



Sai Prema Foundation Fiji

**OFFICIAL LAUNCH
BY ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF FIJI
HON. AIYAZ SAYED-KHAIYUM**

19TH AUGUST 2016

ABOUT SAI PREMA FOUNDATION (FIJI)

Sai Prema Foundation Fiji is a Non Government Organisation (NGO) founded to serve the poor and needy people of Fiji through Medicare, Educare and Sociocare initiatives. This involves free heart surgeries for the children of Fiji, free medical camps in the rural villages, disaster relief, raising awareness on healthy lifestyles and human values, and the promotion of love, peace and unity.

The Sai Prema Foundation is inspired by Sri Sathya Sai Baba. His simple teachings of “Love All, Serve all, Help Ever, Hurt Never” is at the very core of our Foundation’s values. Sri Sathya Sai Baba has given humanity a blueprint of how to help the poor and needy through His monumental projects.

The foundation is made up of a **Board of Trustees** (*Mr. Mahendra Tappoo (Chairman), Mrs Maya Tappoo and Mr. Vikesh Chauhan*) **an International Advisory Board** (*Mr. Isaac Tigrett, Father Charles Ogada, Mr. Waisale Serevi, Mr. Arvind Thiagarajan, Mr. BN Narasimhamurthy, Mr. C Sreenivas and Mr. Sumeet Tappoo*), **an Executive Committee** and a number of **Official Members** consisting of a dynamic mixture of youth and adults to spearhead the projects in Fiji.

The Foundation was officially launched by the Acting Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum on 19th August 2016.

The Sai Prema Foundation Fiji projects include:

(1) HEALTH ON WHEELS - FREE MEDICAL CAMPS

As the name implies, Health on Wheels is about taking healthcare to those who are unable to access medical services because of their socio-economic situation. Many of us take for granted our relative ease at being able to go to a public health care facility or a private GP. However there are many less privileged in Fiji who are not able to enjoy this. Health on Wheels will help in that area of need. Sai Prema Foundation will take a well-equipped medical team and a Mobile Hospital into the rural areas where we set up camp and encourage the entire community to take advantage of the services available.

(2) GIFT OF LIFE - FREE HEART SURGERIES

One of Sai Prema Foundation’s biggest projects in 2016 has been the Gift of Life, free pediatric cardiac surgeries conducted by a specialist cardiac team from the Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital in Raipur, India. The team came at their cost and conducted free surgeries for children with congenital heart conditions. Our team was responsible for on site liaison and coordination between the Raipur team and the Ministry of Health who provided free operating theatres. Months of planning and coordination was required and finally 25 free surgeries were conducted in August worth in excess of 1.3 million dollars. The Ministry of Health revealed that about 200 children are born annually in Fiji that have congenital heart conditions and many of these require surgical intervention. The aim is now to have annual visits by the team and also train local surgeons in Raipur, thereby creating a paediatric cardiac unit in Fiji with the aim of becoming more self sufficient in the near future.

(3) SRI SATHYA SAI SANJEEVANI HOSPITAL FIJI **A FREE SUPER SPECIALTY HOSPITAL**

The Sai Prema Foundation Fiji aims to partner up with Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital (India) to establish a free Medical Centre (in the short-term) and a free Super Specialty Pediatric Cardiac Hospital (in the medium to long term) to serve Fiji's less privileged.

(4) SAI PREMA ASHRAM **A MULTI-FAITH SPIRITUAL CENTRE FOR LOVE & PEACE**

The foundation's socio-care mission is being fulfilled by our intention to construct a Multi-faith Spiritual Centre. This Centre, which will be open to all people from all faiths, cultures and social backgrounds, aims to promote Love, Peace and Unity in Fiji and the Pacific.

(5) SAI ANNAPOORNA - FREE FOOD FOR THE POOR

This program is a social service initiative to feed the poor and needy. The project has commenced with providing such families who are not able to meet their grocery needs. The aim is to provide nutritious food which will benefit poor or needy people to lead more productive lives in society.

(6) DISASTER RESPONSE - CYCLONE WINSTON

The Foundation also does its best to be responsive to the needs of Fiji's most vulnerable. When Cyclone Winston ravaged parts of Fiji in February 2016, members saw fit to mobilise and offer emergency assistance to the men, women and children in some of the hardest hit areas. Members tapped into their networks to help put together emergency relief packages. Teams were then dispatched to deliver these much-needed food rations. A few weeks later, with many more groups helping to feed those affected, the Foundation diverted its assistance to a school community deep in the interior of Rakiraki. The school and its students had lost everything.

For further information or if you wish to assist or volunteer, please visit our website: www.saipremafiji.com



Sai Prema Foundation International Advisory Board Chairman, Mr. Sumeet Tappoo, Sai Prema Foundation Fiji Chairman, Mr. Mahendra Tappoo, stand alongside Acting Prime Minister, Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, as he officially unveils the plaque to launch Sai Prema Foundation Fiji

SPEECH BY MR. MAHENDRA TAPPOO **CHAIRMAN, SAI PREMA FOUNDATION (FIJI)**

Our Chief Guest Acting Prime Minister, Attorney-General & Minister for Economy Mr Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum; Head surgeon of Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital Dr Ashish Katewa; Assistant Minister for Health Mrs Veena Bhatnagar; Government Ministers, distinguished guests ladies & gentleman,

Welcome! Thank you all for braving Suva's typical, wet August weather to join us in marking this auspicious occasion. Thank you for regarding this occasion to be worthy of your time and energy.

We are especially grateful to the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, for accepting our invitation to be among us tonight, especially as we all know how demanding your schedule is. We are extremely appreciative for acknowledging the Foundation's efforts with your presence.

Extraordinary things can happen when we come together in service of others – to serve with no expectations of getting something tangible in return except the satisfaction and peace of mind from doing good. This is what catalyzed us to form the Sai Prema Foundation (Fiji).

This is the philosophical bedrock that drew a group of like-minded people together. Many had largely been involved in volunteerism, and were moved to do even more.

Motivation was also plentiful from our Government. The course our Government has chartered for Fiji has been dedicated to advancing the livelihood of ALL its people. Despite Fiji's limited resources, this Government has in the last 10 years or so transformed the nation from one with almost no welfare payouts, to one that is increasingly on par with certain industrialised first world countries.

Today, our people enjoy free education, free text books, and a two-pronged scholarship approach that rewards meritorious students, and students who may have not topped their grade but are capable of pursuing further education if it weren't for lack of money. Then there's also free medical care in the hospitals & health centres,



free medicine, and even subsidised electricity and water for our low-income earners. And the list goes on.

The Government must be commended for its outstanding achievements. Its achievements in lifting the living standards of ordinary Fijians and the marginalised are unprecedented in Fiji's history.

The Government must also be commended for bringing about unprecedented economic growth which has immensely benefitted all Fijians. It is our humble hope and prayer that our Foundation's projects will complement the Government's efforts, albeit in a small way.

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF SAI PREMA FOUNDATION

Ladies and gentleman, the Sai Prema Foundation's mission is guided by three key ideals:

- 1. To promote physical and mental well-being among the underprivileged, through social and medical initiatives.**
- 2. To raise people's understanding of human values, in a world that is increasingly challenged by a lack of humanity.**
- 3. To promote love, peace and unity among all Fijians, and promote better spiritual well-being.**

The Sai Prema Foundation is inspired by Sri Sathya Sai Baba. His simple teachings of "Love All, Serve all, Help Ever, Hurt Never" is at the very core of our Foundation's values. He has given humanity a blueprint of how to help the poor and needy through His monumental projects.

The first being the **World Class Super Specialty Hospitals** which has no billing department. The second, a **premier University** with four major campuses giving world class free education based on Human Values. The third, a **free water supply projects** giving free water to millions of people living in rural India. And not forgetting his global humanitarian efforts and presence in every country and continent.

The Sai Prema Foundation, which registered in March this year, has already delivered several initiatives. Today we officially launch two of its key initiatives. First is the Health on Wheels project. As the name implies, Health on Wheels is about taking healthcare to those who are unable to access medical services because of their socio-economic situation. Many of us take for granted our relative ease at being able to go to a public health care facility or a private GP. It must not be forgotten that there are many less privileged people among us – who largely through no fault of theirs – are not able to enjoy this.

Health on Wheels will help in that area of need. We take a well-equipped medical team into the rural areas where we set up camp and encourage the entire community to take advantage of the services available. So far, we have conducted two camps – one in Narere, and the second in Suvalailai Village in rural Nausori. This was possible with the help of the Ministry of Health and several medical professionals, all of whom volunteered their time to help the cause. The recipient communities, as you will see later in our video presentation, were very appreciative. More than 300 people took advantage of the medical camp. Many returned to their homes with a diagnosis of their medical condition and how to treat it, and the required medicine or correctional eye glasses. All left better informed about how to care for their health.

CYCLONE WINSTON

The Foundation also does its best to be responsive to the needs of Fiji's most vulnerable. So when Cyclone Winston ravaged parts of Fiji in February, members saw fit to mobilise and offer emergency assistance to the men, women and children in some of the hardest hit areas. Members tapped into their networks to help put together emergency relief packages. Teams were then dispatched to deliver these

much-needed food rations.

A few weeks later, with many more groups helping to feed those affected, the Foundation diverted its assistance to a school community deep in the interior of Rakiraki. The school and its students had lost everything. It is very true that in giving, we receive. The relief work reminded us that shared humanity binds us together. While the work took time and resources, it inspired the Foundation's members to aspire for even greater deeds. We have done so in this month of August.

GIFT OF LIFE - FREE CARDIAC SURGERIES

It has been an enormous blessing for Fiji to be able to have the assistance of one of India's best pediatric cardiac surgical teams. And, for the Foundation, it has been a privilege to play a pivotal role in making this happen. The cardiac team from India's Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital, led by Dr Asish Katewa, operated on 25 children with congenital heart problems. All of the surgeries were free of charge. **This was an immense saving for the families involved and for Fiji because such delicate operations are estimated to cost about \$55,000 per operation. That means families saved more than \$1.3 million dollars. The lives of these children and their families have been changed for the better.**

Much of this is due to the **brilliance of Dr Katewa. He is one of India's finest surgeons**, who has a record of having successfully and personally performed more than 2000 pediatric heart surgeries. Over the past ten days, he performed as many as four surgeries a day on some days. Some of the recipients were as young as three months old! **The generosity of Dr Katewa and his team from Sanjeevani Hospital does not end there as they have offered to help Fiji establish its own pediatric surgical unit. The hospital has offered to train a local team at its hospital in central India. In the meantime, it has committed to continue to send a specialist cardiac team every year until Fiji is able to conduct its own.**

The Sathya Sai Sanjeevani hospital also met the entire cost of the 11-member surgical team and sent half a container - load of consumables worth in excess of \$60,000 - which are the essential surgical items that are not available in Fiji. The Sai Prema Foundation is of course truly proud to be associated with the Sanjeevani Hospital. We are

deeply grateful to the hospital and its chairman, Mr Sreenivas, for extending such compassion to our small island nation.

GRATITUDE

Many more have contributed to the success of the Foundation's projects. We wish to thank you all most sincerely. We may not be able to list all of you, but know that we are sincerely grateful for your assistance. Special mention of course must be paid to Dr Katewa and his team, the volunteer doctors, nurses and other medical staff who have supported our health initiatives.

We also take this opportunity to **thank the Ports Authority of Fiji, the Fiji Islands Revenue and Customs Authority, the shipping agents** who helped, and the many others present here tonight to facilitate the timely clearance of the consumables on Saturday night and its delivery on Sunday so that urgent surgeries could start the next day as scheduled.

Special thanks to the team at CWM Hospital & the Ministry of Health, including the Health Minister Jone Usumate and the Assistant Minister for Health, Veena Bhatnagar, the head of pediatrics at the CWM hospital Dr Illisapeci Vereti, and the Principal Administrative Officer at CWM, Mr Bashir Ali. Without their support these cardiac surgeries just would not have happened.

We also want to thank the International Honourary Advisory Board members of our Foundation. They are:

1. Hard Rock Café founder Mr. Isaac Tigrett
2. Fiji's rugby legend Mr. Waisale Serevi
3. US-based scientist Mr. Arvind Thiagarajan
4. Catholic Priest and philanthropist based in Africa Father Charles Ogada
5. Chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital Trust Mr. C Sreenivas
6. Prominent Educationalist Mr. B N Narsimhamurthy
7. Professional singer Mr. Sumeet Tappoo, who is the advisory board Chairman.

Special thanks must be extended to Dr. Krupali Tappoo for co-ordinating the logistics between the hospital in India and our local hospital on behalf of our Foundation. Her extensive liaisons over the last eight months significantly contributed to the smooth undertakings. To my

co-trustee Vikesh Chauhan and all the extremely hardworking members of the Foundation who come from all walks of life and put their heart and soul into making this all happen, thank you so much.

THE FUTURE

The future holds much in store for our people when we all work to shape our destinies. There are a few more big plans afoot that the Foundation hopes to realise in the near future. Chief among these plans is the establishment of a free medical centre to serve our country's less privileged. This will be unraveled in due course.

In the medium term, the Sai Prema Foundation is planning to develop an International Centre for Love and Peace to promote harmony among the people of all faiths and cultures. Today though, **we celebrate our Health on Wheels project which will launch its first mobile medical clinic.** The mobile clinic is a specially-fabricated truck, which in due course will be stocked with all the essential medicines and equipment needed for the Health on Wheels medical camps. The mobile clinic will ease the delivery of medical treatment at the camps. And we celebrate the successful conclusion of the cardiac surgeries conducted by Dr Katewa and his specialist team from Sanjeevani Hospital.

It's an extremely memorable month, one that will easily be remembered by the nation because of Fiji's feat at the Rio Olympics. Perhaps it is fitting that the launch of the Foundation has coincided with Fiji's win of its first gold medal at the summer Olympics. The emphatic win by our 7s rugby gladiators is undoubtedly symbolic of the heights we can all reach. Their determination, discipline, hard work and humility have shown the world that near-impossible dreams can be achieved if the hearts and minds of the team are united.

It is a lesson that must be remembered by us all at all times if we are to take our communities forward. **Together we can try to make a difference. Together we can inspire change.**

The Sai Prema Foundation is dedicated to do just that, and we welcome all who have the same desire to join our efforts and help us work toward that common good. **God Bless Fiji.**

**SPEECH BY HON. AIYAZ SAYED-KHAIYUM
ACTING PRIME MINISTER, ATTORNEY
GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR ECONOMY,
PUBLIC ENTERPRISES, CIVIL SERVICE &
COMMUNICATIONS**

Bula Vinaka and a very good evening to you Ladies and Gentleman, The Assistant Minister for Health, the Trustees for Sai Prema Foundation, Dr Katewa and his team and to all invited guests.

It gives me much pleasure to be here this evening.

I was saying at another forum earlier this week that when you have very astute speakers speaking before you, you don't have to speak for too long. So I won't be long this evening as I know we have a number of things to inaugurate in this evening's function.

Ladies and Gentleman, let me just say that **healthcare and the provision of medical services is a very critical element of life.** Healthcare and access to health is a very emotional and personal issue. It's not just any other form of Government function that is being performed by some agency and nor is it just a ordinary matter of provision of taxi licenses. On the contrary, **Healthcare is very pivotal to the health and well-being of a country. Healthcare is very pivotal to one's own well-being.** When your loved ones are not well or can die as a result of a lack of healthcare, it causes great stress. It's emotionally demanding, psychologically demanding, and ofcourse, if healthcare is not affordable, then it is financially demanding too. Like I said earlier on, Healthcare is very pivotal to the health and well-being of a country. If you have a lot of sick people in your country, the level of productivity won't be good and both the individual, as a human being, and the country does not realise it's potential.

Unfortunately for Fiji, for many decades, healthcare and investment in healthcare was neglected. There was a lack of investment in the human capital. For example, we did not have our doctors sent overseas or trained to the level and capacity like our young visiting Surgeon Dr. Ashish Katewa who is here with us. This lack of investment in human capital has meant that we have the inability now or are in a position now where we need the assistance of people outside



of Fiji. Ofcourse the assistance is very much appreciated. **The 25 children you have performed the procedures on, obviously you have given them a new lease of life and you have given those families a renewed sense of hope and that is very very important for us. That is very much appreciated.**

Dr Katewa, I liked what you said that you want to help us build local capacity. I agree with you that Fiji needs to be able to stand on its own feet. This may not be achieved overnight and it may take us many years, but if we have that as an objective, then we will be able to provide lot better services to our people.

Also, as you rightly said, **Fiji can be the center for providing medical services to other Pacific Islanders** and we know that medical services in some of our neighbouring Pacific Island nations are far more rudimentary than ours. So it is very critical that we have those types of medical facilities.

Dr. Katewa, I would like to **thank you once again for your services, your dedication, your compassion and your passion for not only undertaking the surgeries but also offering to provide the services to our Doctors and to Fiji.**

Please put your hands together as Fijians and we must show our appreciation.

I would also like to say that we have recently given all our doctors a big pay rise, which they very much deserve. But the Government is not stopping there. We are also investing in these

Doctors and we will be investing in their Post Graduate studies and paying for this too. We obviously see that as a very important step for Fiji and we are also looking into many other areas that we will need to help facilitate and improve the services of including the actual infrastructure and facilities particularly in the rural areas.

I would like to acknowledge the Sai Prema Foundation for undertaking this initiative and bringing Dr. Katewa and his team to Fiji and looking at a much bigger picture and not just providing the Medical services but also looking into investing into the knowledge base of our Doctors.

I also want to thank the Sai Prema Foundation for its relief efforts during Cyclone Winston. Ladies and Gentleman, as we know, Cyclone Winston killed 44 Fijians and this is the largest death toll we have had from a natural disaster. It left a trail of devastation which was unprecedented. **We really appreciate Fijians coming together and organisations such as Sai Prema Foundation coming together to help the people in need.**

I am reminded of a saying of a former President of India and Nuclear Scientist, Dr APJ Kalam. He said that **“great men and women see religion as a means of making friends. Small men and women use religion as a weapon”**.

All religions are positive and all faiths are positive. They all preach about love, they all preach about compassion, they all preach about a sense of humanity and an identification with your fellow human being.

If we all focus on the positives, then the advocacy and **the work of organisations such as Sai Prema Foundation will help us realise that our strength is in our ability to get together as a human race and in our ability to get together as individuals.**

These individuals may be of different faiths, different ethnic groups, of different provinces or from different countries. But **what actually binds us is our sense of adhering to the true human values and principles of what our different faiths teach us and that is love, compassion and sharing our experiences as human beings.**



Acting Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum presents a token of gratitude to Dr. Ashish Katewa, Head Surgeon of Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital (India) on behalf of the Government of Fiji and Sai Prema Foundation Fiji



Acting Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Assistant Minister for Health, Hon. Veena Bhatnagar, Acting Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Health, Dr. Josefa Koroibueta, Head of Pediatrics Department CWM Hospital, Dr. Illisapeci Vereti, heads and members of Sai Prema Foundation Fiji and the Cardiac Team from the Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital, Raipur (India)

So I would like to thank the Sai Prema Foundation and we look forward to working together with you and I want to highlight and appreciate, as Mr. Mahendra Tappoo has said, that he wants to work together with the Government.

Yesterday, I had a meeting with a Minister from another country and we talked about foreign aid. We said that ultimately we want to be in a position where we do not want to always have handouts and we want to move away from this and be able to stand on our own two feet. Therefore we need to not just to build capacity but also to be able to ensure that we have longevity in terms of the resources we have in our country.

So it is very critical for Non-Governmental Organisations such as Sai Prema Foundation and any other such organisations that are going to carry out any form of community work to be able to complement what the Government is doing. Because if they do complement what Government is doing, then we will be able to better achieve those objectives in respect to whatever area it may be. Whether it be medical services, whether it is building capacity in rural areas in terms of housing or whether it is in the agricultural sector.

If we have a united approach to building overall capacity in our country then we don't need handouts and we don't need assistance. This is

the philosophy of our Honourable Prime Minister who talks about not giving handouts but giving a "leg up". If we are able to focus on giving a "leg up" and working collaboratively, then Fiji will be able to realise its true potential and a much bigger potential that we do have.

By the way, I've heard about 'Meals on Wheels' but **'Health on Wheels' is very new and quite creative and I look forward to that.** I remember as a child we used to get those mobile dentists used to come to the schools in those days and we used to fear them!

We look forward to 'health on wheels' and we hope that you get more wheels and we will be quite happy to facilitate those wheels coming to Fiji and providing those facilities.

Dr. Katewa, I thank you and your team once again for your wonderful work and I look forward to seeing you in Fiji soon. Vinaka Vakalevu and we welcome you once again to Fiji.

The Assistant Minister for Health and the Permanent Secretary for Health are both here and you can be rest assured that their team will be once again working with you and they will look forward to you being here.

Thank you very much for the invitation Mr. Mahendra Tappoo and I wish the Sai Prema Foundation all the best. I wish you all a very good evening. Vinaka Vakalevu and Thank you.

SPEECH BY DR. ILLISAPECI VERETI **HEAD OF DEPARTMENT, PEDIATRICS,** **CWM HOSPITAL, SUVA**

The Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Economy, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health, Ms. Veena Bhatnagar and prominent members of the Sai Prema Foundation Fiji.

I am honored to be part of the launch of the Sai Prema Foundation Fiji this evening.

I am actually here just to give you a background of the tremendous work done by the specialist team from the Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital.

I must say that **we owe a lot of gratitude to the Director of the hospital who has carefully chosen Dr. Ashish Katewa as the leader of this group and the nine members of his team** and I will mention each and everyone because without their passion, we would have never done a lot of work.

There is Farooq who is the perfusionist, Dr. Yogesh who is the cardiologist, Kym who is surgical nurse from Brisbane, Dr. Ranganathan who is an intensivist and an anesthetist, Sanjay who is Dr. Ashish Katewa's right hand and left hand, Nibu who is an ICU nurse and a very passionate one as well and so is Rajveer, Dr. Sreemayi and "beautiful" - I can't remember her name all the time but that is what her name in Hindi means.

It took months of planning to bring this group here and I think it was all the way back to March when we all got together and decided on the number of children that we were going to look at.

As you all know, the number of children that have congenital heart diseases in any country are about 1 percent of its population. And for us it means with our 20,000 births each year, annually that is 200 babies being born with holes in their heart and every year we do get teams but there are times when we do not have teams come in to operate on them and this year was one of them.

After the Cyclone Winston, we were unlucky to have no teams come in but Sri Sathya Sai Sanjeevani put their hands up and decided to come along and help us when we really needed it. Because of that we have managed to fix 25 children and it means that there is a backlog of 160 plus children and every year a team doesn't



come there is a backlog of more.

So we are really thankful to this group who have come across and I must say that **compared to other teams in the previous several years, this team has been different**, in the sense that they have allowed us to be a part of their team.

Just to give you a brief on that, I've had to pull out 20 of our nurses to join this team to provide intensive care, pre-operative care and post-operative care and in doing that, I am pretty sure that Dr. Ranganathan would agree with me, that he had a nightmare in trying to teach our nurses because in the beginning we were all raw to cardiac care.

And because of them in the first two weeks we became very close friends and **through that managed to learn more in learning how to look after our children post-operatively.**

This is just the beginning. We have plans to continue this every year and I am hoping that the Minister for Health and the Permanent Secretary whom I have seen sitting here as well this evening and the medical superintendent of the Hospital will continue to invite this group and the hospital to come over and continue to share their expertise and up-skill our people and first and foremost to provide Gift of Life to our children.

I can't say enough just how thankful and how grateful we are but to just mention that there is a time and a season for everything and that God is always in control and I wish them well on their trip back home tomorrow morning.

We wish you a safe trip and God go with you!

SPEECH BY DR. ASHISH KATEWA
HEAD PEDIATRIC CARDIAC SURGEON
SRI SATHYA SAI SANJEEVANI
HOSPITAL, RAIPUR (INDIA)

Ni Sa Bula! Namashkaar! Good Evening! At the outset, I would like to thank the Sai Prema Foundation, Ministry of Health and the Government of Fiji on behalf of my team members present here, our Chairman Sri C Sreenivas and the hundred and fifty plus members of our hospital in India.

We are really honoured to be here and it is a moment of great joy for us to help the children of Fiji, their parents and families and to help alleviate some of the pain.

As Dr. Illisapeci Vereti has already mentioned, the incidence of congenital heart disease is close to one percent and that means that out of hundred children born every year, one of them would have a significant lesion in the heart. There are twenty thousand children born every year in Fiji Islands and **there are 200 such children born with heart defects.**

Fiji entirely depends on overseas visiting teams for correcting these lesions. However, their visits have been erratic and not regular. There have not been any teams visiting this year. On an average visit by an overseas visiting team, they probably operate on 20-25 such children and so **every year there is a backlog of 180 such children who are not operated on.** Most of the families know that their children have some form of heart disease; **it's like a ticking bomb. They know that there is a problem but they have no means to getting it fixed.** As you can imagine it's a painful circumstances to be in.

Our hospital can support your program on three levels. Our coming to Fiji is the first initiative and we have come with a small team. We have worked closely with the doctors and nurses here whilst operating upon close to 25 children.

But that is not going to solve the problem. **We need to work towards developing Fiji's own pediatric congenital heart unit.** We have had discussion with the government, the officials and the Colonial War Memorial Hospital and they are very receptive to our offer. We have suggested that they should form a shadow pediatric cardiac



team in Suva. **We have already invited them to be part of our team back home, spend some time with us. We will be very happy to host them and train them.** The respected departments at Colonial War Memorial Hospital are already working towards that aim in choosing that cardiac team.

We would also like to offer our help in operating children with complex lesions by inviting them back home. As you know our hospital doesn't have a cash counter! All the services are rendered for free so we're happy to operate them free of cost.

I hope and pray that this is an ongoing initiative and together we can achieve Fiji's own pediatric cardiac unit. Just as India's a beacon of hope in terms of affordable medical services for the world, or that part of the world at least, **Fiji could be such beacon of hope for children from neighboring Pacific islands and the South Pacific.**

There are hundreds of Islands with families and children living there with some form of congenital heart disease and I can only imagine how hard it will be for them to afford such care in a developed country like New Zealand or Australia. But if Fiji can provide a credible congenital pediatric unit, this is something which is going to help not only families in Fiji but also neighboring Islands.

On that note, I would like to thank the right honourable Prime Minister, right honorable Deputy Minister of Health Services and Mr. Mahendra Tappoo, the Chairman of Sai Prema Foundation for having us here. Thank you.

FELICITATION OF THE CARDIAC TEAM BY ACTING PRIME MINISTER

1. DR. RANGANATHAN
2. MISS. KYM STUART
3. MR. SANJAY VERMA
4. DR. YOGESH SATHE
5. MISS GNANASUNDARI
6. MR. NIBU PHILIP VARKEY
7. MR. RAJVEER SINGH
8. MR. MOHAMMED FAROOQ
9. DR. SREEMAYI CHODAGAM





4-year old Sione Simone receives the “Gift of Life” pack from the Acting Prime Minister, Minister for Health and Dr Ashish Katewa.



16-month old Nihaal Singh receives the “Gift of Life” pack from the Acting Prime Minister & Minister for Health



The “Health on Wheels” Mobile Hospital Vehicle



Acting Prime Minister and Sai Prema Foundation Fiji Chairman inaugurate the Health on Wheels Mobile Hospital Vehicle

