

**SPEECH BY THE
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT, PROFESSOR BY RAJESH CHANDRA
AT THE KIRIBATI GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR 2018 HELD AT THE
KIRIBATI CAMPUS, TARAWA, KIRIBATI**

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Chancellor, the President of the Republic of Kiribati, His Excellency Honourable Taneti Maamau and First Lady Teiraeng Maamau;
- The Pro Chancellor and Chair of Council of The University of the South Pacific, Mr. Winston Thompson;
- Honourable Speaker, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and members of the Government;
- His Lordship Paul Mea;
- Honourable Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary;
- Minister of Education and Council member, Honourable David Collins;
- Sir Ieremia Tabai, former President of the Republic of Kiribati, former Pro Chancellor, and former Chancellor of USP;
- Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Heads and Representatives of International and Regional Organisations;
- Members of Council, Senate and their Committees;
- The Director, USP Kiribati Campus, Dr. Takuia Uakeia;
- Former Director of the Campus, Dr. Ueantabo McKenzie
- Chairman and members of the Kiribati Campus Advisory Committee;
- Members of staff and students;
- USP Alumni;
- Graduands, their families and friends;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

2. WELCOME AND CONGRATULATIONS

Welcome, Kam na bane ni mauri 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 Kiribati Campus Graduation ceremony for 2018.

I would like to specially welcome our newly installed 25th Chancellor, His Excellency Honourable Taneti Maamau, and our alumnus, to this very important occasion. Thank you Sir, for gracing this occasion. A very warm welcome also to the graduands.

It is wonderful to have this graduation ceremony at the Kiribati Campus, which is in the week of the Campus's 50th Anniversary moment to shine. This week gives the opportunity for the Kiribati campus to showcase itself to the people of Kiribati and celebrate its contributions to the success of its people and the Pacific.

3. GRADUATION NUMBERS

We have 98 students receiving certificates, Diplomas and Degrees today. This is the 6th graduation at this Campus. The last graduation was held in Kiribati in 2015 where only 28 i-Kiribati students graduated. Today, 3 years later, the number of i-Kiribati students graduating is more than 3 times that number. This is great testimony to the priority the Government of Kiribati has been placing on educating and skilling its major resource, its people.

Of those graduating today, 35% are males and 65% are females. Although females are around 50.4% of the total population of Kiribati, they seem to be doing exceptionally well in the area of tertiary education which is very encouraging. 47% of those graduating are from Undergraduate programmes, 24% are from Post Graduate programmes, 28% from PacificTAFE programmes while 1 student is graduating with Masters qualification. 93 students are from Kiribati while 5 students are from Fiji.

4. TO THE GRADUANDS

To our graduates, I congratulate you for reaching this major milestone in your life that creates a strong foundation for life-long success in your country or anywhere you go in the world. Your achievements are all the more remarkable because of the many more hurdles you face compared with students from other countries. Your qualifications today should give you the confidence that despite being from a less advantaged country—albeit one of the largest ocean states—you are as good as anybody else and you can achieve anything you set your mind on.

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.

Since the establishment of the University to 2017, 1465 i-Kiribati people have graduated from USP. Although about three-quarters of these received undergraduate qualifications, nearly a quarter received post-graduate qualifications, and 4 have received PhD degrees.

These graduates have gone on to make a huge contribution to the development of Kiribati and internationally. We are extremely proud that our 25th Chancellor and President is our alumnus. Another alumnus served as the President, while another President was a former member of USP staff.

Kiribati has also contributed significantly to the governance of USP, having provided three Chancellors (Sir Ieremia Tabai: 1983–1986 and His Excellency former President Anote Tong: 2007–2008) and our current 25th Chancellor, His Excellency Honourable President Taneti Maamau.

Kiribati has also provided one Pro Chancellor (Sir Ieremia Tabai 1991–1997), and i-Kiribati members of our staff who have excellent reputation. Therefore, Kiribati has made a strong contribution to the University and can legitimately take some of the credit for the achievements of the University.

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 in the process of being finalized with the final draft to be considered and approved at the November Council.

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 SP 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 KIRIBATI CAMPUS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The Kiribati Campus has shown impressive growth in enrolment, especially after the completion of the new campus building. The average growth rate by headcount enrollments have increased by 7.9 percent over the last 5 years while in 2017 growth alone increased by 36.1 percent reflecting a major increase in in-country cohort-based training. Since the completion of the new building, six cohorts have been arranged covering: MBA, Bachelor of Education Primary, Diploma in Accounting, Certificate in Project Management, Certificate in Early Childhood and Care, and Certificate in Justice. Of these, BEd Primary, Certificate in Project Management and Postgraduate Diploma cohorts are graduating today—a very major achievement.

KIRIBATI STUDENTS, STAFF AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Some wonderful achievements of Kiribati students include top awards at the March Laucala Graduation this year for Tiaon Aukitino & Buriata Eti Tofinga. Tiaon Aukitino received a Gold Medal and the Fosters Group Pacific Ltd and Faculty of Science, Technology & Environment Prize for the most outstanding Master of Science thesis. Buriata Eti Tofinga was awarded Gold Medal and the Westpac Bank and Faculty of Arts, Law & Education Prizes for the most outstanding PhD graduate (shared award).

This high level of achievement should encourage all Kiribati students to strive even harder as each and everyone one of them can be a gold medal winner; each one can climb the highest peak of achievement; and each one has the capability to achieve anything they set their mind to.

The staff of Kiribati Campus have also been upgrading themselves in order to provide increased quality of service to the students of the USP Kiribati Campus. Two members of staff have recently graduated with Master of Education, another with the Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching while one is pursuing his Master of Science education.

Student learning support will be further enhanced from the first semester of 2019 with the appointment of a Student Learning Specialist that should help more students pass their courses, achieve better grades and complete their programmes in a shorter time. From Semester 2, 2018 online registration has been enforced in order to ensure more efficient provision of services to the students. This is part of the University's effort to transform its processes to take more advantage of the digital revolution—and provide faster and more efficient and friendly services to students and staff.

Senior staff of the campus are also sought after by the Government and the Community as members of interview panels and leadership and project committees and USP is proud that it is able to contribute externally as well. As we appoint more academic staff at the campus to increase in-country provision of complete programmes, this broader contribution will increase further.

RESEARCH

In the area of research, the Kiribati campus is working with Korea International Cooperation Agency, Korea Research Institute of Ships & Ocean Engineering and the Pacific Community for the feasibility study of multi-purpose use of discharged water from OTEC Plant (use of ocean deep thermal water) in Kiribati. The aim is to develop an alternative power source - thermal power, assist in the provision of fresh water by the construction of water desalination plant, and create bi-products that can be beneficial and the trialing of the creation of small-scale aquaponics food production.

There are also plans to collaborate with the Micronesian Centre for Sustainable Transportation and to set a USP center on Christmas Island to expand our offerings in Kiribati and to support the establishment of the project on Kiritimati Equatorial Ionospheric Observatory Center (KEIO). It is a collaborative project between USP (using Kiribati USP center) and the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) of USA with the aim to investigate ionospheric disturbances which are detrimental to High Frequency and satellite communication and satellite-based navigation systems. Professor Sushil Kumar is the principal researcher in the project.

CCE

The Continuing and Community Education (CCE) Unit of the Kiribati Campus is working collaboratively with Pacific TAFE Unit to offer programmes in Early Childhood and Care—a critically important qualification to improve educational outcomes. This also align with the recently approved bill for the establishment and provision of a compulsory early education in the nation.

OTHER USP ACHIEVEMENTS

The University has continued its quest to provide the most modern pedagogies to our students and to harness cutting-edge, ICT leveraged learning for our students. After successfully establishing the Lecture Capture System last year, the full implementation was done from first semester this year. Lecture capture keeps recordings of lectures for students who can access it anytime. This initiative is part of the University's continuous efforts to seek new ways of supporting and strengthening learning at USP.

One indication of the likely long-term impact of the lecture capture system is given by the fact that we had about 15 Kiribati EFTS in 2016, but this jumped to 114 in 2017. Although more work needs to be done to establish its full impact, we are confident that it will have a revolutionary effect on increasing the access of regional campuses and students to higher education.

Additionally, the learning and management backbone of USP, the USPNet is being totally renovated through a grant of about NZ\$6 million, which will see all the regional satellite dishes, replaced, and major upgrades made to other hardware and software to make USPNET a truly 21st century learning tool. This is the New Zealand Government's gift to USP for its 50th anniversary, for which we are very grateful.

7. 50TH ANNIVERSARY

This year, the University celebrates its 50th Anniversary and I invite you all to continue to be part of this historic event for the University and the region.

This week also marked the Kiribati Campus's moment to shine as part of the 50th Anniversary Celebration with all the wonderful events organized in recognition of the contribution of the Kiribati Government and its people towards the success of the University.

8. MY FINAL GRADUATION ADDRESS IN KIRIBATI

This is the last time that I present a report to the Kiribati 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 Kiribati. I have been privileged to lead the development of three strategic plans of the total of only five that the University has ever had, and to lead the proposal to the ADB that led not only to the building of our new campus in Kiribati, but introduced for the first time the idea of soft loan financing in the overall funding of the University.

I will leave with fond memories of Kiribati, its people, and an admiration of the boldness of the governments of Kiribati in taking strong positions internationally to protect their people and country. It was because of its bold nature that when we sought guarantees from member countries relating to the ADB project, Kiribati immediately said yes to it and it facilitated everything that was required of the

Government. I will always remain a friend of Kiribati and wish our campus here, the government and people of Kiribati, and USP the best in its quest to become even higher quality and innovative institution, even more value-adding to its member countries, and a beacon of hope and inspiration for 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. Special acknowledgement needs to be made to the staff of the Kiribati Campus who have been working hard towards the goal of excellence.

10. A FINAL WORD

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

Kam beti rabba; Thank you and God Bless.