

2 May 2013 Transcript of the Speech that was delivered by HRH Princess Mele Siu'ilikutapu at the Public Administration in Very Small States Conference in London, United Kingdom 24 April 2013.

I bring a very warm and sincere greeting from HM King Tupou VI of the Kingdom of Tonga and the people of the Kingdom, as well as their prayers for the ongoing success



of our missions to uplift the quality of our national administrative services, through the adaptation of our traditional modes and objectives of governance to our contemporary challenges.

May I begin by noting that the time frame for most of Tonga's historical governance modernisation, wherein the traditional ideology, structure and operation of government to be modernised was actually in the nineteenth century and not in more contemporary times.

This makes the examination of our subject in Tonga far more interesting and challenging.

Very briefly, Tonga is a Constitutional Monarchy in the South Pacific, consisting of 150 islands, about 30 of which are inhabited.

Our population is approximately 100,000, with large communities overseas, especially in New Zealand, Australia and the United States of America.

We are primarily an agricultural, fishing and tourism economy, with free government primary education, health and dental care.

Like all Nations today, we are greatly affected by the difficult world economy, but due to our age-old strong family based concepts of governance, most Tongans have free land from their Government, the Monarch, or traditional leaders, where they live and grow their food.

This is why there is relatively very few homelessness or starvation in Tonga.



Tonga is firstly a kinship nation state. It is made up of a population who, by their common ancestry from antiquity, are related to one another, and thus constitute the national kinship unit that is Tonga.

With this basis, Tonga's governance ideology, structure and objectives, are fundamentally those of the family.

Thus, to put it simply, Tonga's kinship leaders, hierarchy and structure, were also their political

hierarchy.

Similarly, Tonga's national political ideology, are also basically those of the kinship system, namely to love, care and protect the socio-political nation that is the Kingdom of Tonga.

Very briefly, Tonga's core kinship group is the extended family, consisting of the parents, and their children and other relatives. This unit is headed by the father and he is responsible for their livelihood, welfare and governance.

Secondly, related extended families form the next larger kinship group namely the kainga, which are headed by their hereditary elders or 'ulumotua.

Thirdly, related kainga combine to form the clans which are also headed by their senior hereditary chiefs or nobles.

Finally, all of Tonga's clans and chiefs, all of whom are in fact descended from common royal ancestors. The national royal kinship head of Tonga, namely the Hau, is the head or king. This is the kinship nation of Tonga.

When we turn to the traditional political structure, hierarchy, and the roles of the Government of Tonga, we find that they are none other than the same kinship structure and system. That is, the 'ulumotua, chiefs, nobles and the Hau forming the Government of Tonga, and their basic roles and authority, as well as their ideology of governance, were those of the kinship system. It is this unique combination of the kinship-political formula, structure and ideology, which has given Tonga her unique historical cohesion, stability and strengths. This is the political nation of Tonga.

One of the fundamental features of old governance in the world, regardless of whether they were kinship societies or not, was their centuries old ideology that all men were not equal, and that the rulers were the owners and masters of the ruled.

Indeed, the central theme of modern governance ideology and practice, is the replacement of this doctrine with the opposite tenet, that all men are equal.

Accordingly, we value the ongoing promotion of the best and most ethical governance, which ensures the fulfilment of this most valuable doctrine.

Tonga's ancient and traditional society was the same; hence our political and governance evolution had to involve ideological changes to our world concept on the issue of the status of all men.

According to archaeology, anthropology, oral tradition and history, Tonga has always been one kingdom, under the rule of three dynasties, all of whom were descended from one common ancestor. Tonga's first king and the founder of the first dynasty, the Tu'i Tonga dynasty was in about 950 AD.

By about the 15th Century, the twenty-fourth King decided to retain only the semi-divine and superior social status of the Tu'i Tonga, but transfer his temporal kingship powers and responsibilities to his son, whom he appointed to head the new dynasty he created, namely the Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua dynasty.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the then king also decided to retain only the social status of kingship, and assigned his temporal powers to his son whom he appointed to head Tonga's third and last dynasty, namely the Tu'i Kanokupolu dynasty.

Altogether Tonga has had about seventy Monarchs, and the current king, his Majesty King Tupou VI, is Tonga's seventy first monarchs since the first Tu'i Tonga 'Aho'eitu in about 950 AD.

As is apparent from the above, Tonga was already a united and single nation state with a national government since antiquity.

The achievement of this very advanced governance status in human political evolution at this very early stage, a status not yet achieved by many nations until about the nineteenth century onwards, is indeed a miracle.

For further reference we may recall, that some of Europe's political unifications did not occur until the nineteenth century.

The political unification of others was only effected by their colonial powers, and there are even some who are still going through this journey today.

As such, the governance journey we are going through, does not involve only the journey from the old to contemporary governance, but it also includes the journey towards single nationhood.

Mainly as a consequence of Tonga already having a reasonably effective traditional national government from antiquity, her early successful diplomacy which resulted in her Treaties of Friendship with the colonial powers in the Pacific, such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, Tonga successfully retained her precious independence.

She did become a British protected state in 1904, when European rivalries were highly accelerating in the Pacific, but this only made the United Kingdom party to the conduct of Tonga's foreign relations, but not her internal affairs, and this relationship ended in 1970.

With all of these political and governance developments, Tonga was employing her traditional system and governance, as well as the contemporary methodologies of the time, such as the securing of her treaties with the European powers.

Once again it was the strengths of Tonga's traditional Government and governance which had made it a nation since antiquity, and also won her the retention of her precious independence

in the face of global colonialism.

At the same time, the nineteenth century was also a period of heightened dynastic, religious and civil wars in Tonga, which were further complicated by the conflicting forces of European colonialism and the use of firearms.

Despite these disruptions and pressures, it was indeed amazing that the course of the political and governance modernisation of Tonga, and their basis upon the combined strengths of the traditional and the modern, still proceeded, and did indeed achieve the most amazing results.

With the highly summarised background above, may we now look more closely at the role played by Tonga's nineteenth century traditional modes of governance in the new challenges to Tonga's then contemporary administration? And, as indicated earlier, it was the heightened western colonialism in the Pacific in the nineteenth century, a force which neither Tonga nor any other Pacific nation had experienced so intensely before, which was pushing Tonga's traditional government to deal with.

By its very nature, this subject and this encounter was destined to force the alignment of the traditional and modern philosophies of nationhood, and the traditional and modern modes of governance.

The greatest marvel which followed was that it was neither the old nor the new governance ideology and practices which facilitated Tonga's governance revolution.

It was in fact the traditional ruler's conversion to Christianity.

In 1831 Tonga's eighteenth Tu'i Kanokupolu Aleamotua accepted Christianity. Two years later his named successor Taufa'ahau, who was then king of the two northern island groups of Vava'u and Ha'apai, and later became the great King George Tupou 1 (1845-1893) and the maker of modern Tonga, accepted Christianity.

Immediately, and without any other ado, he began the Christian based revolution of Tonga's governance and society. In 1839, he issued the Vava'u code. Consisting of eight clauses.

It began the revolutionary sermon that all people were created equal by god, and were therefore entitled to their freedom and dignity.

In 1845, Taufa'ahau succeeded Aleamotu'a as the nineteenth Tu'i Kanokupolu and second Christian King of Tonga.

Five years later in 1850, he issued Tonga's first national code of laws, with its forty three clauses. This document codified nationally the principles expressed in the Vava'u Code, and also provided the support legislation and processes for the maintenance of law and order. The promotion of ethical governance, and the principles and practice of accountability for one's actions.

Like the Vava'u Code, it also established nationally the all important principle of land rights for the people, and required the chiefs to grant them free land.

In 1862, King George Tupou 1, again voluntarily issued Tonga's famous Emancipation Law Code.

This finally abolished all serfdom thus making the whole Tongan society free. Combined with their land rights and grant of free town and farming land, the lives of the people of Tonga were much better provided for than in most societies.

None of these were the results of public pressure or activity.

All were freely and voluntarily granted by King George Tupou 1, as inspired and motivated by his Christian faith.

Finally in 1875 King George Tupou 1, again voluntarily, established Tonga as a Constitutional Monarchy, whose constitution was the second oldest written one in the world to that of the United States of America.

The most dramatic and again voluntary provision of this constitution was the fact that it made the Monarch subservient to the written law, like everyone else.

The Government of Tonga now consisted of the Constitutional Monarch as the Head of State. He chaired Privy Council whose members consisted of the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, and two regional Governors, all of whom he appointed.

The Head of the Executive was the Prime Minister who chaired Cabinet.

Parliament or the Legislature consisted of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers, as well as the elected representatives of the nobility and the people.

As clearly described, this modern Governance of Tonga was never the product of a public conversion to the merits of good or modern governance. Nor was it a product of public pressure for political change. All were basically the products of the Christian conversion and inspirations of the maker of modern Tonga, namely his majesty King George Tupou, 1.

Tupou 1's voluntarily granting of political power to the people, finally climaxed at the end of 2010, when his descendant the late King George Tupou V then surrendered the remaining executive powers of the Monarch to the people.

This was achieved through making parliament fully elected, and responsible for electing the prime minister.

Very quickly fast tracking Tonga from the nineteenth century to today, we find that the wisdom and practice of combining our traditional and modern Governance institutions and modes are already standard practice. Meanwhile, the key governance issues of today are more to do with what may be the right ways to mix and apply the traditional and the contemporary. This seemingly simple issue for example is often far more substantial than is often understood.

In 2005, Tonga experienced her most serious and sometimes violent public service strike, over the issue of salary rises.

For weeks government had unsuccessfully tried to disperse the strikers from their twenty four hour meeting place next to the Prime Minister's Office, and the Cabinet and Privy Council chambers.

The situation was becoming tenser and more polarised, and no compromise was in sight.

One day after another frustrating Privy Council meeting, the King's daughter who was then the Princess Regent, decided to turn from the governmental to the traditional method of problem solving, by personally going and talking to the strikers.

Culturally, that you had caused your royal kinship leader such an inconvenience is a most embarrassing breach of protocol. Good manners demand their immediate apologies to Her Royal Highness. At the same time, that Her Royal Highness should nevertheless still come to talk and hear their grievances and seek their solution, is an exceptional expression of her love and care for them.

When the strikers suddenly saw her royal highness walking towards them, they all became silent, and went down from their chairs and sat on the grass, as is the custom when royalty is present. And when Her Royal Highness addressed them asking about their grievances, and telling them to disperse and return to the service of the nation, they hung their heads in silence and with many in tears, they then apologised for the seeming disrespect to Her Royal Highness, and they dispersed.

That evening, they called at Her Royal Highness's residence with the appropriate presentations, and formally apologised for the "indignity" they had caused her.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have briefly surveyed how the combination of the traditional and modern ideologies and practices of governance in Tonga, have achieved exceptional results. The traditional modes of governance are the footprints of excellence from the past, and the above examples in Tonga have clearly highlighted how the traditional governance which have sprung up from the grass roots of their societies, are the absolutely essential basis for effective and successful governance.

Without them, administrations will not only be ineffective, but may also be destructive.

Indeed where there is scant respect and the exclusion of the past, there is a destructive vacuum. But where the past is included and forms the rightful basis for the present and the future then there is both the right substance and continuity which are the necessary basis for all good governance.

ENDS

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