

His Excellency Honourable Speaker & Chancellor of the University of Fiji

RATU EPELI NAILATIKAU

**Speech on**

**THE OCCASION OF THE THE UNIVERSITY OF FIJI 2021 GRADUATION**

10am Friday 17 December 2021

University Hall, The University of Fiji, Saweni Campus, Lautoka

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- Members of the Council
- Your Excellencies, the Ambassadors and High Commissioners
- Ministers of the Government
- Na Momo na Tui Vuda
- The Pro-Chancellor, Ambassador Kamlesh Arya
- The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Shaista Shameem
- Deans of the University of Fiji
- The Registrar, Ms Karishma Mani
- Members of the Senate and Staff Members of the University
- The President of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji
- The Representatives of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji
- Graduands, Parents, invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends.

Good morning, *Ni Sa Bula Vinaka, Salaam Alaykum* and *Namaste* to you all.

I am deeply privileged and overwhelmingly delighted to be here at last this morning at the 2021 December graduation ceremony of the University of Fiji – especially so because we have

cancelled several graduations because of COVID-19 and I know only too well, as I know you all do, how inspirational and uplifting a graduation ceremony can be.

Firstly I would like to congratulate Ambassador Kamlesh Arya for his appointment as the Pro-Chancellor and Professor Shaista Shameem on her appointment as Vice-Chancellor of the University. I am indeed grateful to the university council for having made these wise decisions in selecting the perfect shoulders to bear the enormous responsibilities of these honourable positions.

But today there is a very special welcome to the graduating students in whose honour we have gathered here this morning. We also welcome those that have supported them – their parents, guardians, families and friends.

A graduation ceremony is a significant occasion for any university and its graduating students, for during it we acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of our students in the presence of their peers, parents and friends.

It is rather unfortunate that the COVID-19 pandemic has led universities to rethink their graduation ceremonies and many students through the pandemic have lost the opportunity to graduate in-person in a ceremony. The whole experience of student life has changed over the past year.

Now this is something that none of us had anticipated but i do know that these experiences have harnessed our abilities to be resilient and adaptable.

The university has achieved several milestones this year. Student numbers have increased to over 3250. This speaks volumes of the university's accessibility of education to students. I congratulate the university staff for their tireless efforts in attracting new students to the institution.

Success comes to those who show commitment to their field of engagement. There is no alternative to success but hard work, dedication, and perseverance.

This graduation will have 300 students graduating in various programmes. The families' contribution to the success of their children is to be greatly applauded.

I encourage parents and guardians to continue supporting their children's education. This is an investment not only for the family but also for nation-building.

The graduates add up to 5000-plus students who have successfully graduated from the university of Fiji since 2008. For a young university, this is quite an achievement.

To our graduates, I heartily congratulate you all for reaching the milestone you have achieved today. What you will go away with today will assist you in achieving lifelong success in your working life.

I hope and strongly urge you to stay connected to the university through the UniFiji alumni and constructively contribute to the continuing growth of the university by bringing industry

experiences and academic shortcomings to the forefront to enhance work-ready graduates.

The university was placed on the map for graduating Phd students over the past years.

Not only that, students are now enrolling in Phd programmes offered by different schools with great zeal and confidence. There is an availability of qualified staff to supervise the students to achieve their ambitions.

The university offers multiple undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and has recruited highly qualified staff to ensure that these programmes are conducted effectively as per the global standards. The aim of the academics of the university is to provide good education that not only makes students successful in personal and professional life but also to become good citizens. I am sure that you will consider further education at the University of Fiji considering the quality of teaching professionals at the institute.

We are incomplete without a good education because education equips us to make quality decisions as an individual, for our communities and our nation. In such a competitive world, education has become a necessity for human beings for growth and success in life and nation-building.

In the words of the Former President of India from 2002 to 2007 A.P.J Abdul Kalam: quote, “ All of us do not have equal talent. But, all of us have an equal opportunity to develop our talents” unquote.

So take that as a challenge and make the most of the opportunities you are given to educate yourself.

Today is your day and you really deserve to celebrate your hard work, sacrifice, efforts, and perseverance. Never forget to acknowledge those who have supported you in your journey, your parents and families, sponsors and lecturers without whose support you would not have reached this far.

UniFiji aims to continue its mission to improve its quality and reputation through accreditations of its programmes and the University. A total number of 106 programmes have been registered under the Fiji Higher Education Commission.

The university has introduced several new programmes over the past year to meet the demands of the industry and other stakeholders.

The School of Science and Technology continues its commitment to carrying out activities, programmes and research to create awareness of renewable energy and climate change. Climate change continues to be a growing threat in the region. The school is engaged in a number of studies in the area of climate change adaptation and mitigation to address this gap in research and add to the scientific literature. Fiji and the Pacific feel the brunt and the threat of intensive global warming affecting our fragile ecosystems and lives. The University of Fiji in collaboration with the Australian National University and the science circus pacific launched the secondary schools

waste management campaign with the theme “waste creators to waste managers”.

The school has introduced a new Masters and Doctor of Philosophy programme in both environmental science and physics.

The university has also been involved through the registrar’s office, reviewing the regional qualifications in resilience with a major focus on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

The School of Humanities and Arts staff are heavily involved in research in multi-disciplinary areas, publications in myriad subjects and creative writing. The school has introduced two new programmes of Bachelor of Teaching (primary) to contribute towards the nations need for quality primary school teachers and bachelor of interdisciplinary studies to give the student the opportunity to have diverse knowledge and opportunities.

The Umanand Prasad School of Medicine and Health Science has introduced a new programme of Bachelor of Medical Health sciences to evocate the importance of health to the nation and educating them on the vital role of nurturing our health. A healthy environment defines a healthy mind and a healthy personality.

The School of Business and Economics has introduced three new programmes, namely, Certificate in Commerce, Certificate

in Small Business Administration and Doctor of Philosophy in Economics to meet the industry demands.

The School of Law has been committed to staff development through its weekly brown bag lunch time seminar that enables its staff to discuss and share key aspects of local and international laws. The school for the first time had also conducted 100% practical programme, Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (GDLP) through an online platform to ensure that its students complete their programme on time.

The Centre of iTaukei Studies in collaboration with the iTaukei Trust Fund Board is working towards establishing a resource facility for education and showcasing the various forms of itaukei culture. The resource facility would be the first of its kind in the country and it would be the go-to place for iTaukei language learning and cultural performance.

The University of Fiji faces a new antithetical dispensation requiring its application of new and innovative strategies and new knowledge to stave off the ruthless global and local competitiveness in higher education; and the university's winning strategy requires its usage of the knowledge-based to economy-knowledge-based development perspectives, which, in turn, can increase its international competitiveness as a tertiary institution.

I am not only convinced but hugely confident that under the new leadership of Professor Shameem the university will head comfortably in that direction.

The University of Fiji aims to pursue four strategic priorities to realize the institutional objectives, which are:

- empowering the university's people - where students are the most important stakeholders. The aim is to generate a transformative student experience to attract and retain students;
- investing in the university's academic portfolio – where the focus is on excellence in learning, teaching, research, enterprise, and interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary themes and perspectives;
- being an international university for the global sharing of knowledge - where the focal point is on international collaborations and securing partnerships;
- determining a sustainable future- where the accent is on academic sustainability;
- professional services, operational and financial sustainability, and advancing a sustainable natural environment.

I would like to acknowledge the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji for their vision and the university's initiative in providing immense opportunities to aspiring students to pursue their career prospects over the last fifteen years.

Most of the students coming to UniFiji for their studies are from all socio-economic strata. The main idea of the University of Fiji in the Western Division was to give students an added advantage to study from the comfort of their homes.



The university is registered with the Fiji Higher Education Commission. I advocate to families living in the western division to take full advantage of UniFiji's presence and seek admissions to higher education for their children here.

Ladies and gentlemen, a final word to the graduands – I am confident that each one of you will excel in your chosen path, reaping the interest of your investment in knowledge.

We expect you to be excellent ambassadors of the University of Fiji. I encourage you to continue with your learning and return to the university for the next phase of your tertiary education.

Make yourselves and us proud with your contributions to your communities, organisations and your country!

Thank You, Vinaka Vakalevu, Sukran, Bahoot Dhanyavaad.

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