



**SPEECH BY THE
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT, PROFESSOR RAJESH CHANDRA
AT THE USP LAUCALA GRADUATION CEREMONY HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2018
(FSTE & PTAFE)
USP LAUCALA CAMPUS, FIJI**

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Chancellor, the President of the Republic of Kiribati, His Excellency Taneti Maamau and First Lady Teiraeng Maamau;
- 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;
- Graduands, their families and friends;
- Members of staff and students;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

2. WELCOME AND CONGRATULATIONS

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 second Laucala Campus Graduation ceremony for 2018.

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

Due to the large numbers, the graduation ceremony is being held over 2 days and in 3 sessions. Today's graduation ceremony will have students from the Faculty of Science, Technology and Environment and from Pacific Technical and Further Education (Pacific TAFE) graduating in this session. Students from the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education will graduate in the second session this afternoon while students from the Faculty of Business and Economics will graduate in tomorrow's ceremony.

3. GRADUATION NUMBERS

We have 1321 students receiving certificates, diplomas and degrees in this round of graduation at Laucala. This is the highest number for September graduations in Laucala and is 11% more than last year. Since its establishment, the University has issued close to 60,000 qualifications, testifying to its foundational role in the tertiary education of our member countries and in their development as noted by many leaders and ministers.

Of those graduating, 39% are from the Faculty of Business and Economics, 15% are from the Faculty of Science, Technology and Environment, 18% are from the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education and 28% are from Pacific TAFE. 64% of those graduating are women. 28 % will graduate from Pacific TAFE with sub-degree and pathways qualifications, 42% of students will graduate from undergraduate programmes (certificates, Diplomas and Degrees), 20% will receive postgraduate certificates and diplomas, 9% will graduate with Master's Degree. Six students are graduating with PhD. Students from 18 countries are graduating today, including 10 non-member countries, testifying to the growing international profile and attraction of USP.

4. TO THE GRADUANDS

To our graduates, I congratulate you heartily. You have reached a major milestone today. The graduate experience and qualifications that you will go away with 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.

5. SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS

USP is in the last year of its current Strategic Plan and the University has already achieved 82 percent of what it set out to achieve. The new Strategic Plan for 2019 – 2024 is being finalized with the final draft to be presented to the November Council for its consideration and approval.

The University continues its quest to improve its quality and reputation through international accreditations of its programmes. We have now achieved a total number of 27 international accreditations and 15 international recognitions exceeding the Strategic Plan KPIs.

In a very significant validation of our quality system, we have now been accredited by the WASC Senior Commission on Universities and Colleges for six years. 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 in other countries, while helping the University recruit staff more easily and recruit more international students who bring significant income to the University.

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

6. ACHIEVEMENTS OF USP AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

My remarks here only cover FSTE and Pacific TAFE as only their students are graduating this morning.

6.1 Some of our students and staff have shown remarkable achievements and received wide recognition.

Faculty of Science, Technology and Environment

Recently the Faculty and the mLearning team launched 4 Apps. The USP mobile App is an informative App for staff, students and visitors and covers news, exam and course timetables, amongst other things. The USP Campus Mapp App is designed to help students, staff and visitors find places on campus easily. The USP Events App is a collaborative and interactive tool for event organizers and participants. The AAGO is a web application to get the Student Academic Services (SAS) registration forms online for easy approval and to ensure appropriate approval channel is followed in processing these forms.

The Asian Development Bank engaged with KPMG Singapore in conjunction with KPMG Fiji to organize an innovation challenge, a hackathon, known as Smart City Challenge. We had five teams representing USP. Team The Change Makers scooped the first prize while team Luminous won the third prize. The team Change Makers have been pre-approved for the Fijian Government's Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES).

FSTE partnered with FIRST Global Higher Education Network (USA) to mentor high school students to attend the fully-funded First Global Robotics Competition in Mexico City, during 15th -18th of August this year.

The School of Engineering and Physics received 2 Innovation patents grant by IP Australia this year. The "Footsteps waste energy harvesting system using hydro generator" and "An emi sensor for non-destructive corrosion estimation in concrete". The inventors are Dr. Kabir, Islam and Professor Cirrincione and students Aneesh Amitesh Chand, Kushal Aniket Prasad, Shaymol Chandra, Deo Rishey Narayan and Aisake Cakacaka.

6.2 The University of the South Pacific has been working in a number of areas to strengthen and improve learning, teaching, research and its services to students.

FACULTY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

With the development of the new Campus in the Solomon Islands (SI), the SI Government and USP have agreed to finalize the Bachelor of Public Health Programme as the anchor programme at the new campus. The programme will be developed under the new School of Public Health which will fall under the Faculty of science, Technology and Environment. The programme will be offered from Semester 1, 2020.

Our School of Engineering (SEP) plans to offer a new programme in Civil Engineering at the Laucala Campus focusing on three crucial areas of Civil Engineering, namely Water Infrastructure, Geotechnical Engineering and Natural Disaster Resilience. The programme is being developed involving wide consultations as per our approved procedures for the consideration of the USP Council in November.

The Faculty is also looking into providing its Information Systems programme in two streams, Data Analytics and Business Information Systems.

The South Pacific Region's first ever Bioprospecting Samples Database (BSD) created by The University of the South Pacific's (USP) Institute of Applied Science (IAS) was jointly launched at the Pearl Resort on 20 July 2018.

The Institute of Marine Resources Secured EDF 11 funding of 5.7m EUR under the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) to address regional Capacity Building in the fisheries sector over 4.5 years. It has also Implemented (with partners) two SRT projects: Mapping Social Ecological Coral Reef Systems in Fiji (MASCREF) and Keeping balance: the status and importance of seagrass ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean scape.

In the area of Marine Science, the school has seen an increase of nearly 100% in the number of post graduate students since 2013. The School has multiplied its research output in ranked publications five times from 2013 to 2018. The Marine Collection Unit of The University of the South Pacific's (USP) School of Marine Studies (SMS) has been formally registered with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), an open-data platform that provides biodiversity data on all types of animals and plants from around the world. USP is now part of an international network of 1,130 biodiversity data publishers that include the Smithsonian Institution in the US and the Natural History Museum in London.

Two programmes of the Faculty have recently received provisional accreditation – the Bachelor of Software Engineering and Bachelor of Networks and Security from the Australian Computer Society.

Pacific TAFE

This year Pacific TAFE received accreditations for its 20 short courses offered by Workforce Development Training Unit from Continuing Professional Development UK. Work is currently in progress for 80 more short courses by the end of this year.

Pacific TAFE also received recognition for three foundation programmes by Universities NZ this year and an additional three national accreditations from Fiji Higher Education Commission. This takes our National/ FHEC accreditations to a total of 19.

USP Pacific TAFE's College of Science, Technology and Environment began offering Certificate IV in Resilience (Climate Change Adaptation & Disaster Risk Reduction) for the first time in June. This Certificate was developed by EU and PacTVET.

Pacific TAFE will begin offering Certificate IV in Cyber Security later this year on a Cohort basis.

GENERAL

First year students who have paid their fees in full at the beginning of the semester receive tablets to allow them to access their course materials from anywhere on campus and do not have to wait for computers in the labs. This is supported by increase in Wi-Fi access around the campuses.

As of May this year the number of undergraduate programmes offered in flexible mode is 36 which is more than 60% of the undergraduate programmes offered in USP while 14

programmes or 30% are fully online. By 2020, a total of 27 undergraduate programmes are targeted to be provided in the online mode.

The University has planned a number of major projects. One of the major developments, which is currently in progress is the construction of the new road entrance from the Nasese end which will become the main vehicle entrance to USP. This will help ease traffic around the current road entrance and will also help align development around that area.

7. 50TH ANNIVERSARY PREPARATIONS

We are now more than three-quarters of the way in celebrating our 50th Anniversary. The official launch of the Anniversary was held on 5th February. 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.

8. MY FINAL GRADUATION ADDRESS IN LAUCALA

This is the last time that I present a report to the Laucala graduation ceremony as I will retire at the end of the year. As I complete almost 39 years of service to USP—of which almost a quarter century has been spent in the Vice-Chancellor's Office in various roles and ten and half years as the Vice-Chancellor and President—I wish to record my appreciation to the Government and people of Fiji and all the other member governments and the people of the Pacific. I have been privileged to lead the University for the last decade and to have led the development of three strategic plans of the total of only five that the University has ever had.

This decade has been a decade of real transformation of the University into an internationally recognized and respected institution embedded strongly in the needs and aspirations of our member countries, and delivering exceptional value to our stakeholders. I am particularly proud of having turned the University around from its financial difficulties and having grown its reputation significantly moving from no international professional accreditations in 2008 to 27 now, 15 international recognitions and accreditation from the Western Senior Commission on Universities and Colleges of the US.

I will leave with fond memories of the University, its staff and students and the boldness of all the member countries in pursuing excellence in Education and Excellence through Education. I wish the University well in maintaining its excellent achievements and momentum and lifting its performance, reputation and value to the member countries and stakeholders even higher in the future.

9. THANKS AND APPRECIATION

I wish to thank USP's 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 their continued support towards transforming and reforming USP from a good to an excellent University. I wish to acknowledge the staff of the University who have been working hard towards the goal of

excellence. I extend my sincere gratitude to the Pro Chancellor and Chair of Council, Mr. Winston Thompson for his leadership of the university and for his support and guidance to me and wish him well as he takes the governance of the university forward with the transition in leadership.

10. A FINAL WORD

Chancellor Sir, ladies and gentlemen, a final word to the graduands – CONGRATULATIONS once again. I have every confidence that every one of you will excel in your life and make your families, your country, and all of us proud.

Vinaka Vakalevu, Dhanyavaad; Thank you and God Bless.