

PROUD TO BE A MELANESIAN



REPORT ON THE 150th COMMEMORATION OF THE ARRIVAL OF MELANESIAN LABOURERS 1864 - 2014



**FRIDAY 07 – SUNDAY 09 NOVEMBER, 2014,
NASAU PARK, LEVUKA OVALAU, FIJI ISLANDS**

Submitted by

Mr. Pateresio Nunu

(SECRETARIAT OF THE FIJI MELANESIAN COUNCIL)

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1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The 150 Commemoration of the arrival of the Melanesian Laborers to Fiji held in Levuka on Friday 07 to Sunday 09 November, 2014 was very emotional, inspiring and an eye opening to many Melanesian Laborers descendants that were present during the 3 days at Nasau Park in Ovalau. The event begins with a re-enactment of the arrival of the 35 Laborers believed to be from Vanuatu and a march from the landing site on the forefront beside the monument of the war veterans from the Levuka Hospital point where they were sold to white planters from all around Fiji.

Thirty five (35) descendants wore traditional costumes worn by their ancestors when they arrived. The march stopped in the middle of the town opposite the Catholic Church where 35 Balabala trunks was planted symbolizing the 35 laborers.

The event was attended by descendants of Melanesian Labourers from all over Fiji and including the Solomon High Commission; His Excellency Mr. Patteson Otti who accompanied the descendants from the landing site.

At the Nasau park waited the delegation from Vanuatu led by the Minister for Lands Honorable Ralph Regenvanu, Chiefs from Ovalau and Moturiki and some elders who are also descendants of Melanesians.

The event was opened by the Assistant Minister of Education, Heritage and Art, the Honorable Vijay Nath who was the Chief Guest accompanied by the Director Culture and Heritage Mr. Peni Cavuilagi and government Official including the PA Lomaiviti and the Roko Tui Ovalau.

There was high expectation by the descendants and the chiefs of Ovalau for the Prime Minister to be the chief guest; but this did not dampen the spirit of the descendants and the chiefs to accept the Assistance Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts with a full iTaukei traditional protocol as the chief guest is also a descendant of indentured laborers from India.

The event was organized by the Fiji Melanesian Community Development Association and the Levuka Town Council and descendants of Melanesians in Levuka Ovalau.

The cost of the 3 days eve was around \$31,000.00 through the support of various donor agencies such as the Prime Minister's Office, Department of Culture and Heritage, the Chinese Embassy, The Solomon High Commission Office and Mrs. Lesley Bryant from the Queensland South Seas Islanders in Australia.

BREAKDOWN OF FUNDS DONATED BY DONORS

FUNDING AGENCY	AMOUNT DONATED	ACTIVITIES COVERED UNDER THE FUND	SERVICE PROVIDER	COMMENETS

Prime Minister's Office	\$10,000.00	The funding covers Accommodation, Ground, Shed, Food/Meals for 3 days in Levuka	Lomaiviti, Methodist and Levuka Town Council	Receipt for payments is attached and Cheque for payments is directed to service provider as per funding proposal
Lesley Bryant	\$8,000.00	Funding Covers transportation of 60 descendants from Viti Levu to Levuka Suva/Levuka/Suva and Food and Transportation within Ovalau for the 3 days	Patterson Shipping and Levuka Town Council	Cheque is paid directly to Patterson Shipping for transportation, while other funds for food and transportation within Ovalau is managed by Levuka Town Council
Chinese Embassy	\$5,000.00	The funding covers transportation 118 descendants from Viti Levu @\$60 per head Suva/Levuka/Suva and 15 from Vanua Levu at \$100.00 per head Vanua Levu/Levuka/Vanua Levu total of 133 passengers/ descendants	Patterson Shipping	Cheque Directed Patterson Shipping
Department of Culture and Heritage	\$3,600.00	The funding covers transportation of 60 descendants @ \$60 per head	Patterson Shipping	Cheque is directed to Patterson Shipping as per funding

			from Viti Levu Suva/Levuka/Suva		proposal
Solomon High Commission	\$3,600.00		The funding covers transportation of 60 Descendants from Viti Levu Suva/Levuka/Suva	Patterson Shipping	Cheque directed to Patterson Shipping
TOTAL	\$30,200.00				

MELANESIANS SETTLEMENTS REPRESENTED IN THE EVENT

<u>No</u>	<u>SETTLEMENT</u>	<u>NUMBER OF PEOPLE</u>
1	WAILOKU	65
2	TAMAVUAIWAI	20
3	MATATA	15
4	NAIKOTOKOTO MATATA	5
5	KALEKANA	15
6	WAI DRADRA	10
7	NADRALA NADROGA	5
8	LAUTOKA/NAVUTU	5
9	MANIAVA	5
10	WAINUNU BUA	5
11	NAVIAVIA WAILEVU	5
12	MALAITA SAVUSAVU	10
13	MANIKOSO	5
14	VILLAVOU	5
15	NADAWA	10

16	NEWTOWN	60
17	CAUBATI	40
18	TACIRUA	15
19	NAMARA	5
TOTAL	19	300

Five Buses were loaded with descendants from the 19 settlements from Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Descendants were accommodated at the Eli Peceli Hall, some were billed at Baba Settlements, some at Kalaba, some at Wailailai and some at the St. James Primary School.

2. SUMMARY OF THE EVENTS

Day 1: Friday 07th November, 2014.

The programme in day 1 started with a reenactment in the foreshore where the ancestors were dropped off before they were sold to white planters. Followed by a March to Nasau Park and a full traditional protocols accorded to the Chief Guest and invited guest.

The Chief Guest in his opening address encourages descendants to remembers the past and at the same times strive for their betterment in the future. The chief guest also encourages descendants to take advantage of the provisions in the Constitution and at the same time the different programmes provided by the government like the free tuition fees and scholarship and other programmes that will benefit them personally and also as a group.

The speech was followed by a reflection of the past by Mrs. Selina Sangar who through her reflection highlighted the hardship Melanesians faced during they stay in Fiji and at the same time conclude that although they have been pushed from one identity to the other they are proud of the origins, history and identity and see themselves as Kai Solomone, Kai Vanuatu, Kai PNG and also a Kai Viti. Mrs. Selina also thank the Bainimarama government for understanding the plight of the Melanesian Community and that after 150 year their existence that have now been recognized as Fijians.

A traditional presentation was done by the delegation from Vanuatu, thanking the chiefs in Fiji and the government for accepting the Melanesian laborers and their descendants in Fiji. Presentation was also made to representatives from the Vanuatu and Solomon community in Fiji.

After the Official opening guests and descendants were entertained by traditional mekes/dance from Melanesian descendants and later a "Taralala" in the ground by the women of Melanesian descents.

Day 2: Saturday 08th November, 2014

On Saturday November 8, 2014, the day opened with some story from some Elders who are direct descendants and some 2nd generation descendants with some entertainment by young people at Baba, Suva and Wailailai who graces the crowd with their talents.

At midday the Fiji Melanesian Association held their 25th Annual General Meeting at the Eli Peceli Hall. The AGM was concluded with a new name endorsed by the AGM which is the Fiji Melanesian Council to replace the Fiji Melanesian Community Development Association. The new name also comes with a new structure where all tribes are empowered to select their representatives to the Council. Compared to the old structure where the President, Secretary, Treasurer and other Committees are dominated by descendants of Solomon Islanders and especially those from Malaita.

The new council was able to have representatives from various tribes in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and PNG. The new chairperson of the Council is Mr. Joe Sanegar who is from the Solomon Island descent and the Deputy chair is a Vanuatu descent who is Miss Lusiane Abong. Allocation by tribes was based on the number of population in Fiji.

These are the names of the members of the Fiji Melanesian Council elected on Saturday 08th of November, 2014.

PNG/BUKA DESCENDANTS

1. Buka Tribe
 - a. Jack Koi – New Town Suva
 - b. Richard Koi – Ovalau

TOTAL: 2

VANUATU DESCENDANTS

1. Malekula Tribe
 - a. Agnes Abong – Caqiri – Suva
2. Pantecost Tribe
 - a. Lorosio Waqa – Ovalau
3. Ambae Tribe
 - a. Antonio Tiko – Ovalau
 - b. Eileen Moli – Suva
4. Sadro Tribe
 - a. Eparama Siga – New Town Suva
 - b. Tomu Nawako – New Town Suva

5. Merelavo Tribe
 - a. Jone Sade – New Town Suva
6. Mota Lava
 - a. Akanisi Bole – New Town Suva
7. Maevo Tribe
 - a. Michale Malo – Manikoso Nasinu Suva
8. Ambarim Tribe
 - a. Gasio Rokoduru – Levuka Ovalau

TOTAL: 10

SOLOMONI DESCENDANTS

1. Marata Tribe:
 - a. Tome Anikisuna – Wailoku
 - b. Jale Tora – Caubati - Nasinu
 - c. Are Maori – Matata Lami
2. Bali Tribe
 - a. Jimi Rido – Vanua Levu
 - b. Jimi Tawai – Ovalau
 - c. Aminiasi Abariga – Wailoku Suva
3. Wai Tribe
 - a. Tomasi Aloï – Wailoku Suva
 - b. Are Marika – Cagilaba Navua
 - c. Selai Murray – Ovalau
4. Kalekana
 - a. Jale Suvadi – Lami Suva
 - b. Jone Kalakai – Natakea Bua
5. Vataleka Tribe
 - a. Demesi Kedei- Suva
 - b. Inoke Silolo – Ovalau
 - c. Jotame Ratuloa – Vanua Levu
6. Kwaio Tribe
 - a. Joseva Lasea – Wailoku Suva

- b. Kiti Lasea - Wailoku
- c. Akuila Cama - Lami

TOTAL: 17

The total number of the Council is 33 including the president of the Women and Youth wing. The members were also requested to nominate names of someone to head the Secretariat of the new Fiji Melanesian Council, the only name that was anonymously elected is Mr. Pateresio Nunu. Therefore, Mr. Pateresio Nunu was anonymously elected to head the new formed Fiji Melanesian Council Secretariat.

Day 3: Sunday 09th November, 2014

On the 3rd day Sunday 09 November, 2014, descendants were given the freedom to attend their individual denomination at the various churches in Levuka in the morning. Some attended the Anglican Church, some AOG, Catholic, Methodist, CMF, All Nations and New Methodist. At 1400hrs a combine church service was held at the Elipeceli Hall where all descendants gathered together for a thanksgiving service. All tribes presented their items and youths and young children thank God through their action songs. Fr. Jeke Abunio from the Anglican Church in Matata Lami delivered the sermon.

In the evening a farewell grog session was held at the Tui Levuka Community Hall before the descendants depart in the morning at 0400hrs to Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

Below are some photos taken right from Suva, waiting area at Natovi and in Levuka during the 3 days.

Photo Gallery



Thursday 06 November, 2014
Descendants boarding the Bus at Suva Bus Stand



Descendants at Natovi waiting for the Boat to Levuka Ovalau



Descendants in the bus at Natovi



Descendants at Natovi



Descendants at Natovi



Descendants at Natovi



Mr. Ravai from a local daily news agency with as descendants at Natovi



Solomon High Commissioner His Excellency Mr. John Patteson Otti and wife on the far

left is flanked by descendants at Natovi



Boat arrives from Nabouwalu



Descendants in the Boat Spirit of Harmony to Levuka



Descendants in the Boat Spirit of Harmony to Levuka



Descendants in the Boat Spirit of Harmony to Levuka



DAY 1 FRIDAY 07 November, 2014
Descendants at Elipeceli Hall one of the Accommodation and having breakfast.



Some descendants at Elipeceli Hall



Preparation for the reenactment



Preparation for the reenactment



Reenactment of 1864 at the same site



March through the ground at Nasau Park



Vakasobu to the Chief Guest by one of the descendants.



Sevusevu vaka Turaga to the Chief Guest and his delegation by one of the descendants.



Roko Tui Ovalau receiving the ivakasobu



Opening by the Chief Guest Honorable Vijay Nath. Assistant Minister for Education, Culture and Heritage.



Delegation from Vanuatu; President of the Great Council of Chief in Vanuatu in the middle and the Minister for Land Hon Ralph Regenvanu on the right with a chief from Fiji Ratu Timoci Vesikula.



H.E High Commissioner from Solomon Islands with his wife third from right flanked by descendants of Solomon Islands.



DAY 3- 09 NOVEMBER 2014



Melanesian Elder bowing his knees and pray Sunday Combine Service

church service at Elipeceli Hall



Various Tribes sing their hearts to the Lord



Youth Praise the Lord



Young children also praise the Lord through Action Songs



Young girl and the father singing out to the Lord a Solomon pidgin English



Sunday night during the farewell grog session with Ratu Jope the Tui Levuka

Sunday night during farewell grog session at the Tui Levuka Community Hall.

3. CHALLENGES

The 3 days was done according to the programme prepared by the Melanesian Association but changes were made when need arises. However, there are some challenges faced during the 3 days.

- a) One of the major challenges was the weather –The rain begins to fall since the first day the descendants arrived in Ovalau. However, this did not dampen the spirit of the descendants to continue with the programme until the 3rd Day.
- b) Lack of proper communication and Fijian protocol followed by organizers in Levuka
- c) Lack of preparation by descendants of Melanesians around Fiji
- d) Lack of support by the main line churches where they all turned down request for a combine service on Sunday.
- e) Lack of funds to cater for other cost within the 3 days.

4. ACHIEVEMENT AND OUTCOME

The objective of the meeting was achieved during the 3 days, this includes:

- 1) The commemoration event was successfully implimented as all programmes for the 3 days was done as expected with the following achievements.
 - a) The 400 descendants expected to attend the Commemoration from Viti Levu and Vanua Levu was able to attend the event through the financial assistance provided by the following agencies and individual for transportation of descendants to Levuka.
 - The Department of Culture and Heritage
 - The Chinese Embassy's Office
 - The Solomon High Commissions Office and
 - Lesley Bryant from the South Seas Islanders Association Queensland Australia.
 - b) The Food, Accommodation and cost of facilities, and transportation within Ovalau are funded by Lesley Bryant and the Prime Minister's Office.
- 2) Descendants were able to reconnect with their relatives locally and abroad. This was seen in the family reunion done during the 3 days and also plans were made for re-unions in Suva by some tribes and clans.

- 3) Reconnecting of descendants to their roots or original islands in the revival of their tradition, culture and languages.
- 4) Empowerment of descendants to be proud of their identity as Descendants of Melanesian Laborers and at the same as Fijians.
- 5) Empowerment of descendants to be proud of their history and contribution to Fiji.
- 6) Re-enforcing commitment to be good citizens of Fiji and continue with their contributions economically, socially and culturally to the Fiji Islands.
- 7) Embracing of change in Fiji through the new direction set by the current government
- 8) Embracing change in transiting from the Fiji Melanesian Community Development Association to the Fiji Melanesian Council.
- 9) The AGM was successfully conducted and a new name and structure was adopted and passed during the AGM
- 10) A new chair and deputy with 30 members of the Council was elected based on the new structure.

5. CONCLUSION & WAY FORWARD

The event concluded on a high note and after the 3 days; plans have been made by the descendants to meet in various locations in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

Below are some way forward for the descendants of Melanesian in the years to come.

- 1) The Fiji Melanesian Council (FMC) should maintain the new structure and strengthened the FMC through fair representation from all Tribes.
- 2) The FMC to strengthen its financial mechanism through the contribution from their members of tribes rather than relying more on the government and donour agencies.
- 3) The FMC to request Government through the Prime Minister's Office for funding assistance or grant for Melanesian Vasu iTaukei to be directed to the Fiji Melanesian Council for the establishment of the Secretariat Office for the first 4 years.
- 4) The FMC to request government through the PM's Office for recognition of the FMC that has a mandate to represent the Melanesian People of Fiji
- 5) The FMC to request government for a recognition day of the arrival of indentured laborers from the Pacific Islands and India

- 6) That the future Commemoration Event should be extended and inclusive of other Pacific Islands of origin and Indians

- 7) That the Government through the Department of Culture and Heritage should take responsibility in the revival of Culture, Tradition and Languages of Melanesians descendants in Fiji.