



[COVID-19](#) > [Speeches](#) > STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER HON. VOREQE BAINIMARAMA ON LATEST COVID-19 CASE

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20/04/2020



Bula Vinaka.

It's now been nearly two weeks since Cyclone Harold swept over Fiji. As lines of communication have been re-established, our aid ships have made their way to our outer islands, and our response teams have surveyed damage, the scale of the devastation is becoming clearer.

Our agricultural sector saw over 27 million dollars of damages from the immense levels of rain and flooding throughout Fiji. More than 500 homes were destroyed, with many hundreds [more](#) suffering damage. FRA's infrastructure network, including our roading and jetties, took a 22-

million-dollar hit. Overall, more than 180,000 Fijians saw their homes, their lives and livelihoods suffer from the brunt of Harold.

But as we made clear from the start, help is on the way for affected Fijians. For many, that help has already arrived, with food rations being delivered and clean-up commenced in some of our hardest-hit areas. Electricity and water supply have been restored for most of the country. As we pick up the pieces from Harold's wrath, we can again devote ourselves to an enemy that will last far longer than any storm — COVID-19.

I want to begin today by honouring the life of Mr. Morotikei Mainilala, a Turaga-ni-Koro serving in Baleyaganiga Village on Vanua Levu. The police have completed their investigation of Mr. Mainilala's passing. It appears he tried to break up a public gathering — a drinking party — before he was brutally killed. Those suspected of involvement have been charged.

Our ban on social gatherings exists to stop the sort of person-to-person contact that spreads the deadly coronavirus. It's clear Mr. Mainilala knew that — and it's why he strove to prevent his fellow Fijians from violating our health protection measures. I extend my deepest sympathies to his wife, his six children, and his community. They, and all of Fiji, have lost a responsible leader and a brave Fijian.

From Friday through today, we have tested 123 samples for the coronavirus. One test returned what we call a "soft positive" result — meaning we couldn't say with certainty whether this sample was positive for COVID-19. After further testing and consultations with our reference lab in Melbourne, they found that these results indicate this sample came from someone in the final stages of recovery from coronavirus.

This, combined with a travel history from the United States last month, was enough for us to call this case "highly likely" — and in my book, when Fijian lives are at stake, that means "positive". So clinically, we have officially confirmed this patient — a 51-year-old woman in Ba — as our 18th case of COVID-19.

The patient returned from the United States on the 22nd of March. After completing 14 days of home quarantine, she was cleared. Only later did she develop COVID-like symptoms. She was then tested, giving us the soft positive result. The results of her test make it likely this patient has been carrying COVID-19 for weeks. Luckily, our contact tracing — which began as soon as she was first tested on the 18th of April — identifies her as a low-risk transmitter.

This patient shares a home with three others — all three have tested negative for the virus. Regardless, they have all been placed in isolation. We've traced and identified her other casual contacts; they have all been entered into compulsory home quarantine.



Because of the low-risk nature of this patient spreading the virus, and our ability to quickly test and contain her few close contacts, we will not be locking down Ba Town. However, our mobile teams will be conducting a large-scale screening of the entire province. As with Lautoka and Suva, public cooperation is vital to this effort — if we don't see sufficient numbers from these screenings, Ba will risk a total lockdown.

We're also introducing new health protection measures nationwide. This virus is deadliest in already-ill patients — that's why it's vital we keep coronavirus away from patients in hospital. Only two visitors a day will be allowed to see a patient, and the visitation window will only be one hour. Visitors will enter facilities one at a time and will need to be health-checked prior to entry. Our standing ban on visitations to isolation wards and facilities will continue. We'll also be introducing compulsory testing for Fijians returning from overseas in government-funded quarantine after 14 days — if they test negative after the critical 14-day incubation period, they will be able to spend the remaining 14 days of their quarantine at home.

This latest case goes to show: This virus is still out there in our communities. Our 18th case has been present in Fiji for almost a month — while her transmission risk is low, she was certainly not the only unconfirmed coronavirus case in the country. This is a complex and contagious virus, and — no matter the strength of our safety nets — cases can slip through the cracks, as we've in other countries, especially individuals who never show symptoms.

This virus is proving as stealthy as it is unpredictable, but it can be beaten. Not by some magic cure — but by keeping to the simple strategy of physical distancing. The difference of two metres of physical distance between us means the difference between victory and defeat in this campaign. It means the difference between life and death for vulnerable Fijians.

This weekend, aside from dozens more arrests, we've received reports across the country of blatant violations of our physical distancing directives. Too many Fijians are still behaving as if the virus isn't among us. Thank God, there are no deaths due to the virus in Fiji. But if people keep crowding in public places, gathering socially, or otherwise acting like these are normal times, there's no question, we will lose lives. The possibility of a 24-hour curfew is not off the table — the power to avoid that drastic alternative rests with every Fijian watching, listening to or reading this address. So, please, do the right thing today, and spare us suffering down the road.

All of us need to seize ownership over our health and by taking responsibility for the laws designed to keep this virus at bay. Don't push the burden of recovery entirely on the shoulders of our doctors, nurses, and disciplined forces — they deserve far better than anyone's apathy or ambivalence.



Supermarkets, retailers, and shops should have hand sanitiser available and prominent signage instructing physical distancing.

Children should not be out and about — they must stay home, as should the elderly. Social gatherings are banned, and the 8pm to 5am curfew remains in effect. And all of us should stay in our homes as much as possible. If you see someone violating our directives, do not stay silent — pick up the phone and call number 158 or dial the police.

I'd like to end my brief today with some good news. Three Fijians diagnosed with the virus have made full recoveries from the coronavirus. That means these Fijians have tested negative for the virus twice, with over 24 hours in between tests. We also have several individuals in isolation who — after over 30 days — have not tested positive for the virus. Our recovered patients, along with those who have continually tested negative, will be released. Out of an abundance of caution, they will remain under supervised home quarantine for 14 days. Our other 15 patients living with COVID-19 all remain in stable condition. The Minister for Health is here today to share the specifics.

We should celebrate these recoveries. But we should do so knowing Fiji's recovery from this virus is still months' away at best. We can get there — we will get there — day by day, test by test, and recovery by recovery. I know it's not always easy. It's not easy to keep children at home. It's not easy to manage shopping, care-giving and bread-winning, while also adhering to all of our directives. It's not easy to go without seeing friends and family for social gatherings. But these directives save lives. I assure you, when our victory over this virus arrives, every measure of our diligence — and every short-term sacrifice — will have been well worth it.

Thank you. God bless you all.

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