



**WELCOME ADDRESS BY**

**VICE CHANCELLOR & PRESIDENT**

**PROFESSOR PAL AHLUWALIA**

**AT THE**

**PACIFIC REGIONAL SPORTS FORUM**

**4<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2019**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC**

**SUVA, FIJI**

Honorable Minister Parveen Kumar Bala, from the Fijian Government

Honorable Minister Baklai Temengil, Republic of Palau

Honorable Minister Jean-Pierre Nirua, Republic of Vanuatu

Representatives of regional and sporting organizations,

USP faculty, staff and students,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Ni sa Bula Vinaka and good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome you to The University of the South Pacific.

USP is proud to host the Pacific Regional Sport Forum and to open a dialogue with regional stakeholders on the design of the Pacific Sport, Physical Activity and Physical Education (SPAPE) Action Plan 2019 – 2030.

Sport is an important enabler of sustainable development under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and sport is a critical and cross-cutting component of social, economic and political development of Pacific Island Countries.

Nelson Mandela famously said:

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.”

It is very timely that we recognise and connect with these powerful words from Nelson Mandela, particularly after South Africa’s success at the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan after their epic battle with England in the final match hosted in Japan!

While rugby is the national sport here in Fiji, in Japan it has been very exciting to watch the Japanese Rugby Team – the cherry blossoms – inspire their nation and make history with their impressive performances on the field. Sport helps shape our national identities and the passion and fierce rivalry created by the Rugby World Cup is testament to that.

The University of the South Pacific is one of only two regional universities in the world, uniquely placed in a region of extraordinary physical, social and economic diversity.

It is jointly owned by the governments of 12 member countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Samoa.

Building on a series of activities in recent years, USP is committed to strengthening sport-based activities in line with the new strategic plan 2019 to 2024, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 2019, a Sport and Sustainable Development Coordination Committee was formed as part of a university-wide approach to embedding sport, physical activity and physical education.

The Coordination Committee agreed on four pillars of action – Research, Learning and Teaching, Campus and Community Engagement, and Regional and International partnerships.

USP stands ready to help shape the future direction of the Pacific SPAPE Action Plan and build on the evidence base that both supports the sporting sector and underpins the contribution of sport to sustainable development.

We need innovative solutions to tackle the region's most persistent challenges, and the combination of targeted action through the Pacific SPAPE Action Plan and stronger regional coordination will go a long way towards changing the game for Pacific region's greatest asset – our people.

This Forum is powerful platform for regional dialogue with an audience comprising representatives from Government – including Ministers and Senior Officials – regional sport organisations, UN agencies, CROPS agencies and civil society organisations along with technical specialists and invited guests.

I wish you a very successful three days of dialogue, debate and discussion.

Thank you and Vinaka vaka levu.