



9 January 2015 Lord Ma'afu and Cabinet colleagues, Chief Executive Officers and Heads of Departments, all civil servants of the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga. It is a great honour for me to stand before you all, by the grace of God, the Prime Minister of the Executive arm of the Kingdom of Tonga for the 2014 – 2018 Legislative Assembly term.

Before proceeding any further, please allow me to acknowledge on behalf of the people of Tonga, the deep appreciation for the high regard and respect accorded by the Office of the Lord Chamberlain to the constitutional procedure for the selection of the Prime Minister. Whilst it comes as no surprise, the graciousness of the swiftness with which His Majesty King Tupou VI commanded my appointment is received is most humbly accepted. It presents the highest commendation possible to a new beginning which reflects the mutual respect from the Head of State to the appointment of the Head of Government that clearly represents the voice of the people. I also acknowledge the great dignity with which, the Interim Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Lord Tupou and all who had to work during the Christmas holidays to ensure that when Government reopened on the 5th of January, 2015, the new government was in place marking the beginning of the next four years as the Administration.

To my Cabinet Colleagues, we have now all officially been appointed to the highest public offices and we are now required to enter into a servant leadership role which we can only conduct confidently and successfully with the support of Almighty God,, His Majesty the King, the Nobles of the Realm, the people of Tonga and our international friends and development partners. Moreover, it is a role that critically relies on the technical support of these highly qualified government personnel who collectively form the Civil Service.

To all of you here today at the Queen Salote Memorial Hall, my Cabinet colleagues and I, are humbled by the enormity of the task ahead and your high expectations for the 2014 – 2018 term of government.

Although I stand before you today, representing a significant milestone in the history of politics and government of the Kingdom, I am mindful that as the excitement of being the first elected representative of the people to the rank of Prime Minister wears off at the end of the first working week of 2015, that the weight of the responsibility to rebuild the nation, in spite of the significant challenges, is indeed a heavy one.

As the Administration of the day, if we are to be of relevance to the nation, and satisfy the aspirations of the people to our selection as their representatives to the next four year term, we must deliver the desired results.

We will, firstly, give closure to issues of the past because we have unresolved issues of national interest that still need to be addressed. My administration must address these outstanding matters, if we are to be of impact and serve justice that we have so long yearned for in years past. But this will be done circumspectly aiming only for the delivery of justice and to bind and heal the wounds created from these injustices.

Secondly, we must establish a solid foundation for the present, and acknowledge without prejudice, that the government in a critical financial condition exacerbated by an extremely worrisome debt burden which if not managed now, will have to be dealt with by our children's children. As a government, these issues are reflected in our inability over the past four years to carry our own recurrent budget costs. The bulk of the recurrent budget is for salaries as the government remains the major employer in the nation. There remains, severe financial constraints on our ability to provide the services which we are vital for efficient and effective administration of the nation.

Lastly, we must determine a growth path for a secure social and economic future for the people of Tonga. And we must do this, in an environment of harsh realities where our people live in dire social and economic circumstances whereby the basic needs for livelihood can barely be met and the private sector is in its infancy and continues to struggle for survival in an extremely hostile business environment.

As you all know, the moral fibre of the nation has deteriorated over the years, to some extent, fuelled by the dominance of real financial struggle and perceived impoverishment of our people. This is a reflection of the poor overall state of economic wealth which has undermined the welfare of our people, including every single member of the civil service.

We must correctly classify the issues that we should deal with – the injustices of the past, our urgent and immediate priorities, and the solutions that are sustainable in the long term. We will action each appropriately so that the impact we have as a government is felt throughout the nation.

We will be a solution to the pressing issues of the day, so that we can successfully lead the effort to raise up the nation and the people of Tonga past mere survival to the highest standards of living that are achievable and befitting a nation claiming for over a century, that God and Tonga is her inheritance.

You might all be asking yourself at this point, is there a way forward? Is there a way out of this dilemma? are there realistic and practical solutions to the challenges we are facing as a government today? I say yes and I say it with conviction.

There is a way forward, there is a way out and there are realistic and practical solutions to the challenges we face. And it starts with all of us here in this Hall, and listening to this broadcast

and our collective willingness to be the way forward, to be the way out, and to be the realistic and practical solutions to our challenges for the sake of our people.

I have been greatly encouraged during the first week of my appointment, that the systems and structures which are currently in place, do in fact promote an efficient bureaucracy - but that the heights of good governance can only be reached when the leadership at all levels of government adheres to these universal principles.

I am delighted that the early reports of the media since my appointment, states that I am calling for a government of high moral fibre, and I reaffirm today that I believe, that this is the only way we can succeed as a national government. The nation must be able to demand standards of excellence from their leaders.

Last week, I had the great honour to have my first official audience with His Majesty King Tupou VI. In receiving the privileged advice of His Majesty in relation to respecting political boundaries of Cabinet and Privy Council, I have applied the same principle to the next four year term. In order to succeed as a government, I and my Cabinet, the Public Service Commission, the CEOs and Heads of Ministries and Departments, and the civil service must also work within their boundaries. Our role as a Cabinet of elected members of the Legislative Assembly requires us to take on the role of governance, and you as the Civil Service body to facilitate the management. I welcome the pending completion of the government's Cabinet Manual in early 2015 which was a work in progress at the time of the election. I believe that this coupled with the policies of the Public Service Commission already in place, creates a level of transparency for public officers that would be welcomed by all.

Before we can impact the nation, we must be able to resolve the pressing issues which are handicapping the civil service firstly, and only then as a fully empowered team, define and set the direction for engagement. We are all defined as "public officers" and "civil servants" and quite simply, and this demands from us an attitude of serving, or providing service.

Most of us including myself, will be required to change the way we think about how the desired results are to be achieved. For almost 30 years, I have been a critic of this side of the table and now I am sitting here, at the head, I must be careful not to criticise myself out! There is a high expectation in the delivery of public service and today, I call upon all of us in public office, and in the civil service to understand that only standards of excellence will be acceptable going forward. This is a non-negotiable. I am pleased that the early media reports of my coming into office emphasizes my commitment to ensuring that I lead a government of high moral fibre.

This government is founded on the express need to rebuild the nation in two phases:

Phase 1 – The Government Fix; and Phase 2 – The Nation Fix. My analogy to this strategy is firstly, to overhaul the engine of the car so that it can start (the government fix); and secondly, to fix the car body (the nation fix) so that both the inside and outside works superbly as intended when made.

The task cannot realistically be achieved in solo flight or effort but it requires a collective effort

by all in the Civil Service. To solve our challenges, we must realize that timing is of the essence, and today I hope that I can instil a sense of urgency to action.

Let us not allow our existing circumstances to dictate the path we take. Let us not take the wrong path for the right reasons. Let us not take the right path for the wrong reasons, but let us take the right path for the right reasons. We must proactively define the direction which we will take, so that the next four years has the best possible impact on the next seven generations. We are the masters of our destiny as it is our choice of path that will determine where we end up.

Since 1987, I have been a representative of the people of Tonga to the Legislative Assembly. In this role and with my civil service experience as a teacher, there were many things that I have been vocal about and made strong stand against, particularly where it was deemed not to be in Tonga's national interests or delivered injustices to even one person. Injustice to one is injustice to all. Justice to all is justice to one.

Before I go any further, I want to take this opportunity to be unconventional for the very last time, because I feel it is important for all of us going forward. I am going to ask all of you in the nation or any Tongan residing abroad, for your forgiveness, if you have been impacted in any manner by what I have believed to be the only course of action open to me, at various times, during our nation's journey toward full democracy in government. At times, I have quietly felt that the personal cost to me and my immediate family and close associates, and all of you who have stood by my side at any time during the 30-year journey, may have been too great. I may not have another opportunity to say this publicly, but I do thank you all from the bottom of my heart for standing by me and giving me your unconditional support.

I also realise that I and the pro-democracy movement may have been seen as the enemy of the status quo and it seemed that I was anti-government, anti-monarchy, and anti-nobility. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I am a simple man from humble beginnings with a love and passion for justice for the people and it has always been my greatest desire that this would be a mandate from the top down. I have in full sincerity, asked for the forgiveness of the Monarchy, and I now ask the forgiveness of the Nobility and the people of Tonga for both real and perceived transgressions, and plead that our mutual love for our nation be allowed to rise above what is considered, our political differences.

I especially ask for the forgiveness of all those who are responsible for the spiritual leadership of our nation, because there are some national manifestations which have been blamed on the manner in which the voice of the people was carried on certain national issues including the public service strike of 2005., the 16/11 riot., and the threatened public service strike of 2014. On behalf of the civil service, I should like to express gratitude for all the prayers and intercessions for the nation and government to be put in place. Perhaps my government is not what was expected answer to the prayers, but let us all be humbled by the knowledge that it is God Almighty that appoints and dis-appoints. We are all but instruments to his perfect plan for the Kingdom of Tonga and all her people. I ask that you see me today as God sees me. Perhaps, we can start on that basis to rebuild our nation aiming to glorify God, our King and nation.

Let me assure you all, of my commitment to the principles of good governance which are well grounded on the principles of the Ten Commandments and seek your consistent prayers for this Government to remain always under the Hand of God and to become a blessing to the nation of Tonga over the next four years.

As you all know, in my quest for justice, transparency and accountability of high profile public officers or people of authority in the land, I have always believed that one must be prepared to stand against injustice at all cost. I believe that the depth of this experience will prove invaluable in my role as Prime Minister, not because of the power yielded by the position but because the experience of the journey, has humbled me greatly to become a useful vessel for the Master Potter.

So, moving on, where we are today which is what I want to focus the rest of this address on, after establishing that I stand before you with the same conviction and passion for good governance of this nation, but with a transformed mind which urges me to represent these convictions in a manner appropriate for the high office that the people of Tonga have called me to. It is essential now, for the sake of the people of Tonga which I and my Cabinet colleagues represent, that I take this golden opportunity, to establish what we as a Cabinet of the day represent:

Firstly, we represent a government formed out of national unity – as far as possible and without alienating any groups, we have formed this government on a 6-5-5 principle. 6 representatives including myself are from the PTOA., 5 representatives including the Deputy Prime Minister are from the independent representatives, and 5 in total from the ranks of traditional leadership or the nobility. The latter includes one minister of noble rank (Lord Ma'afu), two nobles (Lord Tu'ivakano and Lord Tu'i'afitu) at the Speaker and Deputy Speaker roles of the Legislative Assembly, and two governors of Vava'u and Ha'apai respectively which shall be appointed from noble families who can impact the social and economic development of these outer island regions in cooperation with the Government and the Monarchy.

Secondly, we represent a government that puts a high priority on our women and youth, which combines to form the majority of the population of Tonga. This sector is high risk and has the potential to undermine all socio-economic development efforts of the nation. The rising problems associated with Tonga's youth which involves schools and communities are to be reviewed as a matter of urgency.

The issue of non-representation of women in the Legislative Assembly is not taken lightly by my government and we will endeavour during this four year term to support all initiatives that reach out to educate women who are voters to be the primary advocates of women representatives. We need balance in the Legislative Assembly for sure, but the hand that deals the cards in this instance, are women voters who represent in fact the majority of voters. It is tragic that although there are over 50 percent of women voters, that no representatives have been voted into the Assembly since the 2010 election.

Other high ranking roles in the civil service, which are based on merit rather than your voting preferences, also attest to the fact that equal opportunities exist for men and women, and in this

sense, it would appear that women could very well outnumber men at the technical ranks.

Thirdly, this government wishes to ensure that its vision to rebuild the nation within the four year term is carried out by a civil service that is structured for this function. The civil service must perform efficiently and effectively and in order to do so, must be well-grounded in the principles of good governance and this must be enforced through the systems in place. My government will usher in a new era of commitment to service simply because the nation's people expect it. The civil service must comprise of honest and dedicated civil servants. Today must be that new day, when we acknowledge that we have a pivotal role to play in people's faith and trust in their government and in the leaders of the nation. The civil service must be deeply rooted in values of integrity and fair play so that it can generate substantial goodwill that will give great confidence to the work that we do as a government.

Today, sadly, the reputation of the civil service is appalling representing waywardness, lack of moral courage to withstand the pressures and temptations of the calling to public service. This defeats morale at the lower levels and tarnishes the overall image of the civil service.

It is an unacceptable and unsustainable state and today, we all need to understand that change must occur. The highest standards of probity and integrity in public and personal life must be adhered to in order to support a work ethic that encourages honesty and integrity. We must have a zero tolerance of any public or personal actions that undermine our determination to govern well.

Today, I urge all members of the civil service, to join with me in establishing a new race. Everyone on the civil list or who joins the civil list in the next four years must understand the expectations of public office.

The past is now in the past. Let us look beyond today, where our performance is going to be judged at the new performance levels following a single standard. The word double standards should no longer be part of the vocabulary of performance in the civil service. None of us will be judged on past performance, but from this day forward, all will be judged based on performance according to the set standard, that I and my Cabinet must also abide by.

Fourth, my government is committed to making the necessary amendments that may lie in our laws, systems and procedures to ensure that it is effective enough to deal with corruption. We, as individual civil servants must be prepared for the people to expect swift and exemplary action at all times, to counter the impact of corruption. Corruption is an impediment to faster growth and it hurts the poor the most. Thus one of the very first systems that will come under review will be the legislative framework, administrative practices and procedures and fast tracking a systemic response to fighting corruption.

The public must be able to trust the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the civil service and we in turn must be committed to ensuring safeguard the interests of the asset-owning public. Today, I urge all of you to contribute actively to our efforts to fighting corruption. You all are in a position to do so, and should you ever feel that the processes and systems in place are prohibitive or inhibitive, then you must know that this government has an open door policy toward you

responsible action in this regard.

Fourth, this government faces the biggest challenge of economic management than any other administration before it. The economy is at its lowest performance state. My government has placed as a matter of urgency the conduct of a full review of the current situation, assessing the options for the nation, and establishing a consistent policy that is sustainable for the Kingdom. The approach to this key challenge must be holistic and must be our concern because it affects all of us.

Fifth, my government will work closely with the two governors of Vava'u (which also covers the Niuaus) and Ha'apai, and the people's representatives to the legislative assembly and local level governance, to promote the development of all 17 electoral communities. This is a structured approach to reach all the people of the Kingdom who are and to empower them to also be participants in shaping their own future.

Lastly, although there remain many issues and many details which I have not raised today, we will have many more opportunities to work together on these in the next four years with your respective Ministers. The emphasis today, is that there is a pressing need to re-fashion the civil service to become effective instruments for delivering services on an ongoing basis. We must aim to create new and imaginative solutions for the problems facing us. We will be able to measure success when we witness a cultural change in the civil service.

In the next six months prior to the new budget year, it is my firm belief that with a concerted effort, we will all be able to lay the groundwork for the next phase in our task which is to impact the socio-economic development of the nation swiftly so that relief is felt by the nation as soon as possible.

Having said all, I want to leave with you with a very personal commitment reflecting the depth of my feelings regarding the fact that the government that has been handed over to me is by all practical reality inefficient. It is not a situation which I would wish to hand over to a successor government, and although I am aware that the situation had arisen from the administration prior to the 2010 to 2014 administration, it was unable to be resolved over the past four years.

Today in the current budget period (2014/2015), the government of Tonga receives budgetary support, and whilst I am extremely grateful for the support and willingness of these donor countries to lend a helping hand, my government will take the lead in trimming excesses and living within our means.

This will require my government to make the difficult choices that will allow the civil service to become the driver of the solution to restoring our national pride in our own ability to operate recurrent budgets which are financed solely through domestic funds.

Many of you have heard of my commitment to trim expenditures relating to the persona of Cabinet and high ranking officials and whilst I am fully aware of the benefits these positions of high office bring to many governments around the world, the principle behind this is that we must first be able to sacrifice before the rest of the civil service and the nation.

In the upcoming budget for 2015/2016, we will be proposing to the Legislative Assembly, a recurrent budget that reflects the reality of our nation's fiscal situation. The governance budget which involves the functions of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet will be the first to be scrutinised. This will be followed by a review of performance of the civil service and the services provided by each ministry to facilitate ensuring that our core functions as a government is achieved at efficient and effective cost. I urge each and every one of us to accept this review, as the key opportunity to our being able to make the difference in our era of governance.

My government must raise the bar for performance, and action must follow the words that are delivered from this podium today. We cannot afford as a nation, to carry the high cost of inefficient and ineffective provision of services. As a government, if we continue to do so, and allow other nations to carry this burden calling it budgetary support, we will have no integrity or credibility internally or externally.

We must all carry the weight of change equally, therefore my Cabinet will take action first on matters related to minimizing the costs of transportation., official travel and any other expenditures that can be reduced or are avoidable.

The change must start from within our shores, and it must start with us. Indeed, I look forward to the day, when I shall be able to hold my head up high because we were the solution to our own fiscal problems.

I truly believe that we are in control of our destiny as a nation, but we must not be lethargic about taking action and we must not fear the repercussions of putting in place standards of excellence which we can live by and create a legacy for the administrations to follow.

I should like to mark today, as the beginning of a countdown, when we shall gather again on the first day of the government calendar year in 2016 to review our performance and progress into the year, and award those officers for that have exhibited excellence in their work in 2015. It is our desire that we might be able to inspire the Tongan civil service to the highest levels of commitment and performance in the all-important role of serving the nation.

God bless Tonga and God bless each and every one of you.