

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**MORNING TEA FOR YOUTH AMBASSADORS AND VOLUNTEERS, ADF AND AFP
PERSONNEL**
NUKU'ALOFA, KINGDOM OF TONGA
31 JULY 2008

It is a great pleasure to join you today and have this opportunity to thank everyone here for your service in this country.

I also thank High Commissioner, Bruce Hunt, for hosting this event and welcoming us so warmly here at the Residence.

It's very exciting to see so many Australians working to assist the people of Tonga and at the same time learning about such a unique culture and people, and sharing our own Aussie perspective on life.

The work you are undertaking underpins the close bilateral relationship we have with the Kingdom of Tonga and reflects the spirit of cooperation and goodwill we do our best to provide to all our Pacific neighbours.

This is the second visit I have made to Tonga as Governor-General and it is a delight to renew contact with the warm and friendly people who have such strong links with Australia.

There are more than 7500 people born in Tonga living in Australia, which is around 5 percent of the population living here.

I understand 101 Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development have been welcomed to Tonga since 1999, with 21 presently deployed.

Your support includes important tasks such as improving healthcare and raising awareness of community health issues (well done Rosalind Beadle), teaching journalism and media awareness skills, employment and training, youth development and involvement with tourism, education, and legal research, training and administration.

And sport offers a tremendous opportunity to bridge cultures and especially so in the Pacific. I note with pleasure Dylan Harper's contribution here with the Tongan Australian Rules Football and Tara Naige in swimming.

This bond was demonstrated last Saturday night when for the first time, an Australian of Tongan descent, George Smith, captained the Wallabies against the All Blacks.

We also have four wonderful people here this morning doing sterling work under the auspices of Volunteers International Development Assistance in the areas of health, labour relations, finance and culture.

I know that each volunteer brings a diversity of impressive educational qualifications and life experiences, to the people of Tonga.

I also applaud the ADF and AFP personnel who in sharing their expertise are developing and

strengthening the capacities of Tonga's security forces.

Of particular note, was the deployment in support of Operation Tokoni in late 2006 following the serious rioting in which very good work was done to re establish law and order and support forensic investigations.

The deployment reinforced the priority Australia places on its supportive and fundamental role in the Pacific region as evidenced by our RAMSI intervention in the Solomon Islands, the ongoing deployment to Timor Leste and the tremendous work done on various fronts after the Bali bombings in Indonesia.

Over my career I have made many visits to Papua New Guinea and other countries in the Pacific region and there are two key thoughts I would like to share with you today.

One is that whatever work you do here, it is important to ensure that wherever possible a citizen of Tonga is always in charge.

It's important from a perception point of view that local people are seen to be the charters of their own destiny.

Secondly, I would like to emphasise the desirability of at least some of you returning to Tonga in the future.

Why do I say this? Well my personal experiences on postings to Papua New Guinea as a junior, mid-level and senior officer, and then as Governor-General gave me the opportunity to develop a very close linkage with my PNG counterparts through a continuum of contact both social and work wise over many years.

This model of regular contact and renewal of associations and friendships during my career means that I can speak honestly with my friends in PNG on almost any topic.

It is a model of engagement I feel we should all pay closer attention to and it needs to be two way and include not just military matters but also other key areas such as banking, education, health, business, policing, the public service and so on. So please think about it and return if you can, and if of course, invited.

In the meantime, you should all be very proud of the contribution you are making here and the exemplary reputation you have established in respect to Australian expertise, cooperation and friendliness.

I thank you wholeheartedly on behalf of the people and government of Australia.

Keep up the good work and Marlina and I wish you all well for the future.