

ADDRESS BY
ACTING VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT, DR GIULIO PAUNGA
AT THE VIRTUAL CONFERENCE OF THE PACIFIC GIS AND REMOTE SENSING
COUNCIL
TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2021, 9.00AM
JAPAN-ICT VIDEO CONFERENCE ROOM, USP LAUCALA CAMPUS, SUVA

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

- Pacific Island Heads of Organisations;
- Heads of Organisations and Regional Organisations;
- Members of the Diplomatic Corp;
- Members of the Pacific GIS and Remote Sensing Council;
- Conference Participants;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

A Very Good Morning and Warm Pacific Greetings to you all!

WELCOME

May I offer you all belated New Year's greetings

This Pacific Islands GIS and Remote Sensing User Conference as an online intermediate conference is *the* "Pacific Island Earth Observation Conference" and I am proud and honoured to present some remarks before I declare it open.

TALKING POINTS

Here in the Pacific today, this meeting gives us yet another feather in our cap to be immensely proud of, as *the* only conference on Earth Observation, with so many participants from Pacific Island Countries, as well as from around the globe.

While we may be joining heads and thoughts across our Blue Pacific Continent and the wider world virtually, I am very confident that your Conference will still be as rich and impactful, as it has always been from the genesis of your historical forums way back in the year 1998.

Last year on 24 July 2020, USP was very honoured to have signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* with your Pacific GIS and Remote Sensing Council.

Our institutions have common stakeholders in the GIS and Remote Sensing user community, within the Large Ocean States of our Pacific Island Countries.

While it may seem that more cutting-edge earth observation applications are monopolized by organisations and companies outside the Pacific, our common goal is to combat the tyranny of distance, to strengthen and enhance our expertise through collaboration and knowledge sharing as Pacific users of these same technologies.

We too can offer the world our Pacific flavour in this field.

As you connect from your Island and Global homes, we are all aware that Pacific Island states are isolated and are thin on the ground in terms of specialists in the field of Earth Observations.

Nonetheless there has never been a more opportune time such as this period of uncertainty from the COVID-19 pandemic, for you to reinvigorate the strength of GIS and Remote Sensing as I understand happened all over the world for the tracking of COVID-19 infection rates and contact tracing.

Given that vaccines are to be made available soon, the role of GIS and Remote Sensing technology and expertise will be key in the logistical roll-out, all over the Pacific.

Remote sensing technology and expertise is also critical in the Pacific for natural resource management on land and sea, for disaster assessments and relief efforts, for climate change adaptation and mitigation, for agricultural planning and development, for infrastructural planning, and the list goes on and on.

That is why USP is very keen to partner with the Council to create and enhance the applications in the countries as well as ensuring that our USP Member Countries continue to have highly qualified graduates in this very critical industry of Earth Observation.

USP has a network beyond the institutional network of regional organisations and that is because we are owned by 12 Pacific Island Governments. We have our own cable and antenna link to the 12 USP Member Countries. While we are sitting here and looping into the internet, participants in the 12 USP Member Countries are also looping in from wherever they are, and according to the varying days and times that we operate under.

CONCLUSION

USP has historically been a supporter of your annual Conference, and as you know we offer the USP facility for free while the Conference was managed by SOPAC or later SPC. But cementing our partnership further by our MoU solidifies this support.

Through your Council's conference we are proud and honoured that we can also enhance our links to global institutions like ISPRS and NASA, as well as to satellite data software and hardware companies, and also to other renowned universities whose scientists will present during the Conference.

Your Conference is an intermediate one because our closed borders prevent face-to-face engagement, however we remain hopeful that you will be able to meet up in Vanuatu this coming November and be hosted by the Government of Vanuatu. Our USP Vanuatu Emalus Campus is also ready to offer its facilities and support, because of our MoU with your Council.

I wish you all well as you deliberate over the coming days, and I have much pleasure in declaring your Conference, open.