

**FIJI INSTITUTE OF ACCOUNTANTS
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP SERIES
INAUGURAL EVENT MONDAY, 4 MARCH 2019**

SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE HONOURABLE MINISTER
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The President of Fiji Institute of Accountants – Mr Zarin Khan;

The members of the Fiji Institute of Accountants;

Invited Guests;

Ladies and gentlemen,

- When I was asked to officiate at the **Women in Leadership** series, I immediately agreed because it's always a pleasure as a woman to celebrate the success of other women and to participate in a forum that discuss issues faced by women.
- So, I am delighted to be here in a room full of inspiring and aspiring fellow women, to launch the Women in Leadership series.
- Ladies and gentlemen, Gender issues such as pay parity, discrimination, and the sheer low number of women in boards and committees including parliament and as head of organisation are still debates that capture everyone's attention.
- But how do we turn the situation around to close this gap. And what can organisations do today to narrow the gap and encourage more women to take up leadership roles?
- Ladies and gentleman, as an organisation, the Fiji Institute of Accountants (FIA) has taken that step to launch Women in Leadership series with the aim to promote women in leadership roles. FIA will provide a platform for women to come together to listen, interact and share their experiences and journeys.

- However, what's important to note is, since the formation of the FIA, this is the first time FIA is celebrating women in leadership to promote and encourage young women to become leaders. I think they deserve a round of applause.
- I am told that in 1995, the FIA had a total of 424 financial members: 84% men and 16% women. By 2007, women accounted for 31%. And today ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to advise that the number has increased to 38%. This is a growth of approximately 1% per annum over the past 24 years. Slowly but surely women participation has increased which is why it is important to celebrate **Women in Leadership**.
- For this inaugural event, the week of 4-8 March 2019 was chosen deliberately so that it coincides with the International Women's Day, which is commemorated on Friday, 8 March.
- Many institutions would be organising their own events and the FIA has joined them with the launch of a milestone event **Women in Leadership** series. It is indeed a time for celebration for all women, and men, in the recognition of women in leadership roles.
- I note with pride the logo for this **Women in Leadership** series which outlines a strong woman reaching to touch the skies. Nothing should bar women from achieving their hopes and dreams. And significantly the use of colour purple - internationally recognised as the colour to symbolise women. Purple represents visionary thinking and achievements gained, as well as achievements to come.
- I personally believe we must celebrate the fact that there is realisation that there is gender disparity and every effort is being made by all stakeholders to promote women in leadership roles. And this is seen through various government policies, private sector initiatives, and civil society actions.

- Gender is a critical dimension to parliamentary scrutiny. Standing Orders 110 (2) stipulates that *“the Committee shall ensure full consideration is given to the principle of gender equality to ensure all matters are considered with regards to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally”*. The Parliamentary Standing Committee scrutinises annual reports for gender breakdown to encourage employers to narrow gender gap at workplace. Similarly, when bills are introduced, impact on gender is taken into consideration.
- Now let’s look at how Fiji is doing in promoting women in leadership roles in comparison to global statistics. According to 2018 annual Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) that tracks gender gaps and disparities around the world found that when it comes to political and economic leadership, the world still has a long way to go. So Fiji is not alone. Across the 149 countries assessed, there are just 17 that currently have women as heads of state, while, on average, just 18% of ministers and 23.6% of parliamentarians globally are women. Similarly, women hold just 34% of managerial positions across the countries where data is available.

Why is it urgent to support women in leadership?

- In Fiji, a total of 44 women (17%) and 205 men (83%) ran in the 2014 election. Women won 8 of the 50 seats in Parliament. That is 16 per cent of parliament were represented by women.
- In 2018 election a total of 56 (24%) women and 235 (76%) men stood for the election. For the first time women representation in parliament increased by 4% resulting in 20% women MPs. This is the best result achieved so far for women in leadership.
- Let’s look at women in leadership roles at Local Government as of today (2019). There are less than 15% (207 women out of 1366 employed) of women working for local government, with only one woman CEO. Certainly, there is room to narrow gender gap. Majority of the women provide support services and hold positions such as admin or clerical officer jobs. Also, there are less than 32% (20 women out of 62 senior mgt positions) hold senior management positions in the local government workforce.

- It still remains that women tend to work in industries that reflect traditional gender roles, specifically healthcare and social assistance, educational services, and food services. Even in female dominated industries, women tend to occupy lower-level jobs.
- Ladies and gentleman, we must not forget men who have supported us in our various journeys to leadership. I would like to thank the men present here today and I hope that this will encourage more men to join in so that there are synergies in increasing the number of women in leadership roles in Fiji.
- Later today, you will have time to network. I hope and encourage all of us present here today to make new contacts and leverage off each other and achieve greater heights. By listening, learning and interacting, we can all achieve so much more to better our positions in whatever field we choose.
- As I look around this room, I see many successful women who have much to share with the younger generation about their experiences and their journeys in their respective roles of leadership.
- Ladies” Life is a journey. The path we take, what we look back on, and what we look forward to is up to us. We determine our destination.”
- With those words, it now gives me great pleasure to officially launch FIAs first ever ***Women in Leadership*** series.
- I wish FIA and all of you the very best. A very happy International Women’s Day in advance!
- Thank you very much.

Fijian Government Policies to empower women

- In the 2018-2019 budget, \$2.5 million is allocated for the establishment of a Fiji “Barefoot College”. This is a joint initiative between Government and Barefoot College International to construct a vocational college targeted at rural-based women. Through this programme, Fijian women will undergo on-the-job training in specific technical skills required for sustainable rural development, fostering their independence and uplifting their communities.
- Fiji National Women’s Expo: supports women’s economic empowerment through the hosting of the National Women’s Expo. The Expo provides a platform for rural women to sell their produce and gain access to potential urban markets (\$500,000).