

MEKERE - Miuri Lareva.

Welcome to Mekere's brothers - Elavo and Ivasa Morauta, and his sisters – Aru and Morisarea, and their children.

The families of his deceased brothers, Moreare, Hasu and Siviri.

From the Morauta Hasu (Mekere's father's) Family, Mekere's aunts Moreare Hasu and Kauoti Hasu, their children and grandchildren.

The children and grandchildren of Tete, Evera, Morisarea, Pukari, Sauka and Morara Hasu.

And of Mekere's mother Morikoai Elavo's family, the children and grandchildren of Marere, Eae and Moriterope Elavo.

Some sadness is so profound that it must be heard in the silence between the words. So it is with the death of our friend Mekere.

When we were young, Mekere and I learned together about how humanity is governed. Over recent years we learned together about growing old. We shared the new things we learned as they happened in between.

I will not use the time we have together today to dwell on the sadness of what we have lost and what we will miss forever.

It is time to reflect on what we have learned from a full life lived well.

The life of a good and great man.

A good man who spent his whole adult life thinking about and working towards what could be made better for his country.

A great man, who showed Papua New Guineans that governance as solid as humans have made anywhere could be sculpted in their beautiful and troubled land.

A wise man, who knew that nothing was ever so good that it could not break down; or so bad that it could not be recovered.

A man of strategic purpose and intent, who thought ahead, and made each move knowing what would come next as well as can be known.

A man of strong will, who never gave up on anything worth doing.

A generous man; who knew that all people had faults as well as strengths, and that we can use the strengths in everyone if we build protection against their faults.

A Papuan villager, who never forgot the joys of bare feet on wet boards of canoe and boat, sand between the toes, and live fish straight from the river and the sea; who died listening to the recording of Toaripi hymns sung by his cousin sisters, and of Ivore, the traditional songs unique to Mekere's Savara Ipi clan of the Toaripi Tribe, sung for him by his two surviving aunts, Moreare and Kauoti Hasu.

Mekere - The best of us.

Mekere Morauta was born in the village of Kukipi, on the beach where the Lakekamu and Tauri Rivers reach the sea. Where you travel by canoe or stay at home. Home near the water. Place of sago and fish. Coconuts near the beach. Pineapples, buai, bananas and some tubers on each pocket handkerchief of sand that lifts its back above the swamp.

There are many such places in Papua New Guinea.

Mekere saw his Sepik friend Tony Siaguru in Wesley Hospital in Brisbane just before Tony's tragically early death. "You can't go yet, brother," Mekere said. "We are strong people; people of sago and fish".

The eastern Elema people. Taught by the London Missionary Society sojourners from the beginnings of Australian rule in the time of Mekere's grandfathers and grandmothers. A church of communion and song, they had translated the hymns and the old and new testaments into Toaripi and Mekere learned them well. His was the most eloquent Toaripi prose of his generation.

Mekere's Mum, Morikoai, was a strong lady of the village. Secure in her own place; and defender and nurturer of all who were hers wherever they might go. Mekere and Elavo, Aru and Kou, and Louise and Ros and James and Stephen.

Mekere's Dad, Morauta Hasu, was steady in the old ways and early to master the new. A deacon of the LMS. When the post-war colonial Government brought cooperatives to the Gulf, Morauta made them work in Kukipi and along the Toaripi coast.

Then to Sogeri Senior High School in the hills behind Port Moresby. One of the first high school students, after Paul Hasluck's well-intentioned but misguided egalitarianism was put aside to allow the preparation of some Papua New Guineans for the high responsibility that would come with Independence. "Independence by 2000 if ever", said Hasluck's successor in 1969.

Mekere was one of a small group from Sogeri and Kerevat who joined the University of Papua New Guinea's first year in 1966. They were so few and so late that at Papua New Guinea's independence there were less graduates than in the neglected Belgian Congo. But what a few they were; that happy few, that band of brothers. And what a difference they made.

Mekere was the most conscientious and best student of economics in the early years of the University. His Professor, Anthony Clunies Ross, made arrangements for him to spend a year at Flinders University in Adelaide. Other friends at that time passed economics and graduated on time only because of Mekere's notes and cramming lessons in the three weeks before exams.

The Toaripi were Rugby League enthusiasts. UPNG made it Union not League for Mekere. Mekere was the skilful, reliable, strategic, stalwart of the University team.

Papua New Guinea's colonial experience, like India's, left Mekere with appreciation and love of the arts of the willow. A decade and a half ago, falsely anticipating that the Indian tour of Australia would be the Little Master's last, Mekere came south from Moresby and me north from Canberra to watch the first Test at the Gabba. After facing less than an over, the diminutive Tendulkar ducked beneath a low bumper and was given out LBW. We trudged in silent disbelief back to the ferry that would take us across the River to New Farm. On Thursday and Friday last week, Mekere in hospital enjoyed on television the closely contested first two days of the first test in Adelaide. He would feel cheated again to have missed Saturday's denouement.

Mekere was the first graduate in economics from the University of Papua New Guinea in 1971. He was soon appointed Deputy Secretary for the Department of Finance—the Department at first without the

financial and economic policy functions that were in the Departments of External Territories and Treasury in Canberra. After Self Government in 1973, Mekere at age 27 was appointed to the most demanding public service job in a new country: Secretary for Finance, covering the functions of both Finance and Treasury in the Australian and contemporary Papua New Guinean systems. Policy capacity had to be built from the foundations.

From the beginning there was steadiness under great pressure. Wisdom, especially about the complexity of human motivation. Sure-minded judgement of human character. The strategic approach to every problem; recognising that no matter how well things were going they could go wrong; no matter how bad things were they could get better or worse; and that while there was a chance of a way out of an impasse, one worked through the best way of finding it and following it through to a chance of success. Finding the best people to do the things that had to be done. And then steadfastly holding to the chosen course, whatever the buffeting from outrageous fortune.

The macro-economic policies and the Department through which Mekere built them gave PNG a decade and a half of economic stability, within which the young democracy was given the chance to grow.

The partnership of Julius Chan and then John Kaputin as Ministers and Mekere as Secretary for Finance was extraordinarily effective.

During the Euro crisis following the GFC there was talk of Greece leaving the Eurozone. Many said the separation of one part of a currency union was just too hard. But PNG did it in those days, with the independent currency denominated in kina and toea replacing Australian dollars and cents. And for 15 years it was a good currency, avoiding overvaluation as reflected in comfortable convertibility; inflation on average lower than Australia's.

Avoiding currency overvaluation and distortion required strong budget discipline. The Whitlam administration, under pressure itself on a budget that would seal its fate, refused to change an error that breached pre-Independence aid commitments. To maintain stability and currency convertibility Government consumption expenditure was reduced by 10 percent in the first Independence Budget. The deficit hawks of Malcolm Fraser's and Tony Abbott's governments never did one tenth as much. Then, after the Australian election in December 1975, working with Malcolm Fraser and Andrew Peacock to put the aid relationship right for the longer term.

Developing a system of policy and taxation designed to capture reasonable revenues for the State while encouraging new investment. Renegotiating a colonial agreement with Bougainville Copper that would have left a project contributing half of Rio Tinto's global income in 1973 untaxed for half a dozen years. Staring down Kennecott's threats that there would never be another mine in PNG if its terms were denied, and negotiating new arrangements for Ok Tedi with a consortium led by BHP. It worked. Papua New Guinea received good revenue from Bougainville and later other mines and many times its share of the developing world's mining investment. Papua New Guinea's resource rent tax was followed by Australia for offshore petroleum, and a dozen other countries.

A branch office tax to secure revenue from unincorporated foreign enterprises, followed by Australia two years later.

Borrowing abroad without an Australian government guarantee. Working with World Bank President Robert MacNamara to fund the oil palm programme in West New Britain against the fierce opposition of the US farm lobby—with an outcome that MacNamara was later to describe as his proudest achievement. Negotiating access to the aid and trade arrangements in Japan, and Europe.

Most important of all, developing a system for sound financial administration. A set of public finance laws designed to secure a high level of probity in management of the government accounts. Establishing

discipline in allocating public money through a Budget Priorities Committee chaired by the Secretary for Finance.

Not only Chan and Morauta, of course. Both worked closely with Prime Minister Michael Somare and his Department and Office. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Albert Maori Kiki and Secretary Tony Siaguru. Chairman of the Public Services Commission Rabbie Namaliu. Director of the National Planning Office, Charles Lepani. Mekere and Charles worked closely to ensure that the plan was the budget over many years, and the budget the first step in the plan. Morauta, Namaliu, Siaguru Lepani were the defenders of good policy and process. The Gang of Four. The band of brothers.

Brothers; but women played a much larger role in national government then than now.

Yangpela meri cuscus bilong Michael Somare in the Prime Minister's office, today Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. And in that first self-governing Parliament, the strident voice of Josephine Abajjah, at times the Parliament's most compelling voice, calling out the Papuan collaborators in the national enterprise. And Nahau Rooney. Rose and Jean Kekedo. Winifred Kamit. Felecia Dobunaba.

I would like to share a tribute from the six women in Mekere's electoral office in Port Moresby.

From Elizabeth, Margaret, Ruth, Geua, Molly & Bomi

"It has been difficult these past days trying to come to terms that we will no longer see or hear your voice again – only your memories for us to keep.

You left without saying goodbye.

We are the ladies that run your Electoral Office. Nothing would get past us and most times we were bad-mouthed for that. But we stood our ground to ensure that things were done properly and by the book. You would seek our advice when it comes to who should be assisted. It was always the women groups, mothers, churches or communities. Like you once said, "when you assist a mother, she feeds the whole family".

We would ask for nothing more than for people to know that we worked for someone with very high caliber, always considerate, understanding, caring. We would not change a moment of the time with you for the world.

You taught us to be confident and courageous women. You also moulded us to be better people in life and we thank you for that.

We came from different backgrounds but joined your work force when you became Prime Minister in 1999. That was when we all met to start our career as your political staff and the rest is history. We also became family to you and Lady Ros together with our extended families. Your house was our house, always welcoming.

We love you and will miss you – you are forever in our hearts. With our families we send our SINCERE CONDOLENCES TO LADY ROSLYN MORAUTA AND JAMES MORAUTA.

"God gives, and God takes" – Rest in Eternal Peace, Sir Mekere Morauta."

The women then said farewell in the five languages spoken in the office:

Alu. Emau. Uro. Bamahuta. Kaion

Your loyal staff from 1999 until now, 2020".

Mekere was widely trusted across government and across the nation. When influential Bougainville leaders announced secession late in 1975, Mekere was appointed to lead the national government's negotiating team, reporting to Minister for Provincial Affairs Ebia Olewale. The settlement lasted for nearly a decade and a half. Tragedy followed.

Mekere brought together a Finance Department team of unusual quality. The best of economics graduates from the University of Papua New Guinea.

John Vulupindi, First Assistant Secretary for General Financial and Economic Policy then Mekere's successor. Clever, reliable and well educated in economics. Mekere saw a big problem of waste and mismanagement of money in the Defence Department and Forces. The day after Mekere became Prime Minister in 1999, he appointed John as Secretary for Defence to fix it up. I saw John later that week. *"Mekere has given me the job of fixing it up", John said, "so I'll do it. I'll do it properly, so there will probably be a mutiny"*.

There was a mutiny.

Koiari Tarata, Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy, after John Vulupindi Secretary for Finance. Best of his class of economists.

Splendid public servants brought on by Mekere. Both dead long ago, many years before their times.

The small band of foreign professionals that Mekere brought together distinguished themselves with achievements after PNG. They came back whenever Mekere had a job to be done—and he had lots to be done, especially as Prime Minister.

Rod Sims, now Chairman of the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission, was blocked by COVID from joining us here at Kangaroo Point today. Rod sent a message:

"The youth of the public service leaders immediately after Independence may have been a problem. But it wasn't, because we had Mekere Morauta as our Department Head. As a young and new public servant, I was privileged to learn my craft at the feet of the wisest of men. I continued to benefit from this wisdom over many wonderful years".

Professor Sir John Crawford, then Chancellor of the ANU, frequent visitor to PNG as Chairman of the PNG Development Bank and Chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea in those distant days, once said to Mekere:

"What you have built is too good to last. I hope you are not disappointed when those who follow can't do so well".

Mekere responded that a period of getting it right had its own value whatever might come next. It would show Papua New Guineans later and forever what could be done by Papua New Guineans.

Former Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu is stuck by COVID in Kokopo and has sent his own tribute to Mekere:

"It has been my privilege to know personally, work closely with, and occasionally disagree with, the Right Honourable Sir Mekere Morauta, whose death the nation mourns. He was a close friend, my talaigu, and a colleague in the public service and Parliament over 54 years."

Mekere and I were in the first intake of students at the University of Papua New Guinea. We were in the same class in a number of subjects including economics in which he excelled far better than me. He was an outstanding student, and I could see then he would emerge as an influential leader of Papua New Guinea in the critical period leading up to Independence in 1975, and a national leader thereafter.

In the 45 years since Independence Mekere held many of the most demanding and vital offices in our nation, culminating in his election as Prime Minister.

In 1974 he was appointed the first Papua New Guinean to hold the office of Secretary of Finance, then combined with Treasury. In that role he with the Governor of the Bank of Papua New Guinea and Minister for Finance oversaw the introduction of our own national currency. He was also instrumental in securing international donor support and confidence for the national budget, and in guiding our early economic advancement by amongst other things setting up the macro economic framework that underpinned Papua New Guinea's economic management for the first decade or two after independence.

Our smooth transition to Independence was the work of many, led by our first Chief Minister and Prime Minister, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare. But the skill, wisdom and energy of Sir Mekere was critical in that transition, and in the following years.

After a short period in the private sector, he was the first Papua New Guinean to be Managing Director of the then Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation.

He subsequently succeeded Sir Henry ToRobert as Governor of the Bank of Papua New Guinea.

In these important and challenging roles he served with great distinction.

When he sought to enter the National Parliament, he chose a difficult path, standing for the Moresby North West electorate, a diverse and rapidly growing urban seat. He easily won the seat, and held it comfortably whenever he contested it after that.

Just over two years later he was overwhelmingly elected Prime Minister, succeeding the late Bill Skate. He held office from 1999 until the 2002 elections. During this period he championed and introduced some of the most far reaching financial, banking and superannuation as well as constitutional reforms to enhance political stability that have become the hallmark of his legacy as Prime Minister. They have served the country well ever since.

He left politics in 2012, but returned as Member for North West at the last national election in 2017.

In every high office he held he served with the highest possible integrity. I personally observed that throughout his career. His integrity was absolutely beyond reproach and a shining example for others to try and follow.

On a personal level, he and Lady Roslyn were wonderfully supportive of my late wife, Margaret, during her tragic illness and passing. The support he and Roslyn gave me, and our children, is something I am ever grateful for. I am especially grateful to them for having taken my eldest daughter, Joy under their wings as their "adopted daughter" they never had and mentored her to be the fine woman she is today.

The nation is much the poorer for his passing. More importantly, it is much richer for his life as one of our most respected and distinguished leaders – certainly one of Papua New Guinea's best and finest Prime Ministers.

Good Bye Talaigu. Good bye my brother, you will be missed terribly.

To Ros and James, we share your grief deeply at this difficult time. I am just pleased that of my children, Joy and her family, Aaron, Lorna and Hellen are there to represent our family".

A year after Mekere entered the Parliament, in 1998, he and Sir Rabbie together watched a 4 Corners programme on the ABC in which an inebriated PNG Prime Minister boasted of multifarious abuses of the power of the Papua New Guinea State. The two friends had chosen to sit together in Opposition to

a bad Prime Minister. Now they decided that their country's peril required them to join the Government and to do what they could to save the country.

Tony Siaguru described Mekere as "Papua New Guinea's reform Prime Minister". He inherited public and financial sectors riddled with corruption and a bankrupt national economy. He systematically cleaned it up. New central bank and bank regulatory legislation to restore convertibility of the currency; new laws to restore integrity to the national superannuation fund; a reshaping of national finances to allow teachers and aid post orderlies to be paid. Privatisation of the Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation to save it from corrupt political interference. The establishment of the Independent Public Business Corporation to allow professional management separate from corrupt political influence in state-owned businesses—and to privatise them if the circumstances were right. In agreement with BHP, establishment of independent institutions to manage the Ok Tedi mine after BHP's departure, and of governance arrangements that would protect large income from the mine for sustainable development. And constitutional change that led to PNG's first full-term government in the Parliament elected in 2002.

Mekere's achievements as Prime Minister after the Skate chaos were of historic dimension. The constitutional changes in particular still help. But there was not time to make all the difference Mekere had in mind, or to bed down for all time some of the reforms.

By this time, Mekere had developed a distinctive approach to governance in a poor developing country with weak administrative resources. The approach shaped his reforms as Prime Minister and many of his efforts from that time on.

PNG had too few people with the background, experience and trained character to perform all the functions of a complex modern state. This allowed the emergence of a kleptocratic political culture. There were many good Papua New Guineans; no fewer in proportion to population than good Australians or Japanese or anyone else. But the institutional weakness; the young public service traditions; the political culture separated them from responsibility and stopped them from doing their best.

So PNG had to economise on government. Simple mechanisms that ran by rules and by rote were better than systems that required repeated exercise of discretion. Ministers had to take responsibility for policy, but it was best that they be separated from discretionary decisions over the allocation of resources. Appointments to statutory bodies should be by independent institutions in civil society. Private businesses required no discretionary government involvement, so should be preferred unless there was good reason to the contrary.

I spoke at the Memorial Service for Mek and Ros's friend Jim Carlton, in Melbourne nearly 5 years ago. I referred to Jim's friend as the best of Papua New Guinea's Prime Ministers. John Howard came up to me straight afterwards. "I agree with you about Morauta", he said. "He was the best I knew, and daylight was second."

The Lifelong Struggle

From the beginning and more than ever as time passed, much of Mekere's rare talents in managing hard things was devoured by resistance to the plundering of the State. Regrettably it devoured so much time; but mercifully he was there to do it and to show others what is possible. Constraining the misdemeanours of our friend Leo while maintaining the friendship—weaknesses that seemed big then but pale now alongside what has become commonplace. The struggle in partnership with others in the Gang of Four to strengthen the Leadership Code—only partially successful, but a help since that time to the younger people who are making large sacrifices to preserve as much as they can of the integrity of their young democracy. Maintaining high standards of integrity in the Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation, and then the central bank. The restraint and then the replacement of Skate. The strategic

reform of institutions as Prime Minister, to limit the role of Ministerial discretion with its opportunity for corruption. The preservation of the public interest in the funds accumulated in PNGSDP's long term fund.

The degree of difficulty and the values underpinning his choices are exemplified in an episode the day after he was elected Prime Minister. A representative of a foreign government came to explain an arrangement that had been agreed by his predecessor and which Mekere was invited to continue. An eyewateringly large amount of money would be made available through channels so secure that there was no chance that anyone other than the principals to the understanding could ever know. All that was required was confirmation of change in some diplomatic arrangements. Plenty for the PM; and enough to fund his political party into long term dominance. Mekere listened, interested to learn how such things worked. He then thanked his visitor, and explained that his principals' intelligence must be poor to think that the offer might be accepted.

Mekere never gave up. One COVID blessing is that Jayne and I were in central western Queensland through most of Mekere's last months and able to travel to Brisbane. Speech was a struggle. Mekere would sound the words that defined the thoughts of that teeming mind. Things were bad in his country. He outlined what had the best chance of improving things.

His duty was never done while he had breath.

The breath has departed. Mekere can rest in peace.

So many people know Mekere as a friend. The Toaripi in village and in town. The Moresby North West constituents who kept sending him back, repudiating their reputation for fickle support.

Mekere as the proud and loving father of two energetic, creative, clever boys. Fishing with James and Stephen on Port Moresby jetties. With Louise and the boys as they learned so much ahead of their peers. And now, James such a comfort to Mekere through these hard months. My mind travels back to Mekere knowing like a Toaripi the news of Stephen's death before it came from human voice and hand; honouring Stephen in Canberra and at home while carrying the heavy load of the Reform Prime Ministership.

We are so sorry Ros for your great loss. We admired and enjoyed your great partnership of warmth, intelligence and wisdom, which has added so much to Mekere's life. Keeping our friend out of the trouble into which incapacity to handle the mundane would otherwise have brought. Thank you for being such a partner to our dear friend.

We are sorry James for the great loss. He loved you and Stephen dearly. Thank you both for adding so much to our friend's life.

We can look at the life and death of Mekere and fear for his country's prospects. He wanted so much an effective Papua New Guinean democracy, with broadly based prosperity. He worked so hard for so long to make it happen. All of his goodness, his greatness, his wisdom, his strategic purpose, his strength of will, his generosity, and his patriotism. His work is done and Papua New Guinea is not doing as well as he would want.

If Mekere could not make it work, who could?

What hope for his country?

But there is a better way to see what he has left.

One man, with some friends and often alone, achieved so much. What could be made if many took up his vision and his work? If many people worked together and helped.

What if we all look at Mekere's life and the things that he built and which worked well for a while; and resolved to do as much as our slim talents might allow?

What if we all care half as much as Mekere did, and use our own small talents to rebuild a coconut trunk stump, or Kwila window sill, or taun upright, or sago palm corner of a roof?

What if we decide as Mekere would have done, and refuse to give up just because things seem so difficult now?

That is how I think of Mekere's life, and now his death.

We can remember Mekere's answer to John Crawford 44 years ago.

What he built was worth building though it might fall down, because it proved forever that it can be built.

Ross Garnaut

St Mary's, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane.

23 December 2020.