

PROGRESSIVE REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PREPARATORY TALANOA SUBCOMMITTEE

Role of Preparatory Subcommittee

We, members of preparatory talanoa subcommittee, met on March 27th and April 2nd, 2003 to:

- (1) Identify ‘where we are’ and ‘where we are going’ with respect to the basic principles and priority issues as articulated in Talanoa IV (4th November, 2001) and Talanoa V (9th June 2002);
- (2) Examine the kind of national framework and time-frame within which such basic principles and priority issues can best be pursued and implemented; and
- (3) Assess how the talanoa process can help build mutual trust, confidence and understanding, and create a more favourable political environment.

These three areas were outlined in Dr. Halapua’s letter of 10 March to the Prime Minister, Hon Laisenia Qarase, and the Leader of Fiji Labour Party, Hon Mahendra Chaudhry. The spirit of our two days of *talanoa* is reflected in the following summary report and recommendations to be submitted to our respective Leaders:

1. Building on the Agreed Basic Principles and Priority Issues Outlined in Talanoa IV & V

We believe that we have achieved quite a lot in Talanoa IV and V. We see the urgent need to go forward and therefore express our strong desire that we should continue to keep the process of talanoa alive through the subcommittee no matter how far apart we are with respect to certain issues on our agenda. Our talanoa process can help us create an environment more conducive to understanding and cooperation

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within which to address the objectives of the priority issues needed to move the country forward.

We reaffirm the critical importance of the land and constitutional issues identified in Talanoa IV and V for moving the country forward. On the issue of land, for example, we need to know where we are and where we are going with particular reference to paragraph two of Talanoa V, which states:

‘All welcomed significant changes in the position of NLTB on terms and conditions, disclosed by the Prime Minister—that it will support longer lease terms and a percentage basis for lease rentals with a higher rate to be assessed on the basis of unimproved capital value (UCV). The NLTB has also asked the government to consider premium payments on lease renewals, and the government will explore this’ (see **TALANOA V, LEADERS STATEMENT ON THE PATHWAY FORWARD FOR FIJI**, 9 June 2002, p.2).

Where are we now on this? On what basis are leases extended? Has the NLTB resolved this already? We need to know exactly which leases will not be extended. We need to ask people who are actually involved and particularly someone from NLTB to share with this subcommittee what is actually happening so we are quite clear what the situation is as it all tied up with ALTA. Therefore, we recommend that the NLTB be invited to address the next meeting of this subcommittee so that we are better informed about the current situation with respect to the issue of land.

We understand that the question of multi-party Cabinet is to be left to the Supreme Court decision come June. However, it is important to note that some of the critical issues relating to land and constitution will remain to be addressed irrespective of the outcome of the Supreme Court case. The basic question is always how we move forward from where we are today. In light of this critical situation we believe that we should begin to talk now and to explore, through the talanoa process, some mutual

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understanding and potential arrangement for what we can possibly do together with respect to the two scenarios. This is in order to address the critical issues that cut across political realities and political strategic positions in the periods leading up to and after the Supreme Court case. These are issues which our political leadership and country as a whole will continue to face. We all want to move forward. The whole country wants to move forward too.

2. National Framework and Timeframe

How can we progress from here? Is there a third way for compromise and accommodation? We have circled around this question and we need to explore options to avoid another crisis. The answer to this question can be sought from the agreed principles that underpin the Talanoa IV and V Statements. The preambles of the leaders' agreed statements 'on harmony and stability in the rebuilding of Fiji' (see Talanoa IV, 4th November 2001) and 'on the pathway forward for Fiji' (see Talanoa V, 9th June 2002) speak eloquently of the continued and urgent need for a sustained and informal Talanoa process in order to 'promote national unity, harmony, and stability, and improve the livelihood of our people through a process of conciliatory dialogue and action' (see Talanoa IV) and 'to continue to deepen trust and confidence in each other and establish stronger political and policy frameworks needed for economic growth and social stability' (see Talanoa V) and 'to move the national reconciliation process forward' (see Talanoa IV).

In this connection this subcommittee recommends to the two Leaders to explore, through the main talanoa process, alternatives and the possibility of establishing a national vision, a national agenda, and the potential option of establishing a broad based national framework and clear timeframe of national unity and reconciliation for consensus-building. This is urgently needed to address the main issues, such as the land and constitution, stated in Talanoa IV and V, in the (re)construction of the

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pathway forward for Fiji. A national framework would provide the background for our moral, political, and economic judgement that a certain national agenda and vision is truly worthwhile and would promote national unity, reconciliation, harmony and stability for our people both in the short term as well as in the medium term.

3. Building trust, confidence and understanding, and creating a more favourable political environment

Since Talanoa V we have been unable to continue in the spirit reflected in the communiqué. This should be a subject of discussion. Talanoa I, II, and III may appear not to have achieved much, but in fact this is not true as they have modified the views of some of the key players. The results cannot be measured in tangible terms.

We need to go forward and be quite sure about how to take the Talanoa Statements IV and V forward. The key question is this: how can we advance the national vision and objectives of the Talanoa IV and V statements that our Leaders made? We recommend that our two Leaders resume their one-to-one dialogue in order to continue to build mutual trust, confidence and understanding and thereby create a more favourable political environment for moving the country forward. However, the talanoa process can only work and produce useful outcomes if there is truly a desire for this from the Leaders.

We are grateful to our two Leaders for their trust and confidence in appointing us as their representatives on this subcommittee and for expressing their wish for us to continue to examine and make recommendations on the three main areas stated at the beginning of our progressive report. In this regard, we have agreed that the next meeting of this subcommittee be held on 25th April, 2003, from 2:00 to 4:30 pm.