

**SPEECH BY
THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT PROFESSOR RAJESH CHANDRA
AT THE LAUCALA CAMPUS GRADUATION CEREMONY,
USP LAUCALA CAMPUS, MARCH 2015**

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;
- Members of the Judiciary
- Pro Chancellor and Chair of Council, Mr. Ikbal Jannif;
- Honourable Ministers and Senior Officials of the Fijian Government;
- Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Deputy Chair of Council, Mrs. Fekita Utoikamanu;
- Members of Council and Senate;
- Members of the USP Senior Management Team;
- Heads of International and Regional Organisations;
- Graduands and their families and friends;
- Colleagues, Members of Staff and students;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome

Welcome, Ni Sa Bula, Namaste and a very good morning to you all.

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 2015.

The graduation ceremony is the most significant and meaningful occasion in the University's calendar for our graduands, and I would like to especially welcome our 21st Chancellor, His Excellency Sir Iakoba Taeia Italeli, Governor General of Tuvalu and Lady Koling Italeli to this important and joyous occasion. I also extend a very special welcome to the graduands who are here today --it is because of you that we are gathered here today. I also warmly welcome the parents, families, friends of graduands and colleagues who have joined us on this memorable occasion.

Tribute to Vanuatu

Please allow me Mr Chancellor Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen to begin my address by conveying our heart-felt condolences to the Government and the people of the Republic of Vanuatu for the loss of lives and sympathies for the staggering devastation caused by Cyclone Pam. We are very saddened by the loss of lives and the destruction caused by this natural disaster. The University stands willing to support Vanuatu in any way possible. The University was happy to make available our USPNet communication system for use by the Government of Vanuatu when their communications system was down.

I am pleased to report that classes at the Emalus Campus resumed on Monday 23 March and students have turned out in good numbers. Already, staff and students have come together to support various fundraising activities for Vanuatu and also for Kiribati and Tuvalu which also suffered from cyclone PAM. We also convey our sympathies to the Governments and people of Kiribati and Tuvalu for the damage done by cyclone PAM.

Graduation Ceremony

Today, we have about 1275 students (1285 in April 2014) receiving certificates, diplomas and degrees from 21 different nationalities:

- 54% of all graduates are females; (up by 2% from April 2014)
- 40% will receive Postgraduate qualifications; (compared to 37% same time last year). This is pleasing in terms of our Strategic Plan objectives to boost our postgraduate enrolments but more importantly our PG completions. I am particularly pleased to note that we have one student from the Faculty of Business and Economics (two students last April) graduating with a PhD in Management and Administration.
- and 18 graduates are from 11 non-member countries including four (4) from Guyana and the rest from far away countries such as South Africa, Germany, Belize, and St Lucia. This reflects strong support of the European Union for student mobility among ACP countries.

To the Graduates

A word to the graduates – Congratulations, you have done well and deserve to celebrate today. Graduations mark the end of one journey and the beginning of a more important journey—journey of life. New beginnings in life are full of possibilities. I know that some of you may be leaving the University while some may continue at USP to undertake higher level studies. Whatever choice you take, may I remind you of the important role that you could play as a USP graduate and alumnus. I would like to highlight a few areas that will be useful as you further your endeavours.

First, you can become good ambassadors of USP. Be role models in your respective countries and importantly live and promote a sense of high integrity and moral values.

Second, one of the most important themes that the University is promoting in our work is the University's transformation for excellence. I would challenge you to apply this principle to your lives. A business person by the name of Ronnie Oldham has said:

“Excellence is the Result of Caring more than others think is Wise, Risking more than others think is Safe, Dreaming more than others think is Practical, and Expecting more than others think is Possible”.

Think about it, these are very noble challenges indeed. Oldham went on to say:

It is the commitment to high quality performance that produces outstanding results of lasting value. Excellence is believing in continuous improvement and never being satisfied with anything being less than it can be. It is quality as a way of life (<http://ronnieoldham.com/excellence.htm>).

Third, another theme that the University is promoting is entrepreneurship. I encourage all graduates to embrace it. As graduates you should become employers rather than being employees. Create jobs rather than look for them.

Finally, be grateful to your families, your sponsors – Governments and communities, your lecturers, and mentors – they have sacrificed a lot for you to get you to where you are today – they deserve a “big thank you”. As you celebrate today, be grateful for all the support that you have received, and go out into the world a much better person, equipped with new knowledge and skills, willing to share and contribute to the betterment of your communities and our Pacific Island countries.

Significant Achievements

Mr Chancellor Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to briefly highlight a few of the University’s recent significant achievements and developments:

- Wednesday night at a special ceremony we celebrated the award of 39 Medals and Prizes in 33 categories to students who have achieved excellence. These top achievers, ladies and gentlemen, who are among us today, will match the top achievers from anywhere in the world, and they give confidence to us in the Pacific that despite our many handicaps, we have our share of the brightest minds who will go on to make outstanding contributions in life.
- 2015 marks the end of the current triennium 2013-2015. As we review how we have progressed in our transformation for excellence as espoused in our current Strategic Plan 2013-2018, I am of the firm belief that the strength of the University lies in its SP, in its Vision of Excellence so well taken by Leaders, development partners and students and staff. It is the single most important reason why we are valued at the moment. We will continue with this compelling vision as we enter a new triennium next year, leading into the University’s 50th Anniversary in 2018.
- I have repeatedly said in previously graduations that it is the quality and relevance of our programmes that set us apart from other providers and that the only way we can get this quality assurance is to have as many of our programmes internationally recognised through Accreditations. We have continued our efforts in getting as many of our programmes internationally accredited. As reported last year, our MBA programme is now AMBA accredited for three years and we must try and retain it beyond the three years;
- USP’s Accounting and Finance degrees were successfully re-accredited until 2018 by CPA Australia. Add to this achievement we now have formal accreditation of a postgraduate course with CPA which is region specific (tax law). This is indeed most welcomed and the School of Accounting and CPA will celebrate this achievement next month.
- Other programmes that have been accredited include the University’s Bachelor of Laws degree, the School of Tourism & Hospitality Management, and provisional accreditation for the Bachelor of Net-centric Computing (BNC) and Bachelor of Software Engineering (BSE) by the Australian Computer Society (ACS).
- After a very positive diagnostic report indicating that the University was ready to proceed, the University has now submitted its notification of intent to apply for WSCUC accreditation—this is for American accreditation.

- The Bachelor of Engineering will have a mock accreditation/evaluation visit early April to see how ready we are be for the actual visit later this year.
- Our University enrolments continued to grow strongly indicating continuing confidence in the quality of the University's programmes. We expect to end the year with enrolment increase of over 8 percent on current indications, taking our total enrolment to over 30,000.
- USP and other tertiary institutions in the Pacific have been challenged by our Governments and other stakeholders to expand access to higher education, and to expand this we are undertaking significant capital developments: – next year we will build a 450-bed hostel for Laucala, we have made significant investments in our regional campuses, such as Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Lautoka, RMI and others.
- We are making a major effort to assist our smaller member countries. Our new Kiribati campus is expected to be ready in August this year and we plan to extend the Tuvalu campus as soon as the Government provides additional land. We also plan to conduct our MBA programme in both Kiribati and Tuvalu in trimester 3 this year.
- In terms of new SMT appointments, last year we were delighted to welcome Dr. Masasso Paunga as the Vice-President Regional Campuses and Properties and Facilities and Dr. Dilawar Grewal as the Vice-President Administration. In January this year, we were delighted to welcome Professor Richard Coll as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Learning & Teaching and Student Services. These appointments have considerably strengthened our Senior Management and have positioned us well for continued growth and transformation for excellence. We have also been making very good appointments to our professoriate and staff in general.

Conclusions

Our efforts to maintain USP as the premier regional tertiary institution have received enormous goodwill and support from many quarters. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our member governments, development partners, and our friends for their continuous support. I also thank the University Council and its Committees, Senate and Senior Management, staff and students for supporting me in transforming and reforming USP from good to excellent on its way to being a great University. Our staff have been working very hard and embracing a lot of changes and I wish to make special acknowledgement of this.

I wish to assure our member governments that the University has strong foundations to successfully implement its Strategic Plan for transforming USP into an excellent university that is deeply engaged and makes demonstrable contributions to the development of our member countries development.

Mr Chancellor Sir, ladies and gentlemen, a final word to the graduates–

I congratulate you all and wish you the very best in your endeavours. Much is expected of you; Make USP proud by your strong, innovative, ethical and excellent contributions.

Vinaka Vakalevu; Dhanyabad; Thank you.