

**ADDRESS BY THE
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT PROFESSOR RAJESH CHANDRA AT THE
OPENING OF THE NEW USP KIRIBATI CAMPUS AT TEAORAEREKE, SOUTH
TARAWA, KIRIBATI, TUESDAY 3RD NOVEMBER 2015**

Your Excellency, President Anote Tong and Madam Meme Tong
Minister for Education, Honourable Maere Tekanene
Honourable Ministers
Honourable Members of Parliament
Acting Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council, Ms Fekita Utoikamanu
Traditional Landowners of the Campus site here at Teaoraereke
Ms Emma Veve, Director Urban, Social Development and Public Management Division in
the Pacific Department of ADB and members of the ADB team
Representatives of our Development Partners
USP senior staff from Laucala Campus
Director, staff and students of the USP Kiribati Campus
Representatives of Fortech Construction Ltd
Representatives of the design engineering and services firms
Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kam na Mauri, bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you.

On behalf of The University of the South Pacific, I warmly welcome you all to the official opening ceremony of USP's new campus here in Kiribati.

This is indeed a most special occasion and an occasion of celebration for the Government and people of Kiribati and the University.

The new campus demonstrates the firm commitment of the Government of Kiribati and USP to working together for the development of this country's education system.

Furthermore, we are deeply honoured by the presence of His Excellency President Anote Tong, who will shortly be officially opening this new campus.

His Excellency has not only been a strong and leading global advocate for awareness on climate change but he is also a champion in promoting higher education and the need for up-skilling the youths and women of Kiribati.

Excellency, we thank you for continuing to remind us and quietly prodding USP over the years of the need for a new and expanded campus here in Kiribati.

We in USP are extremely pleased that prior to the end of your presidency, we have managed to successfully fulfil your vision. Once again, we acknowledge your untiring commitment and efforts towards helping us get this project completed at last.

The road towards achieving today's feat has not been easy. In fact, it has been a long and

testing journey. Last year in July, we had marked the ground-breaking ceremony and today, some 16 months later, we are witnessing the fruition of that project.

Throughout this journey, the Government of Kiribati has continually lent its unwavering support for the project. USP shares a strong relationship with the governments and people of its 12 member countries, amongst which, Kiribati is a valued partner. Kiribati has the fourth largest enrolment of our 12 member countries.

The valuable contribution and advice given by the USP Kiribati Campus Advisory Committee and the Government Taskforce specifically set up to facilitate the progress of the new campus project have been very much instrumental in addressing issues and overcoming problems that may have arisen over the past year or so and we would like to gratefully acknowledge their immense contribution to the completion of this project.

I would also like to acknowledge and express my sincere appreciation to the Asian Development Bank that provided a soft loan of US \$3.6m for the construction of the new campus.

Without this financial assistance, it would not have been possible to fulfil the dreams of the government leadership here in Kiribati, or meet the expectations of parents and the aspirations of the youths of this country for a new campus providing quality higher education.

Let me add that the University was indeed honoured by the visit of ADB President, His Excellency Takehiko Nakao to the Laucala Campus in August this year. President Takehiko Nakao had commended USP for being a great example of Pacific regionalism and had expressed his pleasure that *“ADB has been able to work closely with USP, including efforts to improve campuses in Kiribati and Solomon Islands.”*

As we celebrate the opening of this new campus, let me say that we have come a long way. A USP Centre was first opened in Kiribati in 1976 with the appointment of a resident Centre Director who operated out of a one-room office at the government-run King George V School.

In 1978, the Centre moved to its current location here at Teaoaraereke, South Tarawa. With the continued steady growth in student numbers, the Kiribati Centre was finally designated a USP Campus in 2006.

Ladies and Gentlemen, USP’s decision to invest in a new campus here in Kiribati has come about after careful consideration by management and the USP Council.

This decision has actually emerged from our current Strategic Plan (2013-2018). One of the seven priority areas in this Strategic Plan is the need for greater and enhanced Regional and Community Engagement.

A new and expanded campus that we see in front of us today is one aspect of the work being done in this Priority Area. This priority, and the other six (6) Priority Areas of our Strategic Plan, are all focused on our drive towards transforming USP from a good to an excellent university.

Over the years, the Kiribati campus has been growing. We have grown from just a handful of students to around 761 students who are currently enrolled at this campus.

Today, there are around 1366 i-Kiribati students studying at USP, of which, 569 students study at the Laucala Campus. The rapidly increasing number of students over the years is a clear reflection that youths in Kiribati continue to be motivated to participate in higher education.

The Government of Kiribati, together with USP, believes that providing access to quality and relevant education is crucial for the future stability of Kiribati. This new and enlarged campus in Kiribati will, hopefully, help address this demand for higher education over the long term and also will be a practical solution for addressing climate change issues.

The new 1,764 square metre campus building, excluding an additional 882 square metres on the currently vacant ground floor, will feature four (4) modern classrooms, student services and administration facilities, lecture theatre, video-conference room, computer and science labs and a library.

We are particularly looking forward to providing new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment to improve connectivity to other campuses and also to facilitate the provision of expanded, faster and more reliable ICT-based learning courses, especially distance and flexible learning (DFL) courses.

Another feature of the new campus will be the inclusion of the Atoll Research Centre, a very critical and important research facility as we look to the future. His Excellency had played a major role in this centre in its previous set-up when he was briefly part of USP, prior to entering politics.

As is the case with other campuses, USP will look at providing more academic staff to teach at the new campus when it becomes fully operational in Semester 1 of 2016. This will certainly benefit students who can engage with teaching staff directly in class and receive timely assistance and advice on study matters.

One of the main aims of the development of the new campus is to cut the costs of sending students from here to Laucala. From next year, students wishing to do BEd. Primary and BEd. Secondary in Language and Literature will no longer have to go to Laucala. We will expand this face-to-face and cohort based teaching in the following years.

We will also provide cohort-based MBA teaching as well as other targeted programmes for cohort delivery here. Your Excellency, we will work hard to ensure that as many students as possible study at this campus with its modern facilities.

In addition to this, many more students will be able to undertake tertiary studies at the Foundation, Certificate, Diploma and Degree levels than previously and a lot more students will also be able to complete their study programmes and courses without having to travel to the main Laucala campus in Fiji.

We are all in agreement that Kiribati needs good quality graduates who can make positive contributions towards the development of the country. USP has a proven track record in this regard. We have produced over 44,000 alumni, many of whom serve as leaders in their respective areas of expertise in the region and beyond.

We hope to continue providing appropriately qualified and up-skilled human resource to meet the needs of Kiribati and our other member countries in the region.

Moving forward, USP hopes to work with the Government and people of Kiribati in ensuring that the University continues to meet their higher education needs. We will examine the building of student accommodation as well as the establishment of a Centre in Christmas Island. We have been in discussions with the Government on these developments.

While the new campus will not solve all of the challenges facing Kiribati's education sector, I am still confident that it will surely help train generations of young people who will be important for the future of Kiribati, and assist in the strengthening of education and research in this country.

Kam rab'a, vinaka vakalevu, thank you.