

A tribute to Sir Rabbie Namaliu

by Bart Philemon

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Photo Credit: PNG Department of Information and Communications Technology/Facebook

This is an edited version of [Bart Philemon's tribute](#) delivered at Sir Rabbie Namaliu's funeral service on 18 April 2023.

Papua New Guinea has lost one of its brightest shining stars. I was on a Zoom conference with someone in Geneva, Switzerland when I received a phone call from my Motuan brother Sir Moi Avei. I told him that I was in conference so I will call him back later. His response was, "No, go outside. I want to speak to you now". I couldn't understand what his urgency was about but when I went outside, he dropped the bombshell news.

Last time I was with Rabbie was in January this year at Sir Wilson Kamit's funeral service. He looked very well and healthy.

I first met Rabbie in 1966 when 55 of us were selected as first intake to the University of Papua New Guinea. In the early years of our studies in 1968, he came home to Butibam village with me for his Christmas holiday: 20 years later when he became the fourth Prime Minister of PNG in 1988, my families were boasting about the time Rabbie spent his holiday with them.

In 1970 when Rabbie graduated, we went our separate ways pursuing our respective careers. He went on to do his master's degree in Canada where he graduated in 1972. He then returned to teach at his alma mater.

He left the University of Papua New Guinea in 1974 and went to work in the government administration starting off as the Chief of Staff for the then Chief Minister Sir Michael Somare, and then later he became the Private Secretary when Sir Michael Somare became the first Prime Minister in 1975. In 1976 Rabbie moved on to be the Public Service Commission Chairman until 1979.

When Papua New Guinea gained its independence in 1975, Rabbie was one of the key players to establish the public service structure – together with Sir Anthony Siaguru, Sir Mekere Morauta and Sir Charles Lepani, who were among the handful

of well-educated and well-experienced Papua New Guineans who helped shape the ground upon which Papua New Guinea was born.

In 1982, Rabbie was elected as the Member for Kokopo. In his first term in Parliament, Rabbie took over briefly as the Opposition Leader in 1988 but in the vote of no confidence in the same year he was elected by the Parliament as the fourth Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and served until 1992.

Whilst Rabbie was still Prime Minister, I took over from Tony Siaguru as the Chairman of the Organising Committee for the ninth South Pacific Games to be held in Lae and Port Moresby in 1991. We won the most medals at those games since the games started in 1963. Rabbie offered to recommend me for the Queen's Honour of the Knighthood. I thanked him for his offer but declined.

In 1992 I decided to run for the Lae Open seat in the National Election. I won the seat and decided to align myself with PANGU Pati to be on the same team as Rabbie.

In 2006, I was in Honiara, Solomon Islands to attend a meeting of all the treasurers from all the Pacific Islands including Australia and New Zealand. At a dinner function one evening, I got a call from Rabbie advising me that I had been sacked as Treasurer and that he was offered the ministry. He said that because I was sacked, he was reluctant to accept the offer to replace me. My response to Rabbie was that he should accept the offer as he was one of the very few in Parliament who could maintain and continue the progress that had been achieved so far.

Since Rabbie's death many individuals and many organisations have expressed their deeply felt condolence messages, acknowledging that he was a true gentleman and very humble man. In fact, for some of us who knew him well, he was really one of a kind.

Rabbie had a very big vision to move this beautiful country forward to a greater height, and also for its people to be well developed and be successful in their lives. Rabbie possessed that sunny disposition and along with it an acute intelligence. He was always cool, calm and collected.

It was very clear that his personality and capability had set him up for important things in his future. He performed his job with great energy and utmost professionalism. No matter what office he served, he always conducted himself with the highest integrity.

He was a humble, quiet and soft-spoken person and that is the reason why he is admired by many people from all walks of life, and such leaders are unique and rare

in the political arenas of Papua New Guinea.

Rabbie's focus was on the highest standards of good governance. He served his country as a shining torch for others who follow him in public service in Papua New Guinea. He was a man of strong intellect and integrity which made him one of the cornerstones of Papua New Guinea.

I personally share so many stories with Rabbie and I look up to his knowledge and wisdom that made him an exceptional leader before and after we gained independence.

Rabbie was known for his great warmth, empathy and humour. His death was a very sad day for Papua New Guinea as we remember his countless contributions to our nation in government administration, in politics, in business and in the community services.

Thank you my Tolai brother for your humility, for your servitude, for your honesty, for your sincerity and for the love of your beautiful country and for your beautiful people, and for everything you have done in your life. You were a standard bearer and you have set the standard of leadership high for our future leaders to strive for.

[Read Bart Philemon's full tribute.](#)

Author/s:

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Bart Philemon is a former Papua New Guinean Treasurer and Minister for the Public Service. He was the member for Lae Open from 1992 to 2012.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/a-tribute-to-sir-rabbie-namaliu-20230505/>