

**Speech by Professor Rajesh Chandra Vice Chancellor and  
President of USP**  
**At the Unveiling of the RNZAF Commemorative Monument**  
**Date: Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018**  
**Venue: Lawn adjacent to FBE Postgraduate Centre, Laucala  
Campus**

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- His Excellency Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konousi Konrote, President of the Republic of Fiji and Chancellor of USP;
- Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for i-Taukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs;
- Former President of Fiji, Honourable Ratu Epeli Nailatikau;
- Honourable Mr. Ron Mark, Defence Minister of New Zealand
- Honourable Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Fijian Minister of Defence and National Security;
- Pro-Chancellor and Chair of USP Council, Ambassador Winston Thompson;
- Air Vice Marshal Kevin Short, Vice-Chief of New Zealand Defence Force;
- Brigadier General Jone Kalouniwai, Republic of Fiji Military Forces;
- Members of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and of Fiji Military Forces, both current and former;
- Honourable Ministers of the Fijian Cabinet;

- His Excellency Mr. Jonathan Curr, New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji;
- Excellencies and members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Members of Regional and International Organisations;
- Senior Fijian Government Officials;
- Members of the University Council and Senate and their committees;
- Members of the USP Senior Management Team, Staff, alumni and students of the University;
- Distinguished Guests;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is heartening to see you all here for this unveiling. On behalf of the Pro Chancellor and Chair of Council, Ambassador Winston Thompson and the University community, I am deeply honored to welcome the Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. JosaiaVoreqe Bainimarama and Hon. Mr Ron Mark, Defence Minister of New Zealand. Without your presence here today, Sirs, this important occasion wouldn't be possible. This is indeed an extra special and historical milestone for the University in its 50<sup>th</sup> year. We are also honored to have the President of the Republic of Fiji and Chancellor of USP, His Excellency Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote with us. I am reliably informed that he and the

former President of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau both performed sentry duty at the Royal New Zealand Air Force base here during their service in the Fijian Military.

The University greatly appreciates the presence of almost 150 people coming to Suva from New Zealand for the event and of the hundreds of students and invited guests who are witnessing this momentous occasion.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The University of the South Pacific is an opportunity for us to reflect on the incredible accomplishments that we have achieved over this past half century.

It is also a time to recognise the organisations that have been with us, supporting the University, along the journey. Today is very much about this recognition. The foremost amongst these has been, and continues to be, the Government of Fiji that provided the land on which the University first started classes in 1968 here and has been a generous and very supportive host of our main campus and headquarters of the University.

This Campus was the launching pad from which the University was able to grow to 14 campuses and 10 Centres across 12 nations throughout the Pacific. This growth could never have occurred without

the unwavering financial and governance support of successive Fijian Governments. This support has remained steadfast throughout the 50 years and the University is very grateful for this and acknowledges the current Government's unwavering support under your leadership, Honourable Prime Minister, Sir.

As we celebrate the very significant success of the University in more recent times, especially in its reforms and restructuring, its growing standing and reputation through international accreditations, and the consolidation of its position as the premier provider of tertiary education, let me say that this progress owes much to the bold leadership and unwavering commitment of our Honourable Prime Minister to the principles of equality and merit. This kind of leadership has enabled us at USP to pursue bold ambitions and manage change so successfully and recruit and promote staff on merit.

Ladies and gentlemen, before USP's location here, the site had another custodian. The Royal New Zealand Air Force operated here from 1942 until 1967. For twenty five years the New Zealand Government invested in the infrastructure that would later become the backbone of the facilities used by USP. Buildings that were built by the Air Force became lecture theatres, meeting spaces, administration offices, staff accommodation and amenities. Even the old hanger was put to good use by the University. As someone who came to study here in 1971 and

who stayed with USP pretty much since then, I can personally vouch for this.

This use of facilities was just the start of the relationship that developed between USP and the Government of New Zealand—which continued to support USP and the delivery of the highest quality education to Pacific Islanders until now, our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

New Zealand contributed significantly to the development of USPNet and to ICT development that strengthened links between all our campuses and greatly improved both the administrative communication and the teaching capacity of USP. We are very grateful that NZ has made a grant of NZ\$6 million to totally re-engineer USPNet and replace all the satellite dishes to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning network for the Pacific Islands. This is a special contribution from NZ to mark our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

This Commemorative Monument, which recognises the contribution of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, together with the New Zealand and Fijian Governments to the growth of USP, is the result of considerable hard work and cooperation by a number of people working in both Fiji and New Zealand.

The members of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Steering Committee led by its Chair and Pro-Chancellor of the University, Mr Winston Thompson

and members Robin Yarrow and Jonathan Rowe drove this project from concept to completion.

Local architect Setoki Tuiteci prepared all the initial drawings and project managed the construction. Engineer Nathan Kirk ensured that the monument will stay on the ground, despite it having wings. Gordon Ragg and the volunteers at the Museum of Transport and Technology in Auckland restored the wing-float from a Sunderland Flying Boat which forms the fuselage of the artwork.

Author Bee Dawson assisted greatly with the editing of the wording on the interpretive signage and graciously allowed us to use excerpts from her book depicting the involvement of the Royal New Zealand Airforce in Fiji.

Mr. Dave Aidney and his team at Williams and Gosling provided transportation for the artwork from the Artist's studio in Savusavu to its final home here at USP. Mr John Matthews and his crew at Fletcher Construction Fiji built the monument expertly and in a very short time.

Representatives of the New Zealand Defence Forces, Warrant Officer Dave Lark in New Zealand and Lt Colonel Josh Wineera here in Fiji coordinated the significant involvement of both currently serving and former members of the Royal New Zealand Air Force. And artist Shane

Bower and his studio team at Savusavu have created a wonderful tribute to the 5 Squadron of the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

All these people have donated their time and efforts generously to ensure that this commemorative monument remains as a lasting recognition to the contribution that the governments of New Zealand and Fiji have made to The University of the South Pacific. To all of them, a very big Vinaka Vakalevu.

In conclusion, Honourable Prime Minister Mr. Josaia Voreqe

Bainimarama, Honourable Mr. Ron Mark, Defence Minister of New Zealand, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, thank you once again for your presence this late afternoon—and please continue to be involved with our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations that will conclude in December this year.

Vinaka Vakalevu and Thank you.