



**SPEECH BY THE
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT, PROFESSOR PAL AHLUWALIA
AT THE USP LAUCALA GRADUATION CEREMONY 1,
USP LAUCALA CAMPUS, FIJI**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Chancellor, the President of the Republic of Kiribati, His Excellency Taneti Maamau and First Lady Mrs. Teiraeng Maamau;
- The Prime Minister for Cook Islands, Honourable Henry Puna, and First lady Mrs. Akaiti Puna
- The Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council of The University of the South Pacific, Mr. Winston Thompson and Mrs. Queenie Thompson;
- Honourable Ministers and Senior Officials of the Fijian Government;
- Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Heads of Regional and International Organisations;
- Members of Council, Senate and their Committees;
- Members of the USP Senior Management Team;
- Development Partners
- Graduands, their families and friends;
- Members of staff and students;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

WELCOME AND GREETINGS

Ni sa Bula, Namaste and Warm Greetings. It gives me great pleasure to join the Pro-Chancellor in warmly welcoming you all to The University of the South Pacific's first Laucala Campus Graduation ceremony for 2019.

Before we begin, I kindly request that we observe a moment of silence to remember those who recently lost their lives in Christchurch. Let us remember also those who are still in critical condition or are recovering. (pause). Thank you.

I would like to specially welcome our 25th Chancellor, the President of the Republic of Kiribati, His Excellency Taneti Maamau to this very important occasion. Thank you Sir for gracing this occasion and making it so much more special for our graduands. A very warm welcome also to all our graduands.

I am delighted that so many of you have joined us today and it is a great honour to welcome such a diverse community including those who have travelled far from their island homes.

Graduands, today you have reached a milestone in your life and I am very delighted to be addressing you all on this important occasion. This is the first USP graduation ceremony where I am addressing you in my official capacity as the Vice-Chancellor and President.

GRADUATION NUMBERS

This year we have the largest number of students graduating; a total of 2026 students receiving their certificates, diplomas and degree. To each of you, I offer my congratulations. Your awards are a significant accomplishment.

We are also proud to be conferring a total of four honorary degrees at the Laucala graduations.

Of those graduating, 726 (36%) are from the Faculty of Business and Economics; 333 (16%) are from the Faculty of Science, Technology and Environment; 387 (19%) are from the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education and 580 (29%) are from Pacific TAFE. Sixty percent (60%) of those graduating are women. Furthermore, we have 7 PhDs graduating this year.

Students from 22 countries are graduating today, including 10 non-member countries testifying to the growing international profile and attraction of USP.

TO THE GRADUANDS

Graduation signifies the culmination of several years' of hard work on your part and is a celebration of your efforts. The occasion also presents us all with an opportune time to convey our sincerest appreciation to families, friends, employers, colleagues, USP academics, professional staff and mentors who have who played an important role in helping you reach here.

At this juncture, I invite our graduands to stand up and thank your family, friends and supporters as well as USP academics and professional staff with a warm round of applause. They have worked hard to ensure that you are able to graduate today.

While this is a day of celebration, it also represents a point of departure for some of you, from studying at the University of the South Pacific to a new stage, where you have the opportunity to make your mark in the community. The University has endeavoured to instil in you, a body of knowledge and a set of qualities that will prepare you for your future life. However, the true value of your education lies in how you use this knowledge for the greater good of your communities.

Today is just the beginning of a life-long relationship with your University as members of an international community of USP graduates. Please make use of our Alumni Network and keep in touch as you continue your journey through life. Continue to live by the values of your University in all that you do – embody excellence, embrace innovation, uphold the highest ethical standards and operate with integrity; be respectful, and celebrate diversity.

The Pacific, is plagued with great insecurities as a result of climate change that not only challenges our sovereignty but also our livelihoods. Graduands, today I challenge you all to take the best of our insights, experiences and knowledge, and turn them into actions in order to improve people's lives and prospects.

USP'S ASPIRATIONS

Allow me to reflect briefly on our aspirations. Last year we celebrated our golden jubilee and I am happy that USP has accomplished a lot in 50 years. That said, it does not mean we will stop here, instead we are compelled to do even better. While we are ranked amongst top 50 universities in the Oceania, our future aspirations are to become better and to build on our reputation to be amongst the best universities of the world.

In order to live up to our ambitions, we are actively engaging in research across four strategic themes: (1) Oceans, Land & Climate; (2) Economic Growth, and Public & Private Sector; (3) Education, Culture & Health; and (4) Governance, Justice and Equality. These are resonant with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (2015 – 2030) and underpinned by Innovation, Empowerment & Sustainability. Our research capacity is being further strengthened by proactively seeking partnership with regional as well as international organisations; as has been in the case of our recent partnership for both the Innovation Hub and One Ocean Hub.

We at the University remain aspirational, energetic and committed to change and success, ensuring an enduring partnership with each of you. There is little doubt that the knowledge, skills and values that you have developed during your studies here at USP will help you become leaders within your communities well into the future.

As our most recent graduates, you will undoubtedly bring a unique perspective to these issues and their impact on our societies. I have no doubt that it is amongst our newest graduates that the solutions to some of these most challenging and intractable problems will be found.

Your studies can empower you to cultivate 'strong roots' within your community, to allow you to maintain links with local issues and struggles whilst realising that these are inextricably linked to global imperatives.

You all are on the way to shaping Pacific futures and creating your own "ripples" throughout the world. Futures are forged by the choices we make today and the way we decide to transfer the knowledge we have acquired.

Once again I am truly honoured to be addressing you all on this important day of your lives. I wish you every success and encourage you to be bold. Make us all proud by creating positive impact and giving back to the communities that have sustained you and enabled you to shape a better future for all of us.

Vinaka and Thank you