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**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

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**SPEECH AT THE RELEASE OF 2014 DROWNING REPORT**

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Cabinet Chambers  
GOVT. BLDGS

Fri. 13 March, 2015  
1030 Hours

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**The Directors of the Water Safety Council of Fiji,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**My fellow Fijians.**

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I can't think of a better moment to join you as we highlight the tragic incidence of drownings in Fiji, and especially those of our precious young people.

This morning, large areas of our country are feeling the impact of Cyclone Pam. And while we have been spared

the full force of a direct impact, parts of Fiji are experiencing high winds and driving rain.

Pam is being called a “*monster storm*”. And the amount of rainfall it is dumping even at its outer reaches is extremely high as these disturbances go.

So today of all days, I want - as your Prime Minister - to again highlight the extreme danger that flooding poses to every Fijian but especially the most vulnerable among us- our children.

I call on every Fijian today to be especially mindful of the risk. Parents and guardians: make sure you know where your children are. Make sure you keep them safe. Make sure you explain to them that even if a culvert or a creek looks safe, that can change in an instant.

Flash flooding is a terrible killer. And today is one of the most dangerous days for all Fijians.

We know from the Water Safety Council figures we are releasing this morning that 77 per cent of the total drownings in Fiji last year occurred during the cyclone season.

More than half of the 47 drowning victims last year were under the age of 25, with children aged between one and five years old accounting for 23 per cent of those drownings.

The loss of these most vulnerable and innocent children among us is a particular tragedy. We need to be a lot more vigilant. A lot more alert.

We cannot afford to let our guard down with our children for even a minute. We need to keep an eye on them at all times to avoid the loss of these young lives

and the terrible suffering it causes to their families and the whole community.

We also know from the figures that of the 47 drownings last year, 66 per cent of the victims lived in rural parts of Fiji. So we need to be particularly vigilant in those areas outside our cities and towns.

As the Water Safety Council of Fiji's slogan so aptly puts it: "*Drowning is Preventable*". With the right precautions, it needn't happen. And we can reduce the incidence of drownings if everyone is more vigilant.

There is no excuse for any child in Fiji not to be taught how to swim. So I urge all parents to equip their children with the skills they need to get out of trouble if they are ever unfortunate enough to find themselves in danger.

I will leave it to other speakers to elaborate on the latest findings. But I want to pay tribute to the Water Safety

Council of Fiji for its sterling work and also the members of the Fiji Police Force for their efforts to address this vital issue for the safety for every Fijian.

I'm delighted to be here this morning to help draw attention to the problem and on a day when it is even more important than usual.

As we ride out Cyclone Pam, may God protect Fiji and every Fijian and keep us safe. And may God protect the lives of every Pacific Islander in those countries unfortunate enough to be closer to the cyclone's path.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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