

High Commissioner's Address at the Australia Day Reception
Australian High Commission Chancery, Port Vila
29 January 2020

Good evening

His Excellency Pastor Obed Moses Tallis, President of the Republic of Vanuatu
The Honourable Charlot Salwai Tabimasmal, Prime Minister of Vanuatu
Ministers and Members of Parliament
Chief Willy Plasua, President of the Malvatuma National Council of Chiefs
Custodians of the land on which we meet
Ambassadors, High Commissioners and representatives of the Diplomatic Corps
Representatives of government, civil society, church and business leaders
Representatives from our sponsors tonight, Carnival Australia, ANZ Vanuatu,
South Pacific Electrical and Aelan chocolate
Invited guests and fellow Australians

Gud evening long yufala evriwan mo tankyu tumas blong kam long ofisol 2020 Australia Day selebrasen long Vanuatu. Bae mi storian wetem yufala lo inglis from tonaet yumi selebratem Ostralia Dei. Mi hope se hemi oraet wetem yufala.

But before I do begin my speech tonight, I would ask you all to stand and join me in a minute's silence, in honour of the 33 lives lost in the bushfires in Australia, Corporal Dipesh Gurung from The Royal Gurkha Rifles will open the minute's silence with an ode on the bagpipes.

~one minute silence~

Thank you. And thank you to the British High Commission for bringing Corporal Dipesh Gurung here from Brunei.

As some of you may know, this season over 3000 homes have been lost and more than 10 million hectares have been burnt in the devastating bushfires that have swept across Australia. Six Australian firefighters and three American firefighters have lost their lives as they bravely served communities. These fires also affected my family and some of my staff here tonight, as we evacuated affected towns.

The unprecedented fires have also impacted ni-Vanuatu seasonal workers. I can reassure you that, as we always do, the Australian Government is monitoring bushfire activity and communicating directly with employers located in high risk regions. These fires have given me a small insight into the bravery and resilience of the people of Vanuatu who continue to recover from disasters including Tropical Cyclone Pam and volcanic eruptions on Ambae and Ambrym. And is a further demonstration that we can depend on each other, in good times and in hardship.

I have already been overwhelmed by the generosity and support from the Government and people of Vanuatu. The Government has generously donated 20 million vatu to rural fire fighting services. I have also attended several fundraising events and I know that the local Red Cross and many organisations and businesses have come together to donate. I want to thank you all for this incredible support.

Australians are a hardy lot, our recovery efforts are in full swing and we remain open for business. With friends like you, we know we can bounce back.

Yumi save se Ostrelia mo Vanuatu oli neighbours mo oli gudfala frens finis. Ol gudfala response we yumi witnesem i soem bakagen yumi wan famili. Mo mi praod blo talem se man blo mi wetem tufala pikinini blo mitufala, mifala i save kolem Vanuatu niu aelan home blo mifala.

Tonight, as we celebrate Australia Day, I want to pause to consider our relationship and to congratulate ourselves on its strength. I also want to acknowledge my predecessor, Ms Jenny Da Rin, and her commitment in this regard. As I said to His Excellency, President Tallis, the values that Australia and Vanuatu share, and hold dear, have drawn us ever closer

- fairness and decency
- liberal democracy
- mutual respect
- the rule of law
- and helping a neighbour in need.

These shared values have underwritten our relationship for decades. And they continue to reinforce our cooperation now from health to law and justice; from labour mobility to gender equality. We work together in the face of shared regional challenges and we share a desire for a prosperous and secure region.

And our relationship is one steeped in a genuine partnership between our two governments. This true partnership is also evidenced by the genuine two way exchanges that we share. Be it in cultural exchanges of which we are immensely proud. For example, the visits of Indigenous Australians to Vanuatu, including the Yellaka group, Chris Tamwoy and tonight, Sean Choolburra. Or the incredible tour by Vanuatu's Soul Harvest choir to the Desert Song festival in Alice Springs last year. Be it the movement of Australians and ni-Vanuatu citizens and goods into our respective countries through investment, labour mobility programs or the recently introduced kava pilot in Australia. Or the visits between our leaders with Prime Minister's Salwai's visit to Australia in 2018 and Prime Minister Morrison's visit here last year, combined with multiple visits in 2019 by Vanuatu and Australian ministers.

And, of course, we are proud to partner with Vanuatu in pursuing its National Sustainable Development Plan and in achieving tangible and meaningful results. For example, we have worked in partnership with the Vanuatu Government to develop Vanuatu's national skills system. Together, under Vanuatu's leadership, we are better linking skills training to economic outcomes by developing ni-Vanuatu entrepreneurship and the local private sector. This partnership is guided by the first ever Vanuatu National Human Resource Development Plan, on which I congratulate you. In 2019, these provincial Skills Centres supported 237 business clients. Sixty-eight per cent of these businesses were led by women and five per cent were owned by people with disabilities. And over the last six month period, 86% of these businesses have increased their profit margin. This program also focuses on facilitating market access for local private sector growth: the first ever Handicraft Hubs established in Malampa and Torba provinces enabled local producers to engage in inter-island trade. And an innovative 'Farm to Table' initiative is linking farmers with local restaurants, which are attracting new markets with organic, eco-friendly cuisine.

Looking forward we have lots to keep us busy. As you know, this year, 2020, will be another big year for Vanuatu as you celebrate 40 years of independence, hold a general election, graduate from least developed country status and host the Pacific Islands Forum. In these milestones, and more broadly, across the full breadth of our partnership, Australia stands ready to continue our support and friendship. I am also very pleased to display our new logo and tagline, Tugeta Yumi Stanap, tonight to celebrate 40 years of our bilateral relationship and as a symbol of our continued collaboration.

And as for this day that we are celebrating tonight. Australia Day, 26 January, is the day to reflect on what it means to be Australian, to celebrate contemporary Australia and to acknowledge our history. It is about celebrating the contribution

that every Australian makes to our nation. From our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - who have been in Australia for more than 60,000 years - to those who have lived there for generations, to those who have more recently come from all corners of the globe to call our country home.

In Australia, as I did tonight, we acknowledge and honour the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. Our Indigenous heritage is so very cherished and I want to thank you Sean for coming here tonight to perform the smoking ceremony, the first time at the Australian High Commission.

The theme for this year's Australia Day is "The Story of Australia". It begins over 60,000 years ago and new chapters are written every day.

On Australia Day, we reflect on our history, its highs and its lows. We respect the stories of others. And we celebrate our country, its achievements, its people and its friends. I'm delighted to celebrate Australia Day tonight here with you all, our friends and family from Australia and Vanuatu.

Tankyu tumas lo attention blo yufala. Mi hope se yufala i enjoyem gudfala naet blo yumi.