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FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

INSIDE FNU

Learning, Growing, and Celebrating Together

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The Pacific Ocean Envoy for COP31 and Leader for the Opposition, Honorable Inia Seruiratu.
Photo: *Penioni Kolinisau*

Fiji Needs You

By NICOLETTE CHAMBERS

"We need you, this is your time."

This is the stern message from the Pacific Ocean Envoy for COP31 and Leader of Opposition, Honourable Inia Seruiratu, urging students and academics of the Fiji National University (FNU) to remain steadfast in protecting Fiji's vanua and safeguarding its natural environment.

His call follows the conclusion of the PreCOP31 Climate Summit, held in Nadi earlier this month, reinforcing the importance of collective action and shared responsibility in protecting Fiji's land and resources.

Honourable Seruiratu urged the FNU family to step forward, recognise their respective roles and take responsibility for the part they can play in continuing to protect the vanua and address climate change.

He added that University institutions like the FNU can still do more to protect the environment.

"I would say FNU and other institutions can do more, same thing with the University of the South Pacific as well. One is just in terms of the capacities. We need capacities in all this in order to ensure that we are able to come up with better solutions, at the same time in terms of access to technology as well."

"Produce the leaders who can fill the shoes and take the baton from here and continue with the fight. That is why institutions such as the Fiji National University is so important because it does not only train Fijians but it has a responsibility for providing that training as well for the rest of the region, so I definitely agree, they have a role to play, and they can still do better, and they can still do more," said Honourable Seruiratu.

He further stated that having Fiji to host PreCOP31, was an excellent opportunity to show leadership, standing firm on partnerships, and deliverance highlighting that the destination among all discussions was sustainability.

"I have attended so many sessions, and this is all contributing towards our long-term goal which is to prepare the Pacific for the main COP that is coming up in November."

"For us, being a least contributor to global emissions and worst affected, we need to continue to amplify our voices, not only our voices but our leadership as well and additionally, how we can be part of the solution and at the same time get assistance," explained Honourable Seruiratu.

He highlighted that the fight against climate change was not solely on Government, but a shared goal among all other sectors.

"We need the other partners, we need the private sector, we need philanthropy, we need civil society and Non-Government Organisations, we need academia and finances, and so forth, the partnership is so important. Government has a role to play in terms of future legislatures. Despite the challenges, we are progressing," Honourable Seruiratu reiterated.

Meanwhile, the FNU alongside Monash University, successfully hosted its PreCOP31 event on Monday, 05 October at the Hilton Fiji Beach Resort & Spa in Denarau in Nadi with the theme 'Investing in Natural Capital: The Pacific Opportunity.'

The event was organised by the Pacific Action for Climate Transitions (PACT) and hosted by the FNU.



The Pacific Is Not Asking to Be Saved, it Wants to Be Paid – Solomon Islands PM



Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Honourable Matthew Wale.
Photo: *Penioni Kolinisau*

By Christal Kapoor

The Pacific has long been cast as a victim of the climate crisis. Solomon Islands Prime Minister Honourable Matthew Wale offered a different framing earlier this month: the region as a creditor the world has been slow to pay.

Speaking at the FNU PACT PreCOP31 gathering at the Hilton Fiji Beach Resort and Spa, Honourable Wale argued that the ocean, and forests of the Pacific are our largest productive asset, and that the global financial system has failed to treat them as one.

"We do not ask the world to save our blue Pacific continent, this ocean already works for us," said Honourable Wale.

His case rested on a lopsided ledger. Roughly US$220 billion a year flows into nature-based solutions worldwide, he said, citing a UNEP report, while about US$7.3 trillion supports activity that harms nature, a gap of more than 30 to 1.

Pacific governments need about US$13.2 billion for climate action by 2030 but have received a little over US$5 billion in the past decade.

Much of that money arrives with strings attached such as studies and data that small governments lack the resources to produce.

The economics of protection, he noted, are not close.

Reefs shield 41 percent of hazard exposed coastal people in the Pacific, the highest share of any region, while engineered seawalls cost US$15 million to US$20 million a kilometre.

The Prime Minister called for climate finance that is "simplified and grant-based," routed through existing government systems.

He pressed donors and development banks to adopt the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, which would weigh a country's exposure to shocks rather than its income per capita, a yardstick he called becoming obsolete for small island states.

As proof of Pacific ingenuity, he pointed to the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, the island bloc that turned tuna into a managed rent-generating asset.

"That is proof that Pacific-led stewardship delivers and it could be a model for how we value the rest of our natural ocean and land resources," he added.

At home, his Government is betting on a proposed Sovereign Wealth Fund, which he called a flagship policy, and a Climate Resilience Investment Fund meant to blend public, private and international money.

It is also developing a national blue economy framework and says more than 20 percent of its forests and terrestrial space is already protected.

The challenge as revealed by Honourable Wale, is no longer a shortage of assets but of buyers.

"It is cubment on us to create the appetite," said Honourable Wale.

Nobody Will Open the Door for You: Two Pacific Women Tell the Next Generation to Walk In

By Christal Kapoor

"The boat stopped moving. The river was wide, but it had silted so badly that the vessel carrying delegates through the Nadi River catchment, could not get through."

These were the words of Dr Winifred Nainoca, a prominent researcher, climate advocate and member of the Fiji National University (FNU) Council, during the PreCOP31 panel discussion.

"I was so shocked yesterday when our boat couldn't move in a wide river," exclaimed Dr Nainoca.

The cause was plain to see. Land upstream had been burnt and cleared for sugarcane.

"This place was forested before they burnt it down," she said.

Her answer is to put the trees back, with FNU's two large western campuses planting belts of trees across the catchment.

"It is a shock that the trees that are a totem for the local people, was nowhere to be found. It's time to bring it back and FNU needs to take the lead," stressed Dr Nainoca.

For Dr Nainoca, the FNU PACT Pre-COP gathering mattered because of who was in the room, prime ministers, a Pacific envoy, chiefs, lecturers, young people and community members, together for the first time.

The aim, she said, was to link researchers to communities so that they can just straight away apply at community level what they are researching about.

Her message for young I-Taukei women was personal. She acknowledged that in Melanesian decision-making bodies, women are often absent.

"However in the villages, the men even say, you want something to work in the village? Give the project to the women."

"Once you prove yourself, once you get educated, please don't stay at the high offices. Come down and work at community level."

"If you're a woman or if you're a youth, just get in. Remember nobody will exclude you as much as you will allow," Dr Nainoca pleaded.

Similarly, Dr Aliti Vunisea, who has spent more than 20 years working with women in Fijian communities, and across the region, spoke on a panel at the gathering and carried the same message, shaped by experience.

"For our generation, because the traditional system is so strong, we didn't know the pathways to speak, the spaces, the entry points,. But now, things have opened up."

"Unless you speak, nobody will listen to you. Nobody is going to open that door for you. You have to do it yourselves," she revealed.

Her advice for navigating tradition was practical.

"Just be smart. Work through the women who already have standing, the wives of leaders and pastors, spokespeople, educated women and businesswomen. All you need is a footing. Sisterhood always wins," Dr Vunisea added.

She also stated that it is time, to work together as women, as sisters in the fight against climate change.



Dr Winifred Nainoca
Photo: *Penioni Kolinisau*



Dr Aliti Vunisea
Photo: *Penioni Kolinisau*

"Every Fraction of a Degree Matters," Ambassador Yauvoli's Warning to the Pacific



The Director of the Biodiversity Conservation and Fiji Office at the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Ambassador Amenatave Yauvoli
Photo: Penioni Kolinisau

By Christal Kapoor

The Director of the Biodiversity Conservation and Fiji Office at the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Ambassador Amenatave Yauvoli opened the FNU PACT PreCOP31 Dialogue by acknowledging that the current outlook was not encouraging.

"The picture that we have is not good," said Ambassador Yauvoli.

Drawing on the 2025 State of Environment Report for the Pacific Islands, Ambassador Yauvoli said the region's environment is rated "fair to poor".

Climate change, land-use change, habitat loss, invasive species and pollution are all driving the decline.

Most coastal and marine indicators, including coral cover, lagoon water quality and coastal fish biomass, fall below the benchmark.

Hazardous waste is rated poor and deteriorating, and native forest cover is deteriorating.

Funding for ecosystem-based adaptation is rated "unknown", with low data confidence.

These, he reminded delegates, are "not something new", just what the science community has already told us.

His sharpest warning concerned the 1.5°C goal.

Overshooting it, he said, is "not an abstract future scenario. It's real."

"We are surrounded by oceans. We are living in oceans,"he added.

He also stated that decisions made now will either lock communities into greater exposure or preserve their ability to respond.

That is why he urged that one message carry through the dialogue.

"Every fraction of a degree and every year above 1.5 matters. Without it, everything else fails," Ambassador Yauvoli explained.

His message for FNU, Fiji and the region had two parts.

First, partnerships must be effective and durable.

"No man is an Island anymore and trust-building is essential because we cannot do it alone," he emphasised.

Second, finance must come from all sources, public grants, domestic institutions such as the Fiji Development Bank, bilateral partners and multilateral funds such as the Green Climate Fund and the Loss and Damage Fund.

His closing note was one of faith.

"The negotiations are a tough battle, but with God everything is possible," he reiterated.



Loraini Naivalu
***Photo:** Christal Kapoor*



Asaeli Coakula
***Photo:** Christal Kapoor*

Communities Place Their Hope in Global Climate Talks

By Christal Kapoor

The voices of two ordinary Fijians echoed far beyond their communities, during the Fiji National University (FNU)-Pacific Action for Climate Transitions (PACT) PreCOP 1 Ridge-to-Reef Field Trip, carrying a powerful message to world leaders ahead of the 31st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framewrk Convention on Climate Change.

The field trip brought together international delegates, researchers, policymakers and development partners, allowing them to witness firsthand how climate change is reshaping lives in Fiji.

More importantly, it created a platform for those living with the realities of climate change every day, to tell their own stories.

The journey took delegates to the agroforestry farm of former military officer and bomb blast survivor, Asaeli Coakula in Votualevu.

Now in his fourth year of farming, Mr Coakula shared how agroforestry has become both his livelihood and his response to an increasingly unpredictable climate.

His farm is home to native vesi, agarwood, teak, fruit trees and staple crops such as cassava, demonstrating how diversified farming can strengthen resilience against prolonged droughts and changing weather patterns associated with El Niño.

His journey, however, has not been without hardship.

A devastating fire destroyed much of his crops, forcing him to rebuild from the ground up.

Yet despite the setbacks, he refused to give up.

"With God and hard work, there is nothing that we cannot do," Mr Coakula told the delegates.

He reminded them that resilience is not the absence of hardship, but the determination to begin again.

He also acknowledged the Ministry of Forestry for its continued support throughout his farming journey.

"The assistance I received from the Ministry, helped me to continue building a more sustainable future,"he stated.

Mr Coakula has been using a blend of traditional farming methods with modern ingenuity to fight the prolonged drought.

"Our ancestors saw banana stems as a source of water, medicine and food. I use the stems to help hydrate my seedlings as banana stems naturally expel water in prolonged periods," he exlained.

He also emphasised that past practices of our elders have sufficient knowledge to help mitigate the changes brought on by changing weather patterns and the western world needs to invest in these ideas.

The delegation's final stop led them to Yavusania Village, where residents shared an equally moving account of living alongside a river that has sustained generations, but is now threatening their future.

Welcoming the visitors, Loraini Naivalu delivered a powerful and emotional speech highlighting the village's deep connection to the river.

"As you come into our village today, you will have the opportunity to see and learn about our community, our river, and the changes that we have been experiencing over the years," she said.

She explained that the river has long provided food, freshwater mussels, fertile land and supported the surrounding ecosystem that families depend upon.

However, years of heavier rainfall, flooding and changing weather patterns have caused severe riverbank erosion.

"Some areas of land have been lost and around five houses have been affected, with families having to move as the river continues to change," Ms Naivalu shared.

Despite these challenges, Yavusania is choosing hope over despair.

"Yavusania is not only a story of the challenges we face. It is also a story of community action and resilience where women are mostly involved," she said.

The community has begun restoring its riverbanks by planting vetiver grass and other vegetation to stabilise the soil while combining traditional knowledge with modern approaches to better care for their land.

"We hope you will also see the efforts of our people to protect our environment and adapt to the changes taking place around us."

"We hope your visit to Yavusania will be an opportunity to share knowledge, experiences and ideas about how communities can respond to climate change," Ms Naivalu said.

Through the FNU-PACT Pre-COP 31 initiative, these stories now become part of Fiji's message to the international community.

Beyond statistics, scientific reports and policy discussions, the field trip reminded participants that climate change is ultimately about people, the families rebuilding after disaster, the farmers adapting their livelihoods, and the communities fighting to protect the places they call home.

57 FNU Students Shine at National Salon Culinaire 2026

By NICOLETTE CHAMBERS



The FNU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba with the winners of the Crest Chicken National Salon Culinaire 2026 at the FNU Bonunaqwele Nadi Campus. ***Photo:*** *Nicolette Chambers*

A total of 57 students proudly represented the Fiji National University (FNU) at the National Salon Culinaire 2026,showcasing their culinary skills and talents at the annual event.

A record breaking 155 participants took part at this year's competition, the Crest Chicken National Salon Culinaire 2026 and Worldchefs Global Chefs Challenge Pacific Rim Semi Finals marking the highest number of entries since its inception.

The four day Goodman Fielder International hosted event was organised by the Fiji Chefs Association, and hosted by FNU at the University's Bonunaqwele Nadi Campus last week.

The students competed alongside industry experts and came out strong in a few of the different competitions.

Among other medallists of the University, FNU's Waikarawa Waqa, a second year Diploma in Culinary Arts student studying at Nasese Campus secured second place, in the CJ Patel Fiji Culture and Heritage Chef of the Year 2026 competition.

Waikarawa highlighted the passion he had for cooking ever since he was young and acknowledged his mother for being his biggest inspiration.

Officiating at the awards ceremony was the FNU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba noting the proud moment for FNU being hosts to the prestigious event.

"We want our students to have opportunities like this, to put their learning into practice, discover what they are capable of and prepare themselves for the world of work."

"For students from our College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies, taking part in this competition is a valuable experience. They get to test their skills, learn from experienced chefs, work under pressure and see where they can improve. These lessons are just as important as what they learn in the classroom," said Professor Nabobo-Baba.

The Vice-Chancellor added that at FNU, the goal was for graduates to leave with the skills and confidence to succeed in their chosen careers.

"We also want them to be ready to contribute to their communities and to Fiji's hospitality and tourism industry. Experiences like this help our students take that next step,"she said.

Fiji Chefs Association president, Rakesh Kumar said this year's competition had demonstrated the strength, growth and vibrancy of Fiji's culinary heritage.

The 2026 national championship winners are:

- **Fiji Chef of the Year 2026:** Graham Temo – Fiji Airways Limited
- **Fiji Young Chef of the Year 2026:** Chang Kay Yee – Holiday Inn Suva
- **Fiji Pastry Chef of the Year 2026:** Maurisio Baleicolo – Laucala
- **Fiji Vegan Chef of the Year 2026:** Vanshika Naidu – Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort
- **Fiji Culture and Heritage Chef of the Year 2026:** Ravinesh Chand – Sofitel Fiji Resort & Spa

PS Nacuva Says Quality Circles Can Transform the Civil Service



Permanent Secretary for Youth and Sports, Ratu Meli Nacuva receiving the One Star Award from FNU's Director Productivity and Innovation Bob Mitchell (right). ***Photo:*** *Elenoa Cagi.*

By Christal Kapoor

At the 2026 National Quality & Innovation Conference (NQIC), the Ministry of Youth and Sports picked up awards for both of its teams, one star and two stars, and its Permanent Secretary, Mr Ratu Meli Nacuva, said the results show the ministry's transformation is working.

"It means a really good thing, that we are beginning to see results on the transformation that we began in 2024. The Minister wanted the Ministry to deliver better for youth, which is the largest population group, and the ministry has so far reached only a small part of it," said Mr Nacuva.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has five quality circles award, with two competing in the conference.

"We used to have one lane meaning that we could only handle one big event for the Ministry. In the last two weeks, we were able to run four parallel major events including the MSG Cup Sports Ministers' meeting, the Chinese National Day and a few of Central Division's major programme. Now we can deliver four times the capacity we had before," he added.

The Permanent Secretary, who is helping lead the civil service functional review, said other Ministries should follow. He pointed to the Office of the Attorney-General's work, on its registry.

"Imagine if you can reduce the turnaround time of demands from the citizens, from weeks to days. Can you imagine what that means for every single request made to every single ministry? It's almost like a dream, but it can be done and the quality circles are proving it," he further stated.

With fuel prices rising and pressure from events in the Middle East, he said productivity is more important than ever.

"The cost of living gets higher. The only way around this is productivity. It's being efficient in what we do and what we have," Mr Nacuva explained.

He thanked the National Training & Productivity Centre (NTPC) for supporting quality circle teams.

"It's a thankless task that you do, because hardly anybody thanks the quality circle facilitators. Thank you for the hard work that you do FNU," Mr Nacuva said.

The Ministry skipped this year's Fiji Business Excellence Awards to focus on implementation, but Mr Nacuva said it will apply for the prize award next year.

Breaking Boundaries through the Rhythm of the Meke

By ROMEKA KUMARI



Farhat Adnan performing a meke at the FNU Nasinu Campus. ***Photo:*** *Elenoa Cagi.*

Stepping onto the stage at the Fiji National University's Nasinu Campus, Farhat Adnan accomplished far more than just completing a coursework requirement.

As the sole Indo-Fijian woman to perform the meke (a traditional I-Taukei dance) during a combined celebration for World Teachers' Day, Fiji Day, and Pinktober on Friday, 9 October 2026, she challenged long standing cultural barriers.

For Farhat, a second year Bachelor of Education (Primary) student in the College of Humanities, Education and Law (CHEL), taking the lead in a cultural art form outside her own heritage", marked a momentous personal milestone.

"Growing up, opportunities to perform the meke were severely limited for many girls like me."

"Historically, Fijian women of Muslim descent were constrained by traditional expectations, and parents often disapproved of such participation. However, now as a mother and a student, I recognise how vital it is to engage in cultural experiences that transcend our individual backgrounds," Farhat reflected.

The 26-year-old mother of a three-year-old daughter, quickly realised that mastering the dance, and confronting a large crowd, carried a far deeper significance than simply fulfilling an academic assessment.

"It was about so much more than completing a unit assignment. This was my very first time performing a meke. The experience was essential in preparing me as a future educator teaching me to step onto a public stage with confidence, face an audience of unfamiliar faces, and broaden my horizons," she stated.

Embarking on the journey required perseverance, patience, and cross-cultural unity.

"As an Indo-Fijian, I was thrilled to learn the meke, but it presented a real challenge at first. Understanding the lyrics was tough, and mastering the intricate dance movements posed another hurdle. I am deeply grateful to my iTaukei classmates, who guided me with immense patience. They taught me every step, from our initial rehearsals all the way to taking centre stage," Farhat admitted.

She credited the unwavering support of her family with helping her embrace this new experience.

"The encouragement and motivation from my husband and parents gave me the courage to embrace a new culture and step outside my comfort zone," she added.

FNU Nasinu Establishes First-Ever Campus Choir

By ROMEKA KUMARI



Newly established FNU Nasinu Campus choir group. ***Photo:*** *Romeka Kumari*

The Fiji National University's (FNU) Nasinu Campus has established its first-ever choir group, bringing together students and staff from different colleges and courses to celebrate music, strengthen campus unity and foster a sense of belonging through song.

Led by Mr Saini Natera, an Assistant Instructor in the Department of Creative Arts at the College of Humanities, Education and Law (CHEL), the choir comprises approximately 25 students and three staff members from the Nasinu and Nabua campuses.

The choir made its debut during the World Teachers' Day, Fiji Day and Pinktober celebrations at the Nasinu Campus on Friday, 9 October 2026.

"This initiative reflects the vision of our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba to establish a choir ensemble at every university campus, creating opportunities for students and staff to connect beyond their academic responsibilities," said Mr Natera.

He added that with the assistance of the Head of Campus Nasinu, Mrs Katarina Ruru, and the support of Nasinu iTaukei Association President Ratu Sailosi, the establishment of the choir was an important step towards bringing the campus community together.

"Music has a unique power to unite people. My vision is for the choir to provide a joyful space where students and staff can sing together, build lasting friendships and strengthen our campus community," Mr Natera further stated.

With the Fiji Day celebrations approaching, an open invitation was extended to students instead of holding formal auditions. The response was encouraging, with students stepping forward to be part of the new initiative.

"Forming the choir came with its challenges, particularly with limited time to prepare for its first performance. It was challenging because most of the students were not trained singers, and we had very little time to prepare. However, it was also a fun and rewarding experience," Mr Natera expressed.

To help the students learn their parts quickly, he organised smaller groups for each vocal section, allowing members to practise before coming together as one ensemble.

The approach helped the students build confidence and improve their singing within a short period.

"After each rehearsal, the students were pleasantly surprised by how much their voices had improved. Seeing their progress and growing confidence was one of the most rewarding parts of the experience," he stated.

Drawing on his background in brass bands and orchestras, Mr Natera encouraged the choir members to understand the importance of teamwork and active listening.

He taught them to blend their voices rather than focus on individual performances, creating a unified sound.

"It is not about one person standing out, but about everyone working together. When each person listens, supports others and contributes their part, the result is something beautiful," he further stated.

Beyond musical development, Mr Natera believes the choir will provide students with a creative outlet to relieve academic stress, build confidence and develop performance skills.

"It will also create opportunities to preserve Fijian folk songs and Pacific musical traditions while bringing together students from diverse cultural backgrounds."

"Through their participation, students can develop valuable life skills, including teamwork, leadership and time management, while building stronger relationships across colleges and courses," he added.

Looking ahead, he hopes the choir will become a lasting musical tradition at FNU, performing at official university events and ceremonies while strengthening university spirit.

"Music can bridge generational and institutional divides. Through the choir, we want to break down barriers between academic communities, promote inclusivity and mutual respect, and create a stronger connection between students and staff," said Mr Natera.

From Journalism Student to Mentor



Ms Romeka Romena Kumari with the USP journalism students and academic team. ***Photo:*** *Photo Supplied.*

By WATI TALEBULA

The Fiji National University (FNU) Public Relations and Communications Specialist, Ms Romeka Romena Kumari, returned to her alma mater, the University of the South Pacific (USP), on Friday, 25 September 2026, to inspire aspiring journalists, by sharing her professional journey.

A proud USP alumna, Ms Kumari graduated in 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English Language and Literature, and Journalism.

She has since worked across television, online and newspaper journalism before transitioning into public relations and communications.

Reflecting on her journey, Ms Kumari said returning to USP brought back memories of her student days and the aspirations she had, when she first entered the university.

"Returning to USP was special because, I was once in the same position as these students, learning, asking questions, and trying to understand where my qualification would take me."

"I had the opportunity to share what I have learnt along the way, and encourage students to believe in their abilities, and the opportunities ahead of them," said Ms Kumari.

Drawing from her experience across different media platforms, Ms Kumari highlighted the importance of being adaptable, and willing to embrace new opportunities.

"Journalism teaches you to be curious, to listen, to ask the right questions, and to tell stories that matter. These are skills that remain valuable, even when your career takes you beyond the newsroom," she said.

She encouraged students not to feel restricted to one career path, noting that the knowledge and skills gained through journalism could lead to opportunities in public relations, communications and other professional fields.

"Your first job does not have to define your entire career. Be willing to learn, take on challenges and step outside your comfort zone.

Every experience can teach you something that will help you grow. Building a successful career takes patience, commitment and continuous learning.

"Do not be discouraged if your journey looks different from someone else's. Focus on developing your skills, building relationships and making the most of every opportunity that comes your way," she further stated.

For Ms Kumari, the visit was an opportunity to give back to the institution that helped shape her foundation and connect with the next generation of storytellers.

"I thank USP Journalism team for the invitation and for creating a platform for alumni and aspiring journalists to share experiences and learn from one another," she stated.

Her return to USP reflects how a university education can become the starting point for new opportunities, professional growth and the chance to inspire others.

A Voice Beyond Words

By CHRISTAL KAPOOR

For many, climate change conversations are about rising seas, stronger storms and changing weather patterns.

But for Keresi Saro, the conversation is also about something equally important, ensuring that no one is left behind.

A 30-year-old sign language interpreter from Taveuni, Ms Saro attended the recent Fiji National University (FNU) hosted PreCOP31 for the first time, bringing with her not only her professional experience, but also a deeply personal connection to inclusion and accessibility.

Ms Saro, who is married with five children, works with the Fiji Association for the eaf, supporting the Deaf community through communication and access to information.

Her passion for sign language began at home, as she grew up as a child of a deaf adult (CODA).

"My mother is deaf, so for us we are called children of deaf adults. My passion has always been about having sign language and helping the deaf community access communication and information," said Ms Saro.

Her presence at the event highlighted an important message that climate action must include everyone, including persons with disabilities, who are often among the most vulnerable during climate-related disasters.

Ms Saro expressed her appreciation to the Fiji National University for recognising the importance of accessibility, by including sign language interpretation at the event.

"I would like to thank FNU for organising this big event and for recognising sign language. It shows that our deaf families and friends are not being left behind and that they are included in climate conversations.

"When climate change disasters happen, it is usually those with disabilities who are really affected. It is important that they are part of these discussions," she added.

Although she had never previously attended a climate-focused conference, Ms Saro described the experience as eye-opening and an opportunity to learn more about the challenges communities face.

"This is my first time experiencing climate change discussions like this. I felt really excited, and I have learned a lot of things today. It has been really eye opening," she stated.

One of the key lessons she took away was the importance of collective responsibility in protecting the environment, particularly for the future generation.

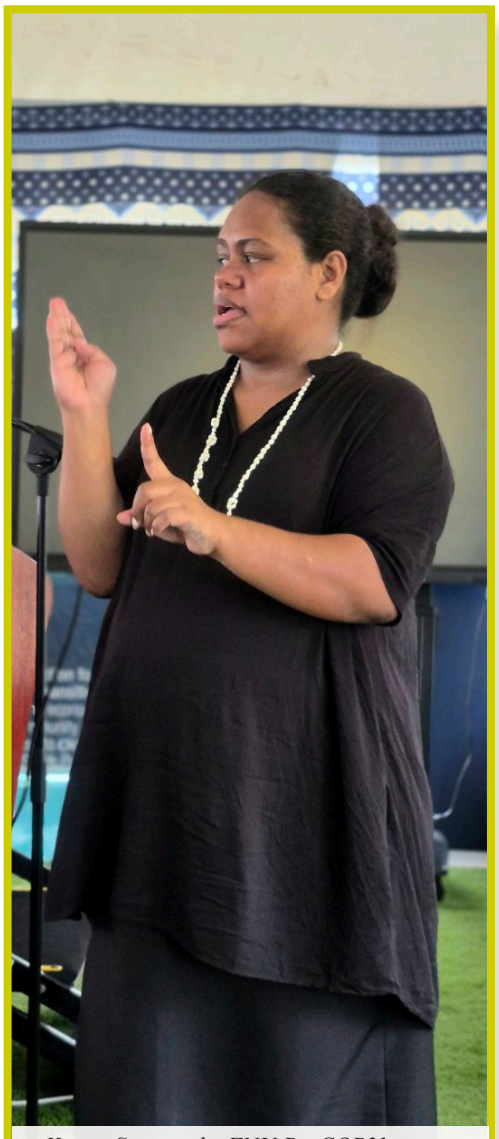
"Do not pollute the seas and water. Always put your rubbish in the rubbish bin. We have seen how pollution can affect our seas and our environment and how it connects with climate change," Ms Saro pleaded.

While attending the conference meant spending time away from her five children, Ms Saro believes the experience was worthwhile.

"Yes, it was worth it and I hope to share the lessons I gained with her family and community," she further stated.

Her participation also reflected FNU's commitment towards advancing inclusive education, community engagement, and sustainable development.

By creating spaces where diverse voices can contribute to important national conversations, FNU continues to support Fiji's broader goals of building resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities.



Keresi Saro at the FNU PreCOP31 event.
Photo: *Christal Kapoor*

FNU Brings a Pacific Voice to the Asia-Pacific Internet Governance Forum in Nepal



National Training and Productivity centre (NTPC) Senior Instructor, Ashutosh Maharaj (left) with the Head of Training Information TechnologySwaran Ravindra. ***Photo:*** *Supplied*

By CHRISTAL KAPOOR

The Fiji National University (FNU) is making its presence felt in regional conversations about the digital future, with two representatives from the National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) recently taking part in the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF) 2026 in Nepal.

NTPC Senior Instructor Ashutosh Maharaj, attended as a selected APrIGF Fellow while the Head of Training Information Technology, Swaran Ravindra served as Vice Chair of APrIGF.

Their participation puts FNU in the discussions on a more inclusive, secure and accessible Internet, and brings Pacific perspectives to a forum that includes much larger countries.

Mr Maharaj said having representatives at two levels of the forum, sends a strong signal.

"Having two representatives involved at different levels shows that we are not only attending these regional discussions, but we are becoming actively involved in them," said Mr Maharaj.

He said Universities have a role beyond the classroom.

"Universities should not only be teaching technology. We should also be part of the conversations about how technology is developing, how it is governed and how it affects our communities," he stated.

Internet governance can sound technical, but Mr Maharaj said it shapes daily life.

"When people hear 'Internet governance', they sometimes think it is something very technical or something that only governments and large technology companies need to worry about, but many of the issues discussed affect us every day, such as cybersecurity, online safety, artificial intelligence, privacy, access to the Internet and how our personal information is used," he emphasised.

He highlighted that the Pacific Region faces its own set of challenges.

"We have small island states, remote communities, connectivity challenges, skills shortages and different social and cultural contexts. If we are not part of the conversation, these realities can easily be overlooked," he shared.

For FNU, taking part means better knowledge flowing back to staff and students.

"That knowledge can then feed into our teaching, research and engagement with industry. Ultimately, our students benefit because we can better prepare them for the issues they will face when they enter the workforce," revealed Mr Maharaj.

Digital transformation is about people

Mr Maharaj said one message came through strongly at the forum, and that was, digital transformation is not simply about introducing more technology.

"We also need the right skills, policies, infrastructure and people to make sure technology benefits society. If we want a stronger digital economy, we need people who understand not only how to use technology, but also issues such as cybersecurity, AI, privacy, digital inclusion and responsible use of technology," he explained.

Mr Maharaj also stressed the importance of keeping teaching up to date through partnerships.

"We need to continuously look at what we are teaching and make sure it reflects what is happening outside the classroom. Partnerships with industry, government and regional organisations are particularly important because they expose our students to real problems and real opportunities."

"As technology develops very quickly, we must ensure that rural communities, smaller Pacific countries and people with limited digital skills are not left behind," he further added.

AI, cybersecurity and regional cooperation

On emerging issues, Mr Maharaj said the conversation on artificial intelligence is shifting.

"The conversation has moved beyond simply talking about what AI can do. There is now much more discussion around how AI should be governed, how it should be used responsibly and what impact it will have on education, employment, cybersecurity and society."

"Cybersecurity and online safety are especially relevant for the Pacific, we often talk about the shortage of cybersecurity professionals in our region, but we also need to look at whether our training is producing people with practical skills," he emphasised.

He mentioned that FNU can look at practical cybersecurity training, responsible AI, Internet governance and digital policy as areas where teaching, research and industry engagement can come together.

A message to FNU students

Mr Maharaj urged students to look beyond the classroom.

"IT is a very broad field, and there are many opportunities beyond the traditional technical roles, including cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, digital policy and Internet governance," he explained.

He pointed to platforms for young people, such as the Youth Pacific Internet Governance Forum (Youth Pacific IGF) and Youth IGF initiatives, as well as fellowships, regional forums and technical communities.

"Start getting involved early. Don't wait until you graduate. Attend these forums, volunteer, apply for fellowships, work on practical projects and build connections with people in the industry and across the region."

"Don't focus only on collecting certificates. Practical skills and experience are equally important. Learn how to communicate your ideas, understand what is happening outside Fiji and be willing to contribute."

"Coming from Fiji or a small Pacific nation should never stop someone from participating internationally. The Pacific has its own challenges and experiences, and our voices need to be part of these conversations. I would really like to see more of our FNU students taking up these opportunities and eventually representing Fiji and the Pacific at regional and global levels," he stressed.



Ashutosh Maharaj (left) with Swaran Ravindra at the APrIGF in Nepal. ***Photo:*** *Supplied*

Health & Hustle

From Noro to FNU and Back Home: David's Journey in Healthcare

By WATI TALEBULA



David Totoka Pitanoe. ***Photo:*** *Supplied*

For David Totoka Pitanoe, the journey from Noro Town in the Solomon Islands, to becoming a senior radiographer and health services manager, began with a simple recommendation from a high school friend.

Years later, after earning three qualifications from the Fiji National University (FNU), David has returned home with the knowledge, and skills he now uses at the Gizo Hospital, in the province of Gizo where he supervises the Medical Imaging Department.

A first-generation University student from his family, David first came to FNU to study the Bachelor of Medical Imaging Science, graduating in 2017.

His interest in the management side of healthcare, later brought him back to the university, where he completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Health Services Management in 2023 and a Master of Health Services Management in 2025.

For David, the journey has been about more than collecting qualifications.

It has been about learning, meeting people, overcoming challenges and finding ways to use what he has learned back home.

The youngest of five siblings, David was born and raised in Noro Town.

His father is a retired seafarer and former fleet manager for a fishing company, while his mother is a stay-at-home mum.

Growing up, his parents encouraged him to value education and work towards a meaningful career.

His interest in medical imaging, developed from seeing the important role radiology plays in diagnosing illnesses and supporting patient care.

"I have seen the direct impact of radiology on diagnosis and patient outcomes, and that has been a motivating factor for me," he said.

His path to FNU began when a high school friend encouraged him to explore the University's programmes.

He chose FNU because of the learning environment and the support available to students.

"I chose FNU for its strong reputation, high-quality teaching, approachable lecturers, flexible course programmes, and solid student support systems. Engaging with students from diverse Pacific cultures opened my mind to new perspectives and unique ideas," David added.

Being away from home was not always easy.

There were times when he missed his family and important occasions back home, but he kept reminding himself why he had come to Fiji.

"I stayed motivated by focusing on my ultimate goal, which is supporting my family," he further stated.

Some of his happiest university memories came from the friendships he made along the way.

"Relaxing over kava with my Pacific brothers and spending time together on weekends are among the moments he remembers most fondly," David explained.

His lecturers also played an important role in his academic journey, particularly Dr Ledua Tamani, his research supervisor at the School of Public Health.

His postgraduate studies also changed the way he looked at healthcare, giving him a better understanding of the leadership and planning needed to keep services running in communities where resources can be limited.

"Pacific health systems often operate with limited resources, making effective planning and leadership essential to meet population needs," he highlighted.

What he learned at FNU continues to influence the way he approaches his work.

"FNU equipped me with practical skills and knowledge tailored to solving real-world challenges. The practical attachments, case studies, and research experiences empowered me to become an effective leader and team member," said David.

At Gizo Hospital, David now brings together his experience as a radiographer, and the management skills gained through his postgraduate studies.

His work includes contributing to health service planning, improving service delivery, and mentoring members of his team.

"My qualifications have provided me with the expertise needed to manage health resources efficiently and contribute positively to my country's health outcomes and development," he expressed.

For David, however, education is not only about building a career.

It is also about creating opportunities for families and communities.

"Education is a powerful tool to overcome poverty and social injustice. It brings stability, security, and progress, giving us the credibility to positively influence our families, communities, and nation," David stated.

His time in Fiji and his return home have also shaped what being an FNU alumnus means to him.

"To me, being an alumnus means being part of a broader Pacific community dedicated to driving meaningful change and giving back to our home countries," he reiterated.

Completing his Master of Health Services Management in 2025 remains one of David's proudest achievements.

As someone who was the first in his family to navigate University education, reaching that point took commitment, patience and perseverance.

Today, David is putting that knowledge to work at Gizo Hospital, serving patients and helping support healthcare delivery in his home country.

Looking back, he encourages young Pacific Islanders to make the most of the opportunities available to them.

"Apply, stay focused on your goals, learn as much as you can, build meaningful friendships, and enjoy the journey. And if I could speak to the young man who walked through the doors of FNU for the first time, I would advice him to trust the process, stay resilient through the challenges, and remember why he started," he emphasised.

David's journey is far from over.

He hopes to become a published author while continuing to build his knowledge through further study, carrying with him the lessons, friendships and experiences that began with a recommendation from a high school friend and took him from Noro Town to FNU and back home again.

INSIDE FNU is a monthly newspaper which aims to promote the University's activities to the wider community.
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INSIDE FNU wants to HEAR FROM YOU

INSIDE FNU welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the newsletter. Please send your suggestions, comments or articles for consideration to mprc@fnu.ac.fj

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