

**SPEECH BY
THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION,
PROFESSOR DERRICK ARMSTRONG FOR THE GRADUATION CEREMONY OF
REPUBLIC OF MARSHALL ISLANDS CAMPUS ON THE 2 OCTOBER 2018,
MARSHALL ISLANDS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council of The University of the South Pacific, Mr. Winston Thompson.
- Her Excellency Hilda C. Heine, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
- The Minister of Education, Honorable Wilbur Heine
- Chairman of the Council of Iroij and Traditional Leaders
- Honourable Ministers and Senior Officials of the Government;
- Excellences and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Director, USP RMI Campus, Mrs Irene Taafaki;
- Members of the Campus Advisory Council;
- Graduands and their families and friends;
- Members of staff and students;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

WELCOME AND CONGRATULATIONS

Welcome, Yokwe and a very good afternoon to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to join the Pro Chancellor/Honorable Minister for Education) in warmly welcoming you all to the University of the South Pacific's Marshal Island Campus Graduation for 2018.

This is a very special day as we come together to award graduands of The University of the South Pacific their Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees. The University plays a proud role in the region in providing education to students from our 12 member countries and supporting our member countries in building capacity in the form of future leaders, innovators and citizens of this region. Never before have the challenges that face Pacific Island countries been so great. In a world where we are at the front line in facing the existential threats of climate change, where leadership in public service, business and in the community demands new skills, authoritative and evidence-based solutions, as well as new ideas that demonstrate innovation whilst also connecting our vision, our actions and our contributions to the cultures and traditions that keep us grounded in our identities as the peoples of this sea of islands, the Pacific Ocean.

The University is grateful for the support it receives from the governments and people of the region and is proud of the graduates that have studied so hard and successfully that they might rise to the challenges that lie before them.

GRADUATION NUMBERS

Today we have 43 students receiving certificates, diplomas and degrees in this graduation. Of those graduating, 2 students are graduating in Foundation, 15 students are graduating from Pacific TAFE, 9 are graduating in Undergraduate Programmes, 1 student is graduating with a Postgraduate Certificate, 6 with Post Graduate Diplomas and 10 students are graduating in Masters, out of which 9 students are from the MBA programme and 1 student is graduating with Master of Education. 54% of those graduating today are women. And we have students from 4 countries graduating today.

TO THE GRADUANDS

I offer my warmest congratulations to the graduands. You have reached a major milestone today. The graduate experience and qualifications that you are taking with you today will help you increase the chance of lifelong success anywhere in the world.

Today, as you celebrate your hard work, sacrifice and perseverance, remember to thank those who have supported you in your journey, your parents & families, sponsors, lecturers and tutors without whose support you would not have reached this far.

SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS

The University continues its quest to improve its quality and reputation and we have a duty to ensure that you have the very best education that is possible, an education that has currency anywhere in the world but one that is rooted in the culture and needs of the Pacific. Our international standing is demonstrated by the 27 international accreditations and 15 international recognitions that the University has now achieved for its programmes. The accreditation of our programmes emphasises the quality of the education that USP is providing across all its campuses. It is a great credit to our staff who teach on these programmes and who work so hard to provide a relevant and stimulating education for our students. It is also a great credit to the students themselves. It shows how our students are achieving quality outcomes from their studies that are internationally recognized. So, I congratulate all of you graduating today for your contribution to the success of the University.

One very significant validation of the quality of our University, its systems, processes, programmes and outcomes has been the recent accreditation of the University by the WASC Senior Commission on Universities and Colleges. This means that USP is now amongst those American institutions that have been rigorously assessed as meeting stringent American standards. This is a very big boost to our international standing, and will enable our students to study and get jobs more easily, and strengthen our continuing efforts towards excellence.

You all graduating today, therefore, can be proud of your qualifications and confident of their international standing.

The opportunity to study within the culture of the Pacific Islands is also an incredibly important one. We want our education not only to be internationally excellent but also relevant to the needs and priorities of our own region. As we go forward we also want to

expand opportunities to include more international students in the University so that we can both broaden understanding of the Pacific and encourage the benefits of cross cultural learning. This includes creating more opportunities for our students to have an experience of studying abroad whilst undertaking their degrees at USP.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF RMI CAMPUS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS.

The Marshall Islands Campus has achieved some remarkable outcomes and is without doubt a flagship for the University. Some individual achievements are worthy of special note:

1. This year, Ellen Milne is a Gold Medalist for her strong performance as an MBA student. This is the first Gold Medal awarded to a student from the RMI

2. Among the major achievements by staff from Campus

- a. Five staff from the RMI Campus graduate this year as follows:
- b. Kepu Aholelei (RMI-USP Geography) – Post Graduate Diploma in Climate Change
- c. Kimber Rilometo (Campus Life) – Bachelor of Commerce
- d. Mieso Mista (SAS Staff) – Diploma in Accounting (Level 5)
- e. Kaumavae Mafileo – Diploma in Accounting
- f. Solomon Torejak – Certificate in Foundation Studies
- g. Daisy Momotaro, Honorable Senator from Jaluit – receiving an MBA

3. Other major achievements include:

- a. The achievement of WSCUC ACCREDITATION which I have already mentioned
- b. The establishment of the Micronesian Center for Sustainable Transport – an MOU between the RMI government and USP will be signed during my visit to Majuro to confirm this joint initiative. The Director has now been appointed and the Center's Research Associate is in place. MCST will engage in research and innovation, policy assistance and capacity building in sustainable transport, especially in shipping.
- c. The 'Improving the Quality in Basic Education' Project (IQBE) – the MI Campus will make a major contribution to this five-year project – in Principal Leadership Development, Classroom Assessment and Early Childhood Education.

4. The campus also has some significant future development plans which in themselves express the confidence that we have in the role of the Campus within the University and its contribution to the Marshall Islands. These include the completion of the renovation for the remaining two buildings. USP is committed to working with the RMI Government and donor partners on realizing the potential of the Marshall Islands Campus.

50TH ANNIVERSARY PREPARATIONS

This year, as you know, is USP's 50th Anniversary and more than 30 of the planned 50 events have been held so far, with the rest of the planned events to follow in the coming weeks till the end of the year. Each of the campuses of USP in the region has its 'moment to shine' as it celebrates the achievements of the campus and the University. I can

certainly say with great confidence that the Marshall Islands campus is shining brightly in the USP Galaxy.

THANKS AND APPRECIATION

Before I close, there are some people I would like to acknowledge and thank. I wish to thank the Marshall Island Government for their continuous support. The Marshall Islands government has had the vision to invest in the future of the country through its investment in education and in particular the education of its young people. USP is very proud to be a partner of the Marshall Islands government and people in helping to deliver this vision both through our work in education. Also in research, the partnership between USP and the MI is of considerable importance, for example through the Micronesian Centre for Sustainable Transport which is already doing groundbreaking work and informing a key area of policy where there Marshallese government and people have shown such strong international leadership over many years.

I also thank the staff from Student Administrative Services who work so hard in supporting our students and in ensuring the success of the graduations that mark such an important moment in the lives of our students, their families and friends.

The artistes from the Oceania Dance Theatre and Pasifika Voices have worked with our Marshallese student choir to make the occasion of this graduation a most memorable one and over the last few days I have been witness to the professionalism and hard work that has been shown to help make this graduation very special and also through this partnership to leave behind not only a legacy in the talent we see here today from our artistes, but also an expanded USP family sharing and interchanging the magnificent experience of Pacific music, dance and culture.

I particularly wish to acknowledge Dr Irene Taafaki and her staff at the USP Marshall Islands Campus who have done an excellent job in putting on this graduation together. Their work leading to this graduation and in supporting such wonderful students throughout their education has shown just what a jewel in the crown the regional campuses are to USP. Nowhere is this better illustrated than here in the Marshall Islands.

A FINAL WORD

Pro-Chancellor, Madam President, Honourable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, a final word to the graduands – CONGRATULATIONS once again. Having met so many of you this week and seen first-hand your achievements I am confident that you will become great leaders and contributors; that each and every one of you will make your country proud, just as now, today, I can truly say, you fill your university with pride in your achievements.

Kommol Tata, Thank you and God Bless.