

**Address by the Chief Justice
Mr. Justice Anthony Gates
at the Groundbreaking Ceremony
for the New Lautoka High Court Complex, Lautoka
on Thursday 11th September 2014 at 10.30am**

Hon. Judges and Master
Chief Registrar
Resident Magistrates
Na Turaga Taukei Vidilo
Representatives from the Commissioner Western's Office
Mr. City Administrator
Mr. Town Clerk
Members of the Bar
Mr. Director of Buildings and Government Architect – Mr. Tevita Vosaicake
The Project Architect Mr. Ulaiasi Baivatu of Clearview Architects
Members of the Consultants Team
Deputy Registrar
Heads of Section Judicial Department and Staff of Judicial Department
Ladies and Gentlemen

Ni sa yadra, Namaste, Noa'ia e mauri, Good morning to you all!

This short ceremony marks the commencement of a very significant project for the Government, for the Western Division, and specially for the Judicial Department. It marks the commencement of the building works for the New Lautoka High Court Complex.

First may I thank you for making the effort to attend this morning either travelling to Lautoka specially or by simply breaking off from whatever you were doing. Plans and arrangements for today were put into gear at short notice. Knowing that everyone will be either elated or disappointed after the Elections and focussing on other things, we decided to complete this ceremonial

event so that other steps and proceedings in the building process could then proceed without delay.

Please forgive us if we have missed out on some aspect of “Building folklore or rites” at this stage. We also know of some persons who should have been invited but who were accidentally omitted from the list.

The users of the existing High Court Building at Lautoka have known for many years of its inadequacy for the amount of business to be undertaken at that premises. The enhancement of facilities proved a stumbling block. It was a massive project for Fiji. It is likely to cost around F\$35 million. So far it is destined to be an infrastructure improvement to be borne by Government alone.

If the Western Division is to develop economically, financially and in its institutions and services, the justice system within the division must be able to respond to society’s needs. There must be Judges and Magistrates, court staff, court facilities and modern equipment for dealing with litigants’ disputes. The facilities must provide both for mediation and for conventional courtroom trials. The essential jurisdictions of the Court of Appeal, High Court, Magistrates’ Court, and various Tribunals must be there. The High Court facilities must provide for all of the High Court Divisions – Family Court, Tax, Employment Relations, Civil, and Criminal.

As most of us who have practised at the Bar at the Lautoka High Court will know, as also the Judges and Master, the facilities provided whilst meagre for the 1970s when built, are totally inadequate today. The immediate need therefore is for courts and facilities to provide for 4 Civil Division Judges and a Master, and for 2 Criminal Division Judges.

Shortly hereafter when the building works commence, a series of deep piles will be drilled. The 5 storey building will sit on those piles which will descend into the earth to the same depth as the height of the building. This will connect to the basalt level below and anchor the building. This foundation design no doubt arose as a result of the information gleaned from the geo-tech survey conducted. I felt I had to make a brief explanation of this feature, that is the deep piles, for I realise some will only have skimmed their eyes over the Press Release. They may have thought that reference had been made to a medical condition sometimes suffered by persons following an over-sedentary occupation such as that of a judge who must remain seated on the bench for excessive hours. I am happy to confirm that that was not the subject matter intended. I move on.

The building will have provision for 18 courtrooms in all. It has 7 levels. Whilst not exactly the Birla Khalifa of Lautoka, the building will be one of the taller buildings in Lautoka City. Indeed the tallest for a while.

Amongst its facilities will be:

- adequate provisions for filing, records, and archives
- separated cells for men, women and juveniles
- cafeteria with kitchens
- a gymnasium
- a media room
- a sick bay
- a crèche
- under-cover parking
- a Legal Practitioners Common Room

- interview Rooms
- standby generator
- water storage tanks
- solar water heating
- audio and video recording in all courtrooms
- lifts to all floors
- a Juvenile Court
- a Tax Court
- Family Courts
- Employment Relations Court
- various registries, chambers, and secretaries rooms.

These are some only of the features of the Building. I believe the Judges, members of the Bar, Stakeholders, and members of the public will find this building will provide the modern facilities they require when pursuing their litigation and court processes.

It is probably of little consequence now to ask why nothing was done about such a project earlier. Suffice to say we are now on the road, and we can all look forward to the better building.

We know in Fiji that it was customary when commencing the foundations of a chiefly bure or the launching of a ship, to sacrifice a warrior. It appears this had origins in other parts of the world too. The living victim elsewhere was selected as “a sacrifice to the Gods” and especially to ensure the stability of the building. It is sometimes said that mafia groups in Sicily disposed of unwanted rivals by setting them in concrete never to be seen again. In the 15th century in Ireland the wall of Holsworthy Church was built over a living human being. I

wonder what the priest had to say about that in his opening ceremony. What could have been the Christian Explanation for that poor man's sacrifice. But don't worry there is to be no concrete pouring today.

"Groundbreaking" which apparently is also known as cutting, sod-cutting, turning the first sod or a sod-turning ceremony is a traditional ceremony in many cultures. With the drought we are suffering in the West I did wonder whether our new spade would make much impression on the dry earth. Would I need help therefore to crack-a-sod? I understand a piece has been softened up specially for the purpose today.

I pay special tribute today to our Director of Buildings Mr. Vosaicake, our Architect Mr. Baivatu, and to Mr. Robin Palmer, our Suva Consultant. Thank you again for being present as witnesses.

I will now set to, as they say "to cut the sod."

A.H.C.T. Gates
Chief Justice