

Barry Whiteside: Commemorative coin for Fiji's Iliesa Delana

Welcome address by Mr Barry Whiteside, Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, at the unveiling of the Iliesa Delana commemorative 50 cent circulation coin at the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Suva, 18 September 2013.

* * *

Chief Guest Mr Iliesa Delana

Distinguished Guests

Board of Directors, and colleagues

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Bula vinaka and a very warm welcome to you all.

This is a truly special occasion and we thank you for accepting our invitation to help honour a true son and “icon” of Fiji, Iliesa Delana, in a slightly different way from our morning tea after his London Paralympic gold medal win last year. This is not to say that we did not treasure those earlier moments when our whole nation was at one, coming together to celebrate a bright shining star.

After that morning tea we at the Reserve Bank of Fiji really felt we could do better and make the recognition more lasting. After all, this was an achievement up there with the very best in our Country's history!

Today, we will be unveiling a commemorative circulation coin that will feature London 2012 Paralympic Games athlete, Iliesa Delana, in action winning the gold medal during the F42 High Jump event. This is the first time that we have featured a sportsperson on our coins. We have had them on stamps, but never on a circulation coin!

I am sure by now Iliesa needs no introduction as he has become a household name throughout Fiji and an inspiration to many. His achievements say it all. But let me say a few words in honour of Iliesa anyway, and to also inspire the younger generation.

Iliesa believes in the motto “*Disability is not a barrier in life but a challenge*” and I strongly believe that he continues to live up to his motto as he always continues to raise the bar.

Hailing from the village of Naisausau, Namara, in the province of Tailevu, Iliesa debuted at the Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled (FESPIC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2006. In 2011 Iliesa participated at the World Championships where he recorded a jump of 1.73m in the F42 category and was ranked number 2 in the world.

At the London 2012 Paralympic Games, Iliesa's jump cleared the bar of 1.74m breaking the Oceania record for the event and he became the first Fijian ever to win gold at Paralympics or Olympics level.

Iliesa's achievements of course have been highly recognised and appreciated – and rightfully so. In 2011 and 2012 he won back to back Sportsman of the Year awards and later in 2012 he was also awarded the 2012 Fiji Person of the Year. He has officiated at many sports and social events recently and continues to evoke that sense of pride as a Fijian who has come from humble beginnings and taken to the world stage.

We are delighted to further recognise and share his achievements and we thought to take this to the next level by striking a special coin, a coin that will be used by all Fijians, a coin that will be symbolic of something great, something to inspire us all to strive for the best.

Work on this new 50 cent coin commenced in September 2012 and we were glad to have received the various approvals from Iliesa himself as well as FASANOC, the Fiji Paralympic

Committee, Digicel as Iliesa's major corporate sponsor and the Reserve Bank's Board of Directors, to proceed with the coinage and make it a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have only produced 500,000 coins of this special issue, in a 50 cent denomination. Many would ask why the 50 cents? It is the largest coin in our existing family and given its size, we strongly felt the designs could be prominently featured without losing any of the details of this historic win. The 50 cent coin is also a widely used coin denomination.

The obverse (front) design features Fiji's Coat of Arms while the reverse (back) design features Iliesa at the event. The obverse and reverse designs complement each other and are reminiscent of the moment the Fijian flag was flown high with pride at the Paralympic games soon after Iliesa's jump with millions of viewers watching the win across the globe.

This coin is a "limited edition legal tender circulation coin" which will be issued into circulation from today. The coin can, of course, be used to pay for goods and services although I am sure it will fast become a collector's edition, not only locally, but also by sporting enthusiasts across the world, given its limited mintage. I am sure the children will be keen to get hold of one and retain it as part of their collections!

With this recognition, I urge all aspiring athletes to learn from Iliesa's hard work, courage, determination and achievements to continue to strive for the best. You can achieve the most difficult of tasks if you set your mind to it. You are Fiji's future. If you have the will to do so, you will surely succeed. Take that lesson from Iliesa.

We believe that this is the highest level of recognition that we at the Reserve Bank can give someone. What better way than to be featured on our Fijian currency, be known to the rest of the world and promote Fiji to the rest of the world.

On behalf of the Board, Management and staff of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, I once again congratulate Iliesa on his magnificent gold medal win at the London 2012 Paralympic Games and wish him well for the future. I also extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to you all for taking time out to celebrate this occasion with Iliesa.

Vinaka vakalevu and God Bless Fiji!