

## **Land Loan and Land Subdivision Loan Product Launch Event Speech**

Merchant Finance Pte Limited CEO, Mr. Veilawa Rereiwasaliwa

Merchant Finance Board of Directors

Honoured Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Bula Vinaka and a Good Afternoon to you all!

What a great honor it is to stand before you today as we launch Merchant Finance's two new products – the Land Loan and Land Subdivision Loan. Products that have been developed with the intention to positively impact lots supply, home ownership and property ownership. With Fiji's current housing crisis and lack of land parcels, such products are greatly welcomed.

This opportunity is one not to be missed – Land Loan and Land Subdivision Loan products are tools that can financially uplift Fijians. The two loan products can also contribute towards economic empowerment by laying the foundation of a pathway to homeownership, secure housing or even business expansion.

Many Fijians struggle with access to affordable housing, leading to the rise of informal settlements. With a product such as the Land Loan, this can enable individuals and families to purchase land, ensuring security of tenure. With landownership, people can access further financing to build homes resulting in the improvement of one's living condition.

Furthermore, Land is considered a valuable asset that appreciates over time and can serve as foundation for future investments. By leveraging land as a financial tool, individuals can create pathways to long-term economic stability and intergenerational wealth, decreasing long-term economic vulnerability. This is particularly significant when we consider that 75% of those living in poverty are iTaukei, making access to such financial products an economic opportunity for empowering indigenous Fijians.

As for the land subdivision loan product – it is a unique product that is not available anywhere else in the market, and specifically targets indigenous landowners. This product opens up doors for landowners to be able to properly plan and subdivide their land creating solid groundwork for improved infrastructure access, such as roads, electricity and drainage.

Subdividing of land also increases the supply of legal housing, helping to address housing shortages in Fiji and reducing the heavy reliance on informal settlements. With Land Subdivision Loan product, landowners can develop their land into smaller lots and either sell or lease it, creating new income streams for themselves and improving their balance sheet.

Additionally, Fiji is facing an increase supply of hard drugs, a crisis that disproportionately impacts the iTaukei community. Combating such problems require a holistic approach, one that includes economic empowerment as a fundamental solution.

By strengthening the financial resilience of indigenous communities, we create opportunities for long-term stability. These two products play an important role in this effort, enhancing landowner wealth, and ultimately lifting families out of poverty, thereby contributing to a more secure and empowered iTaukei population.

The development of the Land Loan and Land Subdivision Loan product also highlights Merchant Finance's efforts in complementing ongoing Government initiatives such as the development of State Land and the iTaukei Land Development Project – all of which are focused on improving the lives of Fijians.

The new land subdivision loan product also encourages partnership between the business community and the iTaukei where the Government interest subsidy will still apply as long as iTaukei ownership is at least 51%.

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm that these loan products are meant to empower people economically by turning land into a productive asset, supporting homeownership, supporting business growth and of course supporting financial inclusion. With proper financial solutions in place, these financial tools can help tackle Fiji's housing crisis and uplift communities from informal settlements into sustainable, secure living conditions.