



Australian High Commission
Port Vila

Friday, 8 March 2024

Media Release

Australia recognises three strong women leaders for International Women's Day in Vanuatu

On International Women's Day, Australia and Vanuatu celebrated the diversity and determination of women. The stories we shared today remind us that gender equality is part of everything we do for a prosperous and resilient society.

The Australian High Commission partnered with the Mataskelekele, Lynch and Sope families to host the annual International Women's Day Awards event on Friday 8 March. This year the initiative introduced the new Mildred Sope Award for Creative Storytelling in partnership with the Sope Family, to honour the late Mildred Sope, who played an important role in developing Vanuatu's creative space.

The awards event was attended by First Lady of the Republic of Vanuatu, Mrs Rima Vurobaravu, Honourable MP Gloria Julia King, DG of Justice, Mr Arthur Faerua, dignitaries and friends.

Since 2012, these awards have marked Vanuatu and Australia's shared commitment to promote and empower women and girls working across all sectors of Vanuatu society whether in health, education, community development, humanitarian response, disability inclusion and the arts.

Australian High Commissioner Heidi Bootle said while there were only three awards on the day, all the nominations showcased the courage, strength, and compassion of ni-Vanuatu women.

"This year's nominees exemplify leadership values and are role models for all around them. They are our unsung heroes, diligently working to affect change for the better.

"Vanuatu and Australia work together to promote gender equality across all sectors; whether empowering women engineers in infrastructure or creating more opportunities for women in business. Gender equality is essential for resilient and healthy communities," said High Commissioner Bootle.



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Caption: Mr Brandon Lynch, First Lady Mrs Rima Vurobaravu, Mrs Helen Naupa, Ms Anna Naupa, Australian High Commissioner Heidi Bootle, Former Prime Minister Barak Sope, Ms Lyn Rose Tule, Former President Kalkot Mataskelekele and grandchildren of Late Andy Lynch.

In 2024, three strong women leaders received awards for their outstanding leadership in Vanuatu.

Ms Lyn Rose Tule received the 2024 Hanson Mataskelekele Award for Women in Leadership. She was instrumental in setting up the Vanuatu Women's Centre in Torba Province in 2010 and helped to establish the Malampa Counselling Centre. As one of the longest serving staff of the Vanuatu Women's Centre, she is recognised as a role model and leader for her passion for community work and commitment to ending violence against women and children.

"I encourage all women in different levels of society to stand strong against issues they face in their lives; to stand for their rights and to continue to stand up for other women who cannot stand up for themselves," said Ms Tule.



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Caption: Former President Kalkot Mataskelekele and Australian High Commissioner Heidi Bootle presenting the Hanson Mataskelekele Award for Women in Leadership to Ms Lyn Rose Tule.

Mrs Helen Naupa was awarded the 2024 Andy Lynch Award for Excellence in the Community Sector. She has over 30 years of advocacy for women’s rights in both national and provincial governments and the NGO sector. She helped to develop the Vanuatu Government’s women’s affairs unit and was the main drafter for Vanuatu’s inaugural NGO shadow CEDAW report in 2008. She is recognised for her leadership in enhancing social inclusion and utilising kastom and culture in the transformational developments on Erromango.

“I want to wish all women in Vanuatu a Happy International Women’s Day. Wherever we are, we are strong women, whether you stay at home, work in an office, work in the garden, or are in business. I encourage us all to continue to base our communication on respect, humility and honour no matter who we work with,” said Mrs Naupa.



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Caption: Mrs Helen Naupa, awardee of the Andy Lynch Award for Excellence in the Community Sector and Mr. Brandon Lynch.

The inaugural winner of the 2024 Mildred Sope Award for Creative Story telling was awarded to Ms Anna Naupa. An avid reader of Erromangoan and English heritage, Anna is the creator and convenor of the group who created the first illustrated children's book of nonfiction *Taftumas! Different Journeys, One People*. Co-founder of Haus Storian which was launched during the 7th Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival in 2023, she never stops writing whether for herself or for general, academic or Erromangan audiences. She is recognised for her contribution to oral storytelling and literature.

Ms Naupa said: "Writing is about collaboration and connection with readers, fellow writers and with the past, present and the future."



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Caption: Australian High Commissioner Heidi Bootle presenting the Mildred Sope Award for Creative Storytelling to Ms Anna Naupa.

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