

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, HON MISA TELEFONI**  
**AT THE OPENING OF UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC'S**  
**CULTURAL NIGHT – 25 AUGUST 2006**

It is a real privilege for me to be asked to open your Cultural Celebration tonight.

- |     |                  |   |                   |
|-----|------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1.  | Cook Islands     | : | Kia Orana         |
| 2.  | Fiji             | : | Bula Vinaka       |
| 3.  | Kiribati         | : | Mauri             |
| 4.  | Niue             | : | Fakalofa Lahi Atu |
| 5.  | Papua New Guinea | : | Halo True         |
| 6.  | Solomons         | : | Halo long iufela  |
| 7.  | Tahiti           | : | Ia Orana          |
| 8.  | tonga            | : | Malo lelei        |
| 9.  | Tuvalu           | : | Talofa            |
| 10. | Samoa            | : | Talofa lava       |

**“Maturity is not directly learned in the lecture rooms or laboratories of the University. It is learned and developed in the classroom of the world outside. Maturity means recognizing that you exist in an inequitable community of people, with wide disparities of opportunities, of incomes, of privileges and of power, or access to resources. Maturity recognizes your privileged situation within that community, and enables you to temper all decisions you make. We are all here in this world to serve.”**

Those regrettably, are not my words. They are taken from the last graduating address of the University of the South Pacific's late, great Vice-Chancellor SAVENACA SIWATIBAU – better known to us all, as “SIWA”. Siwa's words reflect not only his great intellect, but his humility!

Siwa passed away, on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2003, in Christchurch New Zealand. He was not only the highest acclaimed economist in the region, he has been described by Siteveni Halapua of the East-West Centre in Honolulu this way:

**“Siwa was one of the most highly respected leaders of our era. His commitment to all Pacific Islanders, and his personal rectitude, serve as a model that all of us, should attempt to emulate. The imprint of his legacy across the Pacific islands region will be felt for generations to come.”**

I reflected on the truth of Siwa's words on the inequalities of the world we live in when World Bank President James Wolfensohn told us in Dubai in 2003 that he feared for a world where Japan subsidises each cow by US\$6 per day, Europe and the United States by US\$3 per day, and 2 billion people in this world have to try and survive on US\$2 per day! No wonder the Doha Round Trade Talks have broken down, people over animals! Japan pays US\$6 per day for its cows, and 2 billion people survive on less than US\$2 per day!

Siwa called this process “maturity”. I call it self-awareness – a process of self discovery that leads to a deeper understanding of not only your place in society, but of yourself. This process of self-awareness is most important for you the USP Alafua Student Body of 2006, for you must understand where your culture and traditions, your mix in with your academic studies, and how they all fit in to the scheme of who you really are. What we call in Samoa, your Tofa.

There is no English word to properly describe the deep meaning of "Tofa". The closest word in "psyche". The main component parts of your "psyche". How would you answer me today, if I asked you the question: "Who are you?"

If you bear with me, I shall reiterate a theme I have illustrated before, but is worthy of repetition, in this context.

Let me use my own person as an illustration of my point.

- When I am one of the delegates to the Methodist Conference, I answer the question: "Who are you? "I am a Methodist".
- If I am attending Parliament, or a Cabinet meeting. I answer the question: "Who are you?" "I am Deputy Prime Minister.
- If I am attending the AGM of the Society of Accountants. I answer the question: "Who are you? "I am a Certified Public Accountant, (CPA)".
- If I appear at the AGM of the Law Society, I answer the question: "Who are you" "I am a Lawyer, an attorney at law".
- If I attend a meeting in Falelatai, I answer the question: Who are you? " I am Misa, a matai from Falelatai".

There is only one question "Who are you?" Your various answers to this one question depend on the particular environment you are working in. You must always remember, that your Tofa comprises the component parts of who you really are.

The philosopher Descartes said, in Latin, many hundreds of years ago: "Cogito ergo Sum" "I think, therefore I am". It is the proves of thinking that defines who you are, that raises the human being, above the level of the beast.

Have you all seen the movie: "Welcome to the Jungle" starring the Rock, Rocky Johnston, or "Scorpion King?"

In July 2001, I spoke in Salt Lake City, at the invitation of the Samoan Heritage Committee, at their Heritage Week. I told them about a cover story in July 2001 "Ebony" magazine, about Rocky Johnston – "Scorpion King". I am sure you all know the Rock's mother is Samoans, and his father is African-American. In her cover story, Zhondra Hughes wrote:

**"throughout his career, the Rock has managed to uphold and celebrate his Black and Samoan heritages simultaneously"**

Why does Heavyweight Boxing Champion David Tua, who is announced as hailing from South Auckland, have "100% Samoan" tattooed on his leg?

We must never forget who we are, our national and cultural heritage.

What is your most important I am?

The most important I am for me, is the answer "I am Samoan".

In Samoan, e iai le tatou faasinomaga autu, o tatou o Samoa – e iai le tatou atunuu (Samoa) ma le tatou aganuu (faa Samoa). O tatou tu ma agaifanua faa Samoa. O le tuu faatasiga o au tali eseese I le fesili – "O ai oe?" – O lau Tofa lea. O lau Tofa e faamatalaina lou tagata atoa.

If we say we are Samoan, then we must manifest this fact in how we behave. Let me illustrate this point:

As Samoans – we will always obey and respect our parents, no matter how old, no matter how learned or qualified we become. This is dictated by this all important part of our Tofa.

I was invited to speak to the Alumni of Samoan Students in New Zealand, I told them that I did not place much value on the raging academic debate about the “identity crises” of the Samoans born in Aotearoa. Much has been written on this subject, but I believe you are not Samoan by virtue of where you were born. You are perceived as Samoan by how you behave. If you are born in Samoa, of Samoan parents, but do not stand up and give up your seat for older folk in Auckland’s buses, then at that instance, you are not a Samoan. By not showing respect for your elders, you are not behaving as a Samoan should. If we are Samoans, then we have inherited certain values. We live by and value certain customs and traditions.

This is just as true in the traditions of all the Pacific Islands represented here at Alafua this evening.

It is noteworthy, in the village. If a Samoan storekeeper starts getting tough, not allowing credit. The village people say in despair, “O le matuai palagi lava o le tagata le la! This person is a real “palagi”. The point is that he may be a Samoan, but he is not behaving as a Samoan should, so they call the person a “palagi” – a European!

I must emphasise to you all tonight. You are not turning your back on all this new “palagi” knowledge you are learning by maintaining your Pacific Island values, your Pacific Island customs, culture and traditions. This new learning is

just one small part of all the component parts that make up your "Tofa" as Pacific Islanders.

**Conclusion:**

As Pacific Islanders, you must never forget, or ever abandon your roots.

Guard your Tofa, whichever country you hail from, never forget who you really are. The most important part of our Tofa is the definitive –

I am Samoan  
or I am Fijian  
or I am Rarotongan  
or whatever your country of origin.

I began with a quote from SIWA, which instructs us to reflect on our disparities. This is part of our maturing as human beings.

In recognizing our disparities, we celebrate our differences, and begin to live together in harmony and friendship with each other.

We cannot even begin to appreciate other peoples' cultures, if we do not appreciate our own cultures.

As Martin Luther King once said;

**"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools".**

Let us now celebrate our Cultures in Song and Dance. Song defines us - most traditional Samoan songs are sung to the beat of our rowing rhythms – songs sung to accompany long journeys on our traditional canoes.

Samoan dance is more about rhythm than strong movement. This is based on the reflective and contemplative mood of our chiefs.

For each Pacific Country – our Song and dance help define our Tofa, or psyche.

It is my privilege to formally declare this Cultural Celebration open.

God Bless you all!

Misa Telefoni