

Vale Sir Mekere Morauta

by Rabbie Namaliu

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Mekere Morauta presenting a certificate at the Port Moresby Christian Academy

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 macroeconomic 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. These 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.

*This tribute was **delivered** on behalf of Sir Rabbie Namaliu by Ross Garnaut at the funeral service for Sir Mekere Morauta in Brisbane on 23 December 2020.*

Author/s:

Rabbie Namaliu

Sir Rabbie Namaliu was the fourth prime minister of Papua New Guinea.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/vale-sir-mekere-morauta-20210112-2/>

