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**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**INCREASE IN SOCIAL PENSION SCHEME ALLOWANCES**

The Bainimarama government has approved the increase in monthly social pension which is currently paid to 9675 senior citizens who are 70 years and over, who do not have any form of income or pension, or who have never been part of a superannuation scheme. The Social Pension Scheme was first introduced in 2014 by the Bainimarama government and has a budgetary allocation of \$3.2 million.

The Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation Dr Jiko Luveni says that the increase will come into effect from next year.

“The increase is based on the requests of senior citizens, particularly through my discussions with the communities in rural areas. The pensioners have requested for the monthly \$30 pension can be increased \$50 and this was put through Cabinet. I am delighted to inform that Cabinet has approved the increase in Social Pension Scheme for the senior citizens from \$30 to \$50 a month.

“So from next year, those who qualify for the social pension will receive \$50 a month and currently there are more than 9000 beneficiaries and we expect this number to increase next year. This increase has come about as the result, of Bainimarama government’s commitment to provide enabling and inclusive society for the senior citizens in Fiji.

“As articulated into the supreme law of the land, Fiji’s Constitution, government is committed to deliver the “rights to social security schemes” particularly those who are living in poorest of the poor bracket. Through reforms in social welfare programs, the assistance is now targeted towards assisting the families and this has even led to increased coverage of the welfare programs.

“The Ministry has noted the increase in its program coverage from 4 percent to now 12 to 14 percent of the population benefiting from government’s social welfare programs,” Dr Luveni explained.

Apart from the Social Pension Scheme, the Ministry also administers the Bus Fare Concession- The bus fare concession scheme is the outcome of an agreement signed between the Bainimarama Government and the Fiji Bus Operators Association in January, 2011 whereby elderly persons over the age of 60 pay only half the fare and people with disability are allowed to travel free of charge in buses. A total of 39,789 recipients are currently assisted which, includes 38,393 Elderly Beneficiaries and 1396 Beneficiaries for Person’s living with disability.