

## **Chairman's Report**

### **(Presented at the 32nd AGM, May 2013)**

A very warm welcome to you all on behalf of the Officers and Council. And it is a delight to be here at New Zealand House once more. Regarding numbers present today from the list I have for NZ Security, we appear to be considerably up on last year. From the top of the list, I am delighted to welcome our Keynote speaker, Mr. Rob Taylor, The New Zealand Deputy High Commissioner in London, a former High Commissioner to Vanuatu, who has also served in Samoa.

about whom I will provide a little more background immediately in advance of his talk, entitled 'New Zealand and the Pacific.' Welcome, Mr Taylor! The meeting part won't take long as I know you are keen to hear what he has to say.

A very warm welcome also from all of us to HE Ms Winnie Kiap, the Papua New Guinea High Commissioner in London, Welcome, High Commissioner!

We welcome Felix Kipalan at Leeds University, as sole representative among Chevening and other post grad scholars, currently studying in different parts of the UK. Warm thanks to Felix for acting as a focal point for students, so far from home and sunshine, and bringing some we had not yet managed to locate to PISUKI's attention.

Since the last AGM, your Council has met three times, one less meeting than in previous years, but has hosted far more events than ever before in any one year, building on the successful event hosted in its 30th anniversary year. It was a momentous summer for us all, being the year of HM The Queen's Diamond Jubilee and also the year in which London hosted the Olympic Games. Pacific Islanders travelled to UK, and the various Pacific oriented organisations with affiliations to particular countries hosted events and receptions galore, as did the diplomatic missions. I will mention later in this report a few of the highlights at which PISUKI was represented, and others with which we were very happy to assist. But first, PISUKI events:

The year began in style with the Edwin Smith Memorial Lecture (named after a former Secretary, who died in post, and had contributed much to the Society) This was held on 6th July at Westminster Hall, Houses of Parliament, and our speaker was Rick Nimmo, former Director of Political Governance and Security, at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and his subject was

'Change in the Pacific – a Forum Perspective. There is an abridged version of his lecture in the latest Outrigger, and the full text is available on the website, together with pictures. We were delighted by the number of students, especially Chevening Scholars, who attended this event, also supported by the Tongan, Papua New Guinea and Fiji High Commissions. – although High Commissioner Mara was attending the funeral of a Fijian soldier who had died on active service.

On 13th August, we enjoyed the hospitality of our Secretary Canon Rex Davis at Grosvenor Chapel, in Mayfair, for a Talk and Barbecue, our first opportunity of no less than three in 2012 of hearing from Rev Akuila Yabaki, Executive Director of the Suva-based Citizens' Constitutional Forum, a platform for discussion of Constitutional issues. A co-founder of this Pacific Islands Society, Akuila chose as his theme, 'Fiji Today' – looking at the then current situation in Fiji. Earlier this year, in April, a number of us attended the joint Minority Rights Group/Conciliation Resources Seminar, entitled: "Fiji: the challenges and opportunities of diversity" held following the launch of a Govt Draft Constitution superimposed over the Yash Ghai constitution commission output. Doubtless our Treasurer, John Wilson, who was invited to Fiji to provide input/legal advice on the Yash Ghai draft Constitution – shredded bar one copy - will be able to update us on events since then. We were saddened, however, to hear this month that he had been convicted for contempt of court, following an article published last April, in which he had simply repeated previously published legal opinion.

On 6th September we foregathered at St Philip's in Earls Court Road to hear Professor Ian Conrich, Fellow in the Dept of Literature, Film and theatre at the University of Essex give an illustrated talk, "Easter Island, Myths and Popular Culture", in which he sought to understand the popular appeal of Easter Island and the moai in particular. To this well attended event, with social, we were delighted to welcome the Paralympians + Team support for Solomon Islands and Samoa, courtesy of long-time Society Member, Vicky Glass, who was the Solomon Island Team attache for the 2012 Games. You will have read Vicky's account of her appointment in the last edition of Outrigger....talk to Vicky later.

Also in September, on the 28th, members of three PISUKI Areas joined at short notice a most successful occasion in Central London, a dinner at the Holiday Inn, Mayfair, hosted by Agnes Henson-Derby, and David Wynne-Jones, Area Reps for London/Herts/Bucks, with a bit of help from Council Members located in the three areas, as well as Vernon Scarborough, who has responsibility for Area Representatives. We were pleased to welcome High Commissioner Mara and Mrs Mara to this event.

The Phil Philo Lecture by the Curator of the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum was cancelled, due to unforeseen circumstances, but will be rearranged to take place this year, somewhere in the Midlands.

The Grand finale to 2012 was the Pre-Xmas party on 11th December, also at St Philips, a happy occasion attended by a number of students and excellently catered by Council Member Oe Jameson. The profits from that event as we were nearing Xmas, were donated to the UK Charity, Wantok Support. It is pleasing to have several Trustees of that Charity, including High Commissioner Kiap, here today. We were delighted that the Chairman of the Kiribati Tungaru Association, Erin Orme, won first prize in the Raffle, having travelled from freezing Essex. Do ask Oe, or Genevieve Ali-Teo for more information, in case you would like to join the charity.

In April this year I was pleased to travel to Devon for the PISUKI South-West Area event, organised by Tony Child – with excellent speakers, lunch and a dance performance by two solo by members of the Kiribati Tungaru Association, KTA.

A selection of events, your chairman has attended on behalf of the Society, include:

- The Solomon Islands Independence Day Celebrations courtesy of Mazula Head in Solihull. Nearest Saturday to 6th July every year.
- Tonga Day on 4th August in Farnham, hosted by Elenoa Lyons
- It is invidious to mention particular Olympics related events, but in early August, the pan-Pacific week long inspirational Pacific Village overseen by Jane West of Fiji Travel, with located at St Katharine's Dock in the City of London, providing a 'home from home' for Pacific Islanders and their wantoks was for me, and I'm sure others, a highlight. There was a Fiji military wives choir and meke group, and groups performing also included islanders from PNG, Vanuatu, Maori, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomons and more.
- A Welcome reception for the Fiji President, and former London High Commissioner, on 26th July at St Mary Abbots Centre in Kensington, also attended by Vernon Scarborough, and Margaret Taylor
- On 28th July, A reception at the PNG High Commission Residence for the PNG Olympians, and on the same day
- At Greenbanks, the Tongan High Commissioner's residence a reception for Their Royal Highnesses, the Crown Prince and Princess and Team Tonga
- The London Pacific Fashion Show on 5th October at the Salvation Army Theatre – with profits going to Help for Heroes, Bank of Brothers.
- In March 2013, the Commonwealth Youth Awards at Marlborough House, also attended by Michael Walsh, at the invitation of Tamara Sadgrove, who carried the Commonwealth Mace on Commonwealth Day in Westminster Abbey, and organised the 8th Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting in Port Moresby in April
- Also in March, a Pacific Island Night at the Commonwealth Secretariat.

As there is not much time for wider Pacific news this year, I recommend the many excellent on-line daily reports and newsfeeds of, for example, Pacific Islands business, Australian and NZ Broadcasting Corporations, providing news of the Pacific,

One thing you may have read about was the Women Arise movement in Papua New Guinea, a call to action to help end violence following recent horrific killings. In solidarity with the Port Moresby Haus Krai (House of Mourning) held on 14th/15th, a service was held in London on 18th May, last Saturday, organised by Chevening Scholar, Felix Kipalan and Collette Tsiperau from Leicester. I was proud to stand with them. Amnesty International in its report issued two days ago highlighted sorcery related killings in PNG, and police brutality in Fiji

For the last two years I have reported that Social networking and mobile telephones have taken firm hold in Papua New Guinea and the wider Pacific.. PISUKI has gone with the flow and a couple of weeks ago put up a Facebook page, at date with 190 'Likes' – not bad going. Other Pacific based FB pages include British Friends of Vanuatu and UK in the Pacific the Facebook page for the British High Commission offices in the South Pacific. located in Honiara, Suva and Port Moresby.

We were greatly saddened to learn of the death last week of the former Archbishop of Melanesia, Sir Ellison Pogo, following a long illness.

Finally, warm thanks to all who have served this year and given so freely of their time and energy – especially new members of Council, Laisani Jioji, who also happens to work at the Fiji High Commission. Also Siale Bain-Vete who, as reported earlier, but wishes to stand down through pressure of work.

Chris Luxton

Chairman