



Forging a Brighter Future: Strengthening the Bonds of Partnership between SINU and Australia

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Vice Chancellor**

**Speech on the Occasion of the Signing of the Memorandum of
Understanding between SINU and DFAT**

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Yours Excellency Rod Hilton, Australia's High Commissioner to Solomon Islands

Senior Staff of the Australian High Commission

Pro Vice Chancellor Corporate, Shadrach Fanega

Acting Pro Vice Chancellor Academic, Dr. Eric Katovai

Deans

Members of the Faculty

Australian University Alumni

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency, Rod Hilton, the Australian High Commissioner, the staff of the Australian High Commission, and all our invited guests and staff of the Solomon Islands National University (SINU). Today, as we gather to celebrate the signing of the Partnership Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), we are not just marking a momentous occasion in the history of

SINU; we are "Forging a Brighter Future" and strengthening the bonds of partnership between SINU and Australia. This event is a testament to a decade-long journey of collaboration, a reaffirmation of our shared values, and a significant step towards a future brimming with promise and potential, as we strive to enhance the social and economic fabric of the Solomon Islands through education, research, and innovation.

On a personal note, I am profoundly pleased and moved by today's events. This signing ceremony is the culmination of the hard work and dedication of various individuals who have committed themselves to the betterment of SINU. When I assumed the role of Vice Chancellor on the 1st of January 2023, a senior staff member of the Australian High Commission quietly mentioned to me that DFAT had been hesitant to engage with SINU due to its well-publicised challenges. However, they assured me that if we could address the governance issues, they would be willing to lend their support.

It is, therefore, a matter of personal pride for me that we have, over the past year, worked tirelessly to gain the confidence of DFAT. This partnership is a testament to the progress we have made and the trust we have built. It is a significant measure of the hard work that the staff at the University have put in, and it is they who must take the credit for this achievement.

Today, as we formalise our partnership with DFAT, we are not only celebrating the signing of this MoU but also the collective efforts of the SINU community that have brought us to this pivotal moment. It is a reflection of the vision I set out for the University during my inauguration - a vision of an institution that can be a beacon of hope, an oasis of learning, and a leader in innovation.

We aspire to develop a University that espouses zero tolerance for abuse and corrosion of systems, with a keen interest in emerging technologies and the power of ICT to achieve efficiencies, improve the efficacy of teaching, and enhance all processes within the organisation. We aim to explore the power of collaboration and develop strong public-private sector partnerships in research, publications, and collaborative research programs with overseas universities. We also seek to provide a space for discourse on public policy issues, serving as an interface between academia, government, industry, NGOs, and the community.

My vision for SINU is to provide a world-class education to our students, to foster an environment of inclusivity and respect, and to be a leader in research and innovation. We strive to create a campus culture that is open and welcoming to all, regardless of background

or identity. To achieve these goals, we need the support of donors to invest in our programs, and we must ensure that we have the governance systems in place that meet their due diligence requirements. I am committed to undertaking a review to enhance, improve, and strengthen the overall governance, financial, and administrative systems of the University. This will enable us to develop programs that can be accredited by SITESA and overseas accreditation bodies, and to develop joint degree, master's, and PhD programs with overseas universities, thereby giving SINU international recognition, credibility, and growing our research capacity.

I am therefore pleased to say that through this partnership that we will be signing today, we can now afford to begin the work on what we set out to do. This MoU represents not just a formalisation of our collaboration but a tangible step forward in realising the ambitious goals we have laid out for the Solomon Islands National University. It is a catalyst that will enable us to translate our vision into action, to harness the potential of our students and faculty, and to make a meaningful impact on our community and beyond. Today, we embark on a journey of transformation and growth, fuelled by the support and partnership of DFAT, and I am filled with optimism for the bright future that lies ahead for SINU.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we embark on this new chapter, we do so with a sense of purpose and optimism. This MoU is more than just an agreement; it is a roadmap for the future. It is a commitment to excellence, to innovation, and to making a tangible difference in the lives of our students and our communities.

While the development of this Memorandum of Understanding is a significant achievement, it is important to recognise that the real work lies ahead. The onus now falls upon our faculties to actively engage in building bridges with Australian universities and researchers. This is not a time for complacency or business as usual. I encourage each member of the SINU community to ask themselves, "What can I do to contribute to our country's social, economic, and political development?" The establishment of strong networks with Australian institutions and scholars presents a unique opportunity for us to enhance our research, academic programs, and community impact. Let us seize this moment with determination and creativity, working collaboratively to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our people and the future of our nation.

This Memorandum of Understanding will further strengthen the robust networks and collaborations that we already have with Australian universities. For instance, we have been

working closely with the University of Wollongong on the development of a regional program that has already commenced with a graduate certificate in fisheries management and development. Additionally, this week we were delighted to host a team from the University of Queensland who conducted a highly successful workshop on research methodology. Our collaborations extend to the University of Wollongong, University of Adelaide, and Queensland University of Technology in developing programs in security and policing. We are also collaborating with the Australian National University (ANU) on organizing the Panatina Seminar, which we are proud to be hosting early next year. Our partnership with Griffith University has been ongoing, and through our appointment of Australians as Adjunct Staff of SINU, we have achieved a significant milestone with the creation of the "Solomon Islands Thesis Catalogue," a comprehensive 414-page document curated by Emeritus Professor Clive Moore. Furthermore, we are working closely with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to develop joint programs in natural-based solutions to buildings. These existing partnerships are a testament to our commitment to international collaboration and will be significantly bolstered by this new partnership with DFAT.

The significance of this partnership extends beyond the confines of our university walls. It is a symbol of the enduring friendship and mutual respect between the Solomon Islands and Australia. This MoU is a testament to our collective belief in the transformative power of education and our commitment to nurturing the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and innovators.

SINU plays a pivotal role in the social and economic fabric of the Solomon Islands. As an institution of higher learning, SINU is not just a center for academic excellence, but also a catalyst for positive change and development. Investing in SINU is akin to investing in an economic reform program for the future of our country. It is an investment in the potential of our youth, the capabilities of our workforce, and the resilience of our communities.

SINU serves as the intellectual powerhouse of the Solomon Islands, tasked with the crucial responsibility of seeking answers and clarity to the myriad social and development challenges that our nation faces. These challenges include issues related to governance, healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, and economic diversification. As the intellectual heart of the country, SINU is uniquely positioned to conduct research, foster innovation, and develop solutions that address these pressing issues.

By nurturing critical thinkers, ethical leaders, and skilled professionals, SINU can contribute significantly to the social and economic development of the Solomon Islands. The University can help by providing evidence-based policy recommendations, advancing sustainable practices, and fostering partnerships with industry, government, and non-governmental organizations. Through education, research, and community engagement, SINU can play a central role in shaping a prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future for the Solomon Islands.

This partnership with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is a significant step in bolstering the resources at SINU to fulfill this important role. By enhancing our collaboration with Australian universities and leveraging the support and expertise of DFAT, we can strengthen our academic programs, research initiatives, and community engagement efforts. This partnership will provide SINU with the necessary tools and support to expand its capacity, improve the quality of education, and drive impactful research that addresses the needs of our nation. With this strengthened foundation, SINU is better equipped to be a driving force in the social and economic development of the Solomon Islands, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of innovation and progress in the region.

Our partnership is built on a foundation of shared interests and aspirations. Together, we aim to forge sustainable and mutually beneficial linkages between SINU and Australian universities. This collaboration is not just about enhancing academic quality and governance; it is about creating a vibrant ecosystem of learning and exchange that transcends geographical boundaries. We envision SINU as a beacon of excellence, not only within the Pacific region but on the global stage.

The objectives of our partnership are ambitious, yet within our grasp. We are committed to fostering linkages that support SINU's integration into Australia's security and development cooperation efforts. This collaboration will enable us to offer courses and programs that are not only relevant to the needs of our region but also aligned with global standards and best practices.

Inclusivity, sustainability, and accountability are the pillars of our partnership. We are dedicated to creating an environment at SINU where every student, irrespective of their background, can thrive and achieve their full potential. Our joint efforts will focus on implementing sustainable practices across our campuses, reducing our environmental footprint, and ensuring that SINU is a model of responsible and ethical governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we embark on this new chapter, we do so with a sense of purpose and optimism. This MoU is more than just an agreement; it is a roadmap for the future. It is a commitment to excellence, to innovation, and to making a tangible difference in the lives of our students and our communities.

Through this partnership, we aspire to create an avenue for greater economic and social integration between Australia, Solomon Islands, and the rest of the region. Our vision is to provide programs that not only meet the highest standards of academic excellence but also offer qualifications recognized in Australia and New Zealand. By doing so, we aim to graduate future thought leaders who are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and credentials necessary to navigate and contribute to the increasingly integrated future of our region.

The development trajectory of the Solomon Islands and the broader Pacific region is closely tied to our relationship with Australia and New Zealand. As such, this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is more than just an agreement between two institutions. It represents a significant step towards strengthening the economic and diplomatic ties between our nations. This partnership has the potential to have far-reaching implications for the people of Solomon Islands, opening up new opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and mutual growth.

In the words of former Australian Prime Minister John Howard, "Australia and the Solomon Islands have a shared history and a shared geography. These are the foundation stones of our common future." This partnership embodies the spirit of this statement, emphasising the importance of building strong and enduring relationships between close neighbours for the prosperity and stability of our region.

As we move forward, let us embrace the opportunities this partnership presents, and work together to create a brighter, more integrated future for the Solomon Islands and the Pacific region.

In conclusion, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to our partners at the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), especially to your Excellency Rod Hilton, to the tireless individuals who have worked diligently to bring this partnership to life, and to the entire Solomon Islands National University (SINU) community for your steadfast support and unwavering commitment. Today, we stand at the threshold of a new era, poised to embark on a journey of transformation and growth that will shape the future of our nation and our region.

As Solomon Islands prepares to go to the polls next month to elect our National Parliamentarians, this partnership takes on even greater significance. It serves as a beacon of hope and a reminder of the power of collaboration and unity in driving positive change. Let us seize this moment to reflect on our shared aspirations, to recommit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence, and to forge ahead with courage and determination.

The enduring relationship between Solomon Islands and Australia is a testament to the strength of our bonds and the depth of our shared values. As we move forward, let us continue to nurture and strengthen these ties, for they are the foundation upon which our common future will be built.

In the words of the late Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, "Australia's future is closely linked with the future of the countries of the Asia-Pacific region." As we celebrate this momentous occasion, let us embrace the spirit of this partnership and work together to create a future that is prosperous, inclusive, and bright for both our nations.

Thank you.