

# Sir Rabbie Namaliu's funeral service

April 18, 2023

**Bart Philemon**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend to Rabbie's children who are Joy, Isaac, Rabbie Jr, Aaron, Lorna, Helen and all of Rabbie's extended family in Raluna Village and Kokopo my sincerest condolences for you all at this time. You all have my deepest sympathy. I wish you all peace comfort and courage and lots of love at this time of sorrow. My heart goes out to you all at this difficult time.

We all lost a great man, but 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 respond was "NO Go Outside I Want To Speak To You Now". I couldn't understand what his urgency was about but when I 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 with 5 girls 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. Twenty years later when he became the 4th 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 with Master of Arts Degree. He then returned to his Alma Mater and was tutoring in Arts before he got promoted to lecturing in Arts.

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 in Papua New Guinea. 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 4th Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and served until 1992.

When we departed from the University of Papua New Guinea we went separate ways in pursuits of our careers but we still kept in contact from time to time.

Whilst Rabbie was still Prime Minister, I took over from Tony Siaguru as the Chairman of the Organizing Committee for the 9th South Pacific Games to be held in Lae and Port Moresby in 1991. We won the most medals at this game since the games started in 1963. From the successful games,

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. In order to win I would have to win against a 15-year PANGU Veteran who was then member for Lae. Rabbie as the sitting Pangu Prime Minister agreed to come over to Lae to be my Guest Speaker at the launching of my fundraising dinner. However, when the Pangu team in Lae found out about Rabbie's involvement they threatened to organize a demonstration at Nadzab airport on his arrival. We therefore, had to cancel Rabbie's involvement and I was able to get Frank Rickwood, the Chairman of Oil Search Board to replace Rabbie as the Guest Speaker.

I won the Lae Open Seat and decided to align myself with Pangu Pati to be on the same team as Rabbie. The Pangu team was camping in the Madang Resort Hotel to negotiate numbers to form the Government. I was nominated for the Speakers seat and Rabbie was nominated for the Prime Minister. When the vote was taken, both of us lost by one vote each, 55 - 54 votes.

In 1994 with a successful Vote of No Confidence, Rabbie was elected as the Speaker and served until 1997 election. In 1995, the United Nation celebrated its 50th Anniversary in New York. The parliamentary representatives of each of the member states around the world were gathering in the United Nations in New York to celebrate the occasion. Rabbie was not able to attend on behalf of the PNG Parliament so he nominated the member of Wapenamanda, who then was Masket langalia and I to represent Papua New Guinea Parliament. That was a great honour for me in my first term of Parliament to deliver a 10 minute speech on behalf of the PNG Parliament sharing the same stage and podium which many many of the World leaders used before me going back 50 years.

In 2006, I was in Honiara, Solomon Islands to attend a meeting of all the Treasurers from all the Pacific Island including Australia and New Zealand. At the dinner function one evening, I got a call from Rabbie advising me that I have been sacked as Treasurer and that he was offered the ministry. He further said that because I was sacked, therefore he was reluctant to accept the offer to replace me.

My response to Rabbie was that he should accept the offer as he is one of the very few in Parliament who can maintain and continue the progress that has been achieved so far.

In 2007, Rabbie as Treasurer was to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Washington. I had then formed a new party and moved to the Opposition side of the Parliament. Rabbie extended an invitation to me to join him to attend the meeting in Washington which I accepted.

After the APEC meeting, the US Embassy in Port Moresby had arranged for Rabbie and I to visit the US Congress for a day. We attended one Congress session and later had lunch in the Congress building with some Congressmen and then ended up with a meeting with a Senator from Hawaii in his office.

After the official meeting at the US Congress our official duties came to an end at the weekend. I was surprised that Rabbie told me that he had paid for the air ticket and accommodation costs out of his own pocket for us to travel to Vancouver, Canada for the weekend. I was a little slow in realizing that is where he spent two years in 1971 and 1972 pursuing his master's degree. The next morning after we arrived, we caught a ferry which was an hour ride from Vancouver to Fraser Island where we spent the day having lunch and dinner with one of his professors and touring around the beautiful snow filled Fraser Island.

It was very unfortunate for Papua New Guinea that Rabbie lost his political career. My 20 years' experience in Papua New Guinea Parliament identified that the Political Leadership in Parliament

needs a lot more political leaders of Rabbie Namaliu's kind That is the single biggest challenge we are facing today.

After Rabbie lost his 2007 Parliament election, it did not stop him from continuing to serve his country with honour and Loyalty in Business, Commerce, Mining and Community Services.

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

I fully support and agree with the public characterization of my dear brother Rabbie. He was an outstanding Papua New Guinean scholar who was among a small handful of well educated and experienced citizens who have shared their lives upon which a new Nation of Papua New Guinea was born.

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 in contributing and support the nation building into the future. Rabbie possessed that sunny disposition and along with it an acute intelligence. He was always cool, calm and collected. I personally class my Tolai brother as fittingly a real gentleman.

It was very clear that his personality and capability has set him up for important things in his future. He was performing 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 is a man of strong intellect and integrity which made him as 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.

Rabbie was along with a very few handfuls of Papua New Guineans during his time until now who has so much to offer this beautiful country, but even their capabilities good values and classiness were not enough to leave a lasting legacy on the land where the craft of good governance had been most difficult at most times to practice over the last 48 years.

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.

We all thank God for the gift of you to Papua New Guinea. You were a standard bearer and you have set a standard of leadership so high for our future leaders to strive for.