rotuma's geographical isolation from Fiji and the world, puts it at an advantage from being infested with most of the invasive and harmful bugs, insects and diseases that could seriously damage and ruin the island's potential and capacity to produce more, thus enhancing the Community's ability to be self-sustaining and at the same time improve Food Security and contribute positively to the National Economy.

Its pristine land and marine environments, its rich/fertile Volcanic soil, lush vegetational growth and unpolluted biodiversity together with a resource rich marine ecosystem creates a perfect natural setting for the island's initiative and drive to be successful in its bid to be formally declared and confirmed as an Organic source of all Natural Produce.

Introducing Organic Certification to the Council of Rotuma and the People of Rotuma was a major paradigm shift in the manner in which the present generation of Rotumans will be compelled to properly utilise the land and the bountiful natural resources The Almighty has blessed the Island with. Present and Future generations of Rotumans will now have to return to the traditional manner in which our Forefathers used the land without the use of Fertilisers or Weedicides and fish and protect the reefs and surrounding seas.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is so heartening and gratifying indeed to be involved and witness this "New Norm" of Land and Marine Utilisation which is in conformity and aligned to one of the iTaukei Trust

Fund Board's mandate, "The Promotion and Implementation of Initiatives to improve the livelihoods of iTaukei and Rotumans."

Today, it makes it even more meaningful, delightful and indeed a proud moment for all Rotumans, for us to come together to launch this Organic Journey. Thank you for your support during this morning's launch which is testament of the on-going struggle and efforts of all Stakeholders involved in the final realization of this long-held aspiration and goal.

The Organic effort to declare Rotuma as a Organic Island is the result of a joint Effort and collaboration between the Council of Rotuma, the iTaukei Trust Fund Board, the Ministry of Agriculture, Matanataki and the Pacific Community (SPC). The Council of Rotuma endorsed a proposal to ban the use of chemicals on island farms in 2011 which became effective in early 2012.

In August 2020, an iTaukei Trust Fund Board team visited Rotuma to assess the island's potential for economic opportunities and after thorough consultations, one of the conclusions drawn was to relook at Rotuma's Organic Accreditation Potential. The outcomes of which became the End Result of the Collective Invaluable Effort of All Stakeholders resulting in the Final Outcome – The Launch of Rotuma's Organic Certification Today.

I have been reliably informed that the latest journey to Rotuma by Officials has been worthwhile as forty (40) participants including chiefs and growers from Rotuma's seven districts, both men, women and youths, attended the first series of training on organic farming.

Another important objective on certification of land lots around the island is to gradually expand the Programme to allow development stakeholders to properly manage waste in compliance with organic standards towards the island's Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) Certification is achieved. At this juncture, I would also wish to personally congratulate the nine (9) farmers whose samples met the Organic Land Certification Standards and qualified them for Organic Registration. This achievement in July this year has led to the island's broader achievement, which was the official certification of the brand "Organic Rotuma". Rotuma is now in a position to sustainably produce and manage agricultural produce for the global export market.

These include produces like kava, coconuts and organic seedlings. Of these three, organic seedlings due to their compact size offers significant freight cost advantages for export. The intention now is to train farmers who are keen to pursue the organic certification procedures of pollinated seed production.

The iTaukei Trust Fund Board, with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Pacific Community (SPC) and Matanataki intends to pilot a project on the establishment of an organic seedlings' nursery for commercial purposes. Seedlings also assist in food security rehabilitation efforts after natural disasters. This is an exciting next chapter for Rotuma's organic journey, due to the expected wide range benefits the seedlings production will bring to the People of Rotuma.

Ladies and gentlemen, Organic agriculture provides a host of benefits, including healthier fresh produce, protection of our biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaption, food and nutritional security, the prevention of land degradation and the creation of employment opportunities. Moving

forward, more discussions with the Council of Rotuma is expected in the areas of identifying relevant organic produce to be explored that will include possible healthy value adding products.

To this effect, the iTaukei Trust Fund Board is looking at upskilling and capacity building initiatives, so that technically sound and capable people are identified to lead various projects to further progress Rotuma's "Organic journey."

Globally the Organic Movement is a special and unique Organisation which for obvious reasons, is very particular and selective in accepting New Members into its ranks and this latest development is indeed an apt and timely development in our Beloved Nation's ambition and long-term plans to boost and improve our National, Regional and International Economic Status by enabling us – and in this case Rotuma to tap and benefit from trappings of an untapped and lucrative niche market.

Ladies and gentlemen, The second Initiative being formalised today is the Launch of Rotuman book Rak La Faeag Rotuam, a publication which is superbly produced and authored by a retired School Teacher and a Self-taught and Qualified Rotuman Language educator, Mrs. Fauoro Titifanue who resides in our home island, but we are so fortunate that she is here with us today.

In 2012, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the Rotuman language to be as endangered. Therefore, it is my humble opinion that the publication and Launch of this special Rotuman Language Book/Guide for our Young generation who wish to learn and improve their knowledge/understanding – and be able to perfect their ability to converse in proper Rotuma, today's Event is historical, timely and apt.

Ladies and gentlemen, Today's Launch of The Book – "Rak La Faege Rotuam," is in line with the Ministry of education's Overall Teaching Programme to advocate for the promotion of our native languages which is key dovetailing well and a facet and Targetted Outcome of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board's Mandate.

"Rak La Faeag Rotuam"

The publication and today's launch of the book Rak La Faeag Rotuam, is testament to the perseverance and dedication of someone who is determined and passionate about sharing her vast experience and knowledge of the Rotuman language, someone who possesses an innate sense of pride for her mother-tongue, and more importantly a selfless Rotuman Elder who wishes to impart this immense gift to today's present and future generations of Rotumans.

Ladies and gentlemen as alluded to earlier this book is a culmination of years of hard work and anyone keen to learn Rotuman can easily do so now because it is designed for beginners regardless of one's age and it offers a simple easy-to-follow approach about learning the Rotuman language - its words and pronunciations are complemented with visual and colourful illustrations to guide the learner.

Mrs. Titifanue taught Rotuman language studies as a hobby, a favourite pastime activity and her love and passion for the language saw her effectively teach three Peace Corp Volunteers to read and write the Rotuman language, whilst they were serving their mission in Fiji between 1994 to 1998. Mrs. Titifanue hopes that through her book "Rak La Faege Rotuam," another avenue would be made

available to people wanting to learn or further their Vernacular or the Rotuman language, here in Fiji and around the world and be proud of their Rotuman heritage.

I have been reliably informed too that the book will also be available online via the iTaukei Trust Fund Board's website or via the Shop Online platform so I urge our brethren here in Fiji and the wide Rotuman diaspora communities around the globe wanting to learn and share their mother-tongue to invest in this worthy initiative.

I congratulate and acknowledge the collective invaluable assistance and contributions of all stakeholders involved in the Accreditation of Organic Rotuma and consider it befitting, apt and timely that I also congratulate Mrs. Fauoro Titifanue for her passion, untiring and selfless act in producing such a brilliantly researched and compiled Publication which should be a source of Inspiration and Knowledge to young Rotumans who wish to Learn and Know more about "their roots" and unique language.

In conclusion I would like to once again on behalf of my wife Sarote, The Chiefs and all your Rotuman Brethren here and back on the island express our Most Humble and Sincere Appreciation and Gratitude to each and everyone here present and humbly say: Vinaka Vakalevu, Dhanyavaad, Thank you and Faiaksea!

With Almighty God's continued Blessings, it gives me so much Pride and Pleasure to declare and officially launch the Accreditation of Organic Rotuma and the Publication, "Rak La Faeag Rotuam".

May Almighty God continue to Bless us all and our Beloved Nation - Fiji! Vinaka Vakalevu, Fai'aksea, and Thank you!

