

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

REPUBLIC OF FIJI

59 - 63 High Street, Toorak, Suva. P. O. Box 2528, Government Buildings, Suva.
Phone: +679 331 0255 Fax: +679 331 9513 Website: www.feo.org.fj

22/05/2017

STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

Statement by the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission

Mr Suresh Chandra

Launch of the 2017 Secondary School Voter Registration Drive

9:00am, 22 May, 2017

Natabua High School, Lautoka

The School Principal, Master Virendra Sharma,

My fellow Electoral Commissioners – Ms Kavita Raniga and Mr Jay Lal,

Supervisor of Elections,

Teaching team of Natabua College,

And today's guests of Honor, the students.

First and foremost, a big Bula Vinaka to you all. It is good to see you this morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my Commission was appointed in February this year by His Excellency the President on the advice of the Constitution Officers Commission. It is made up of 6 Commissioners and I as the Chairperson. The Supervisor of Elections is Secretary to the Electoral Commission.

As chairperson of the Electoral Commission, I am personally very excited to be here this morning to meet all of you. It is the Commission's view that the most important step in the electoral process is the registration of a voter.

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The electoral process is **for** the voter. The voter is our **number one** stakeholder.

Since 2014, the Fijian Elections Office has been continuously updating the National Register of Voters. The Secondary School Voter Registration Drive is an ideal program to capture newly eligible voters before, they leave to pursue higher education or a career of choice.

Fiji has a high number of young voters. I am sure that after today's registration exercise, many of you will be joining your parents, relatives and older friends as a citizen with responsibility.

Yes ladies and Gentlemen! Responsibility.

It will now become your responsibility to ensure that once you are registered, you must go and vote. I am aware that the VoterCard has several other uses. Every time I look at my VoterCard, I feel a weight on my shoulders – it tells me that my vote decides how my country is governed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, congratulations, this is a very important realization – Today is your initiation into being a citizen of the country.

I am sure that you have already seen and in the months to come, you will come across numerous election-related advertising, news, discussions, social media posts and many other publications. This can sometimes be overwhelming, when you suddenly realize that this information is 'meant for you'. It is supposed to allow you to make a 'choice'

This conversation today is very important because the 2013 Constitution guarantees every Fijian the fundamental right to vote.

For the first time in Fiji there is an electoral system:

1. which for the first time allows 18 year olds to participate as voters.
2. which is no longer based on ethnicity,
3. which provides a free and fair platform for open competition without any geographic boundaries. This create opportunities for candidates to benefit from

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a nationwide reach and get support from voters around the country who may have similar political ideologies.

4. which guarantees one person, one vote, one value.

In 2014, a 50 member parliament was elected based on this system and saw 84.6% of registered voters turn up to vote. Since voting in Fiji is voluntary, this is an impressive turnout. Another impressive outcome was the 99.24% valid votes. The statistics show that the new voting system is easy to use.

The Electoral Commission has dedicated a very fitting theme for all the work that we will be doing towards the 2018 General Election – ‘Raising the Standards in the Delivery of Elections in Fiji’

From initial observations so far, the Fijian Elections Office has achieved significant milestones in terms of enhancing voter comfort and access.

The Fiji National Polling Venues Directories have immensely simplified the work of Political Parties and other stakeholders. I am told that this mapping facility has now been integrated into the Voter Registration System so you can actually see polling places around your area of residence and choose the ones more convenient to you.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Ministry of Education for facilitating our request to conduct this important exercise. I would also like to thank the School Principal, Master Virendra Sharma, and his administration for organizing this morning’s event.

It is my great pleasure this morning to officially launch the 2017 School Voter Registration Drive in the West.

Vinaka Vakalevu.

-Ends-

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Photos:



Photo caption: The Electoral Commission Chairperson, Mr. Suresh Chandra (far left) and Electoral Commissioner, Mr. Jay Lal, with a newly registered student.

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Photo caption: The Electoral Commissioners and Supervisor of Elections with the Seventh Form Students of Natabua High School.

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Photo caption: The Supervisor of Elections, Mr. Mohammed Saneem, Conducts an Information Session Targeted for First Time Voters.

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Photo caption: Students assisted by Election Officials as they view the National Register of Voters.



Photo caption: Students of Natabua High School.