

**Tribute to the Right Honourable Sir Rabbie Langanai Namaliu, GCL KCMG PC**

**State Funeral Service**

**APEC House, 18 April 2023**

Sir Charles Lepani KBE

I wish, first of all, to express my gratitude to the children and relatives of Sir Rabbie for their kind invitation to me to say a few words of tribute and to honour my close friend and brother. In thanking Sir Rabbie's children and his relatives, and on behalf of my wife Lady Katherine and our family, I also wish to pay our respects and condolences to his children, Joy, Isaac, Langi, Aaron, Lorna, Hellen, and grandchildren, and to Sir Rabbie's siblings, Jack, Robinson and Helen, as we share with them their sorrow and grief at the loss of their beloved father and brother.

I acknowledge the presence of the Governor General His Excellency Sir Bob Dadae, and Lady Dadae, Prime Minister Hon James Marape, Deputy Prime Minister Hon John Rosso, Chief Justice Sir Gibuna Gibbs Salika and Lady Salika, Ministers of State, Governors of Provinces, members of Parliament current and former, former Prime Ministers, Their Excellencies, members of the diplomatic corps, Chief Secretary Ivan Pomaleu, departmental heads, and heads of other state agencies. I also acknowledge the presence of the children of the late Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, Betha, Sana, Arthur, and Dulciana.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of some very special friends of Sir Rabbie—Dame Meg Taylor, Lady Roslyn Morauta, and Dr. James Morauta, the son of late Sir Mekere Morauta, Lady Winifred Kamit, Dame Jean Kekedo, Professor Ross Garnaut and his son John, and Dr Peter Drysdale.

The devastating news of Rabbie's untimely passing has been difficult for us all to understand. It has not been so long since Papua New Guinea mourned the passing of our founding father, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, and another great leader and Prime Minister, and someone whom I also regard as a close friend and brother, Sir Mekere Morauta. Now the nation is in mourning again at the loss of another foundational leader.

I ask for your indulgence on this solemn occasion as we gather to honour Rabbie, he being a man well read in history, indeed a scholar and teacher of history, that it is only appropriate for us to honour him with some history of Papua New Guinea, for he himself had a substantial role in its

creation. His leadership was distinguished by his passion and commitment to the service of nation building and his belief in the importance of staying true to traditional cultural values.

I first came to know Rabbie for a brief period in 1967 and 1968 during our initial University of Papua New Guinea days, before I left to continue my studies in Australia. But even for that brief period of two years, among the students in the pioneering cohort of UPNG students in 1966 and the second intake of students in 1967, I saw in Rabbie an emerging student activist asserting political leadership and influence in the life of the nascent institution of learning, not only preparing us to take on the challenges of decolonising Papua New Guinea, but demonstrating the makings of a leader in the political life of a future independent Papua New Guinea. He was at the helm of history making. His was a voice that resonated well in our student debates, and I suspect he had a lot to do with the naming of our student news magazine, NILAIDAT, suspiciously a very Kuanua sounding word.

When I returned from Australia and was working as a Trade Unionist with the Public Service Association from 1972 to 1974, the expatriate executives in PSA and a Milne Bay wantok, Jacob Lemeki, and I set about pushing for localisation of the Territory Colonial Administration by putting up a case for colonial administration officials to depart willingly with a Golden Handshake.

Across the road from the PSA in Konedobu, during this time of self-government leading to Independence, several young men and women were working in the office of the then Chief Minister, Hon Michael Somare. Key among them were Rabbie Namaliu, Meg Taylor, Nahau Rooney, and Moi Avei. They were making their mark as political operatives advising the Chief Minister and his cohort of Pangu Ministers, Albert Maori Kiki, Paul Lapun, Ebia Olewale, Gavera Rea, Tony Voutas, Ces Abel, Ruben Taureka and others, agitating for the colonial administration to be localised and for PNG to attain independence sooner rather than later and, of course, attending to the serious business of setting policies for an independent PNG. Just to complete the political landscape of the time, Julius Chan led Peoples Progress Party with Bruce Jephcott, Donatus Mola and others and Tei Abal led the United Party with mainly Highlands elected politicians.

As the territory administration began to quickly localize, names such as Mekere Morauta, who was understudying Macasker in the Department of Treasury, Anthony Siaguru, understudying Bill Conroy in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Henry ToRobert being groomed to be the Governor of the newly established Papua New Guinea Central Bank, Joseph Aoae to take over as Secretary of Justice, Buri Kidu in the Public Prosecutor's Office but already earmarked to be the first Chief Justice,

and other emerging senior Papua New Guinea public servants, were undergoing on-the-job training as well as some formal training at Mt Eliza in Victoria. These were the foundational bedrocks, the history makers, on which our then emerging young nation was built.

To illustrate Rabbie's overarching reach in shaping the history of our nation, I make mention of two significant points of reference. One was the work of the Constitutional Planning Committee spearheaded by John Momis and John Kaputin, who strongly advocated for a decentralised form of government to be an essential element in our Constitution and in our development policies. The other was the emerging economic crisis of inflation at the time, which shaped a key element of our evolving macro-economic management policy, and I'm glad Ross Garnaut is here with us to vouch for this story.

Rabbie had an invisible hand in guiding these two foundational elements of PNG's progress to independence. As Principal Private Secretary to the Chief Minister, Rabbie was tasked with coordinating a weekly crisis management meeting. As inflation loomed large, he brought in Mekere and Ross to advise, which led to the promulgation of the Hard Kina Policy. You younger generation will live to regret you were not around in those days to enjoy how the Kina was valued higher than the US and Aussie dollars.

Then Rabbie was appointed Chairman of the Public Service Commission, and among his lasting legacies was his leadership in decentralising the Public Service.

Our friendship with Rabbie was bound together by the history we shared. With Mekere Morauta in Finance to deal with how to fund decentralization (introducing such funding initiatives as Derivation Grant), Anthony Siaguru heading Foreign Affairs, and me in the Planning Office, where we brought in the Mackenzie Group of Consultants to advice on the modality of delivering decentralization, settling on the Canadian provincial government system, rumours of the now notorious Gang of 4 began to circulate. One of our crimes—our advocacy for a more rapid pace of decentralisation at the political level and within the Public Service and, of course, tight control and management of fiscal policy.

Rabbie was the most introspective of the four of us when it came to his contribution to our efforts in public policy making for the future of independent Papua New Guinea. As an historian, he infused context into our deliberations before we put policy options to the Somare-Chan post-independent government.

As Prime Minister, Sir Rabbie's key achievements reflected his concerns about the social-political and environmental impacts of major resource projects. These included completing the protracted negotiations for the environment provisions of Kutubu Petroleum Project and having these passed by Parliament, which then enabled the project to commence; his initiative in establishing the Development Forum, where joint venture partners, the state, provincial governments and landowners were brought together to reach agreement on key fiscal elements of equity distribution and tax; and the signing of the Porgera Agreement.

In our times together, whether we discussed matters of state or were just reminiscing over humorous moments in our interactions with our political masters and senior public service colleagues, Rabbie would, from time to time, let go of a loud raucous infectious laughter that would provoke a similar burst of laughter from Mekere, Tony and me, as if Rabbie were the lead singer and we chimed in for the chorus. Those were truly moments of friendship that continue to resonate for me, especially since the passing of Tony in 2004, and then Mekere and now Rabbie.

I was deeply moved during the trip to Kokopo last week, on Sir Rabbie's return to say his last farewell to his people, by the tributes from his people and our national leaders, and from many whose lives he has touched. They speak loud and clear of a life well lived and complete, a life of patient listening, of humility, generosity, untiring servitude, and compassion. A life of leadership to emulate. And I attest from the earliest days of our friendship, it was a life of passion and commitment for the good of this nation and its people. Sir Rabbie represented Papua New Guinea at international fora, multilaterally and bilaterally, with great distinction. His life of dedication remains a living legacy for his people of East New Britain and for all Papua New Guineans.

Rabbie is one person whose legacy disproves old Bill Shakespeare, who in his play *Julius Caesar* gave to Marc Anthony the words, "The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones." Rabbie's imprint on history is different. His good deeds will live on for well and truly many years to come, as long as we keep remembering our history as a nation. And for those of us who refuse to learn from our past and our culture, knowledge will surely die.

Rabbie, you being a man steeped in culture, I invite you, my friend and brother, to enter the realm of spirits for Trobrianders, that is Tuma, to rest while in transit to your final destination. As you enter Tuma, you come to a small rocky outcrop from which a stream of water cascades. There you sit yourself down and unburden yourself of your earthly accoutrements, your power, your status, your

wealth. You cup your hands and fill them with the cascading stream of the water of Tuma, splash your face with this refreshing water, then enter Tuma, where you will enjoy many a bountiful harvest of yams and abundant fish from its shores. You will meet and be welcomed by the spirits of Trobrianders speaking dialects from all parts of Trobriands, and more so, please teach them the Kuanua language!

A song of Tuma or Wosi Tuma I dedicate to you, Rabbie, my friend and brother. Trobriands is matrilineal, the source of our power, our status and land title.

*Oh Mother, fetch me the water of Tuma, for I have journeyed long and my throat is parched,  
fetch me the water of Tuma, the word of Tuma, the language of Tuma, the song of Tuma.*

Rest In Peace, Rabbie, I will miss you, Brother.

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