



**ADDRESS BY THE
VICE CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT PROFESSOR RAJESH CHANDRA
AT THE USP LAUCALA GRADUATION CEREMONY (MARCH) 2014**

Acknowledgements and Greetings

His Excellency Sir Iakoba Taeia Italeli, Governor General of Tuvalu and Chancellor of The University of the South Pacific
Lady Koling Italeli
Pro Chancellor and Chair of Council, Mr. Ikbal Jannif
Honourable Ministers of the Fijian Government
Members of the Judiciary
Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Deputy Chair of Council and Deputy Director-General of SPC, Mrs. Fekita Utoikamanu
Heads of International and Regional Organisations
Members of Council and Senate
Members of the USP Senior Management Team
Graduands and their families and friends
Colleagues, Members of Staff, Students, and Alumni
Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome and Congratulations

Welcome, Ni Sa Bula, Namaste, and a very good morning to you all.
I join the Pro Chancellor in warmly welcoming you all to the Second Laucala Campus Graduation Ceremony for 2014. I thank you for joining us today to recognize and honour our newest graduands on their achievements.

The 21st Chancellor

I wish to extend a special welcome to our 21st Chancellor, His Excellency Sir Iakoba Taeia Italeli. This morning we were privileged to witness his dignified installation.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege to warmly welcome you, Sir, on this auspicious occasion. Thank you for making this occasion even more special for all of us, especially our graduating students.

We are happy and proud to celebrate our new Chancellor, and believe that his experience as an alumnus of USP, having received a Law degree from the Emalus Campus in Vanuatu, gives him a special insight into this outstanding institution.

His Excellency Sir Iakopa attained the position of Attorney-General of Tuvalu before he took the decision to pursue a career in politics. He is now the highly-esteemed Governor General of Tuvalu. His gracious presence here today is a great honour for the University.

Graduation Ceremony

Today, we witness 760 students-representing 15 different nationalities- receiving certificates, diplomas and degrees.

USP's governing body has set targets for the number of females, the number of postgraduates, and the number of international students who should complete each year so that USP meets the needs of an increasingly modern and prosperous Pacific Island region. We have made very good progress in producing the type of first-rate graduates that can power our island economies and societies. I wish to highlight that:

- 59% of all graduates today are female (this is a 4% increase from September 2013);
- 40% of our graduands will receive postgraduate qualifications, as compared to 37% at this ceremony last year. I am particularly pleased to note that we have two students graduating with PhDs – both from the Faculty of Business and Economics;
- Of the total number of 43 Masters students graduating today, 47% of them have completed the MBA degree.
- Three graduates are from non-member countries, namely Barbados, Korea, and the USA.

The figures I just shared with you indicate not only that USP is growing, but that it is producing the type of graduates that its member countries need in order to thrive in the global knowledge economy. It is important to appreciate that all of our graduates, no matter what their gender, level of studies, or home country, are poised and ready to use their education to contribute to the societies and economies of this region. We are very proud of this graduating class of 2014!

To the Graduates

Let me focus on this impressive group of graduands now.

First, Congratulations! Congratulations on persevering and completing your studies. You can be justly proud of your achievements. Today should be a memorable joyous day you can look back with happiness and satisfaction throughout your life.

After these celebrations, however, you need to realize that your graduation is really the start of another more important journey—journey of real life. New doors, in terms of both educational and career prospects, will open for you. I hope you will seize all of these opportunities with speed and great energy and also create your own opportunities and bring to life your ideas and vision. Keep learning, maintain your curiosity about the world around you, and continue to contribute to your communities through your experience and intellect. Life-long learning is the real key to lifelong success.

All of you will be happy that you have come so far and I am sure you will have many wonderful memories of your journey at USP. The sacrifices including the many sleepless nights doing assignments or research, the early rises to attend 8.00am lectures, the separation from home and families, I am sure that you will feel that it was all worth it. I

am reminded of a quote by Aristotle

“The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.”

Yes, the fruit is sweet. You have done it! Now I want to challenge you all to strive for excellence in whatever you do. As you go out into your respective communities, you will be judged first and foremost as graduates of USP. I am confident that your time at USP has prepared you well, creating a resilience of character and tolerance, understanding, and empathy for different backgrounds and points of view.

You also need to make an unshakeable commitment to maintaining high ethical standards in everything you do.

One of the main character traits that I observe in USP graduates is respectfulness, and this is, I believe, essential to personal happiness and career success. Always respect yourself, your heritage, and our environment. Treat your colleagues with respect and remember that differences are to be celebrated. The respect that you show to all will be returned, and will set a positive and productive tone for your work and life.

I wish you well in your chosen career and in your life. Be proud of who you are and where you come from. Remember USP and the opportunities you have had, and consider helping other Pacific Islanders access higher education. I encourage you to join your Alumni network and keep in touch with your university.

Significant Achievements

I would now like to highlight a few of the University’s recent achievements and developments:

- Enrolment numbers continue to grow. There has been an increase of 6% in our new student intake compared to the same period last year, bringing our total enrolment to 28,165.
- The new Kiribati Campus is under construction and expected to be ready by mid-2015.
- The government of RMI has purchased a large hotel to be the new campus.
- Quality is a core value of the University and is assured through a comprehensive system, which includes institutional quality audits from Australian and New Zealand quality agencies and international accreditors.
- Our MBA programme was recently accredited by AMBA, and the LLB programmes was recognized to be equivalent to Australian law degrees. The Accounting and Finance degrees were successfully re-accredited until 2018.
- We are in the process of securing American accreditation through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). A site visit from WASC is planned for next month.

- We have completed construction of the 11th Hall with 96 beds and started the construction of further two blocks totaling 48 beds at the total cost of \$6 million. We also plan to start construction of another 350 beds next year.
- In May this year, I signed an agreement with the Prime Minister of Tonga for the fibre connection. In July, the Tonga Campus saw the launch of our 100 mbps high speed Fibre connection to Tonga's fibre optic cable network.
- Part of the Food Court area has recently been converted into an international level training kitchen and training restaurant for the catering students of the Centre for Vocational and Community Education.
- The SPC and the University recently jointly won a major grant of 6 million Euros from the EU to promote technical and vocational education in climate change and renewable energy.
- USP Annual Report for 2012 won the Marketing and Communications Award from the Association of Commonwealth Universities, UK that has more than 500 universities.
- One of our Master of Science students, Ms Prayna Maharaj, won the Young Scientist Award at the 47th Annual Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology Conference in Melbourne in June.

I hope you can tell, from the brief list of achievements that I have shared, that USP is making significant strides to become the excellent university that this region deserves. We will continue to improve our quality and services to ensure that our graduates remain the best in the Pacific.

Now, although USP's achievements and plans are many, time is limited. However, I must mention one more item.

Sports are very important in Fiji and our region and they are not only good for personal development, but they contribute to nation-building and to economic development.

Rugby is a one of the most popular sports for us. There is a huge amount of natural talent in our region. At USP we are determined to develop rugby further.

We are proud that on August 8th the USP Rugby Team won its match against New Zealand's North Otago Rugby Team (21-10); a major achievement for our team and for us. The team has now been promoted to the Suva Premier Grade Rugby Level, and we know that this is the start of something even bigger. Many alumni who played at USP have gone on to play for clubs in Australia and New Zealand, and Europe as well as contributing to Fiji rugby. I acknowledge this success and hope that we will build on this success in the future.

Conclusions

Honourable Chancellor, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to assure all of you that the University is making steady progress in its aim to transform itself from a good to an excellent university.

Support from our member countries and development partners remains perhaps the strongest in USP's history. With rapidly increasing enrolments and international accreditations being obtained, we clearly have the confidence of parents and students.

We will continue to produce outstanding graduates and undertaking relevant research recognized internationally that makes demonstrable contributions to the development of our member countries. This is a pledge to our member countries, and to their citizens, who rely on USP for quality higher education that enables them to access the best jobs and rewarding, meaningful careers.

What we have achieved is a collective effort; a very big Vinaka Vakalevu. I hope we will all continue to work together for the good of the people of the Pacific Islands region.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, a final word- especially to the graduates. I congratulate you all again and wish you all the very best in your endeavours as you start a new chapter in your lives. As you go out into your respective communities, you will become ambassadors of USP. We are very proud of you and are confident that you will make us proud and bring credit to the University.

Vinaka Vakalevu; Dhanyabad; Thank you.