SOUTH PACIFIC ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION

Engineering Connections

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The South Pacific Engineers Association is Underway …

Thursday, 4 March 2010 saw the launch of the South Pacific Engineers Association in Suva, Fiji. Launched by the President of Fiji, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau in front of an audience of about 100 dignitaries the Association aims to support the development of engineering and engineering standards in the South Pacific region through actions including but not limited to:

a. informing engineers and their wider stakeholders within the region on important national and international developments and issues affecting engineering;

b. contributing to South Pacific engineering knowledge development and dissemination;

c. supporting the identification, codification and harmonisation of standards to improve engineering practice within the region;

d. development of competence assessment and registration systems, both in nations and regionally, towards the ultimate goal that regional competence registers will receive wider international recognition;

e. creating a strong representational voice for engineering in the region, including influencing governments and the Pacific Islands Forum on matters related to engineering, the environment and economic development;

f. raising the profile of engineering in communities within the region;

g. building engineering education within the region towards the ultimate goal that regional engineering qualifications will receive wider international recognition;

h. raising the technical capacity of engineering-related institutions;

i. representing the region's engineers in the global context; and

j. creating a network that supports professional development amongst engineers and engineering organisations in the region by regular communication.

His Excellency addresses delegates during the launch (above), and national chapter representatives sign their commitment to the Association (below).

Prior to the launch event, the Council of the Association met for the first time, and demonstrated their commitment to SPEA by signing copies of the Rules. The inaugural President of SPEA, Leiataua Tom Tinai, was elected.

The Association comprises national chapters in six countries. Three of these, The Institution of Professional Engineers Samoa, the Fiji Institution of Engineers and the Institution of Engineers Papua New Guinea are existing bodies. The other three national chapters in Tonga, Vanuatu and the Cook Islands are yet to form their national bodies, but aim to do so within the year. The Institution of Professional Engineers New Zealand and Engineers Australia are supporting SPEA.

The Council has developed a work programme for the first year including:

- getting all national chapters operational,
- building relationships with government leaders, including developing advice on key regional issues for those leaders,
- supporting further development of engineering education in the region,
- investigating how to bring professional development opportunities to engineers in the region, and
- building relationships with aid agencies.

Introducing the inaugural President of SPEA, Leiataua Tom Tinai

Leiataua Tom Tinai of Samoa is the newly elected inaugural President of the newly formed South Pacific Engineers Association or SPEA. He has 30 (+) years of experience in civil engineering and co-owns a Civil and Structural Engineering Consulting Company in Samoa. He was educated in Australia's New South Wales University and is a current registered practicing member of the Engineers Australia and also a senior registered practising member of the Institution of Professional Engineers of Samoa.

Leiataua said he is looking forward to the challenges ahead of the SPEA organization. He said he was honoured and delighted to be awarded the top post. "The launching of SPEA is a milestone for the Pacific community and we must make it work, and obviously so far, it works," he said.

Presentation by the President of Fiji, His Excellency Ratu Epili Nailatikau

RATU EPELI NAILATIKAU

LVO, OBE (Mil), OStJ, CSM, MSD, jssc, psc

President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands

ADDRESS FOR THE LAUNCHING OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION

Vale Ni Bose
Suva

Thursday, 4th March, 2010
11.00a.m.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here this morning on this auspicious occasion of the launching of the South Pacific Engineers Association here. The countries in our region like countries in other regions are very much at the mercy of the wrath of the forces of nature in its various forms like earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, drought and sea level rise.

Our very survival depends on us having the means to resist the forces of nature and protect the safety of our people, our homes and the systems we depend on for our food and our livelihood. All too often countries, and particularly those in our region, are faced with major damage to be remediated. As we all are familiarly aware of, much of that have to be repaired or completely rebuilt. This is expensive and consumes the resources we would prefer to be able to use for advancing the standards of living of our people.

Good quality engineering is one of the primary means to resist the forces of nature. Well-engineered structures resist high winds so less rebuilding is needed. Well engineered transport systems suffer little damage and enable us at will, to move people and resources to places where they want to go or where they are most needed. Well engineered water supply and sanitation systems are vital just for ordinary everyday living and these are critical issues in post forces of nature times of relieving human misery. Well engineered power supply and telecommunications will also survive much better and will enable a quick recovery.

However, I am reliably informed that good quality engineering is hard to achieve in a small nation in that the population size of the nation really matters. It follows, therefore, that we cannot train all the people we need in our own countries, and have to rely on those trained by other countries. To add to the complication we are vulnerably open to and subject to headhunting and, therefore, we struggle to retain our skilled people against the pull to more lucrative offers from developed or prosperous countries.

We also know too well that sometimes when we have received aid from bitter experience, it is excruciatingly tied by the donor. Donors will diplomatically point out that it is their right to tie aid. But often in the past, the donor has ignored or failed to see the development of a local skill base to continue to maintain and operate the asset as an important part of the project and this makes it hard to receive the full potential benefits of aid programmes. But is it only the fault of the donors? I think not. It is not only the fault of the donors – the fault often lies with us because we accept aid so readily that we do not closely scrutinize the smaller print or take the time and care and argue for an improvement in the smaller print.

The South Pacific Engineers Association gives the one thing our nations lack individually – size and the potential to grow. With its size, and we anticipate its greater ability to influence, it is easy to see that the Association has the potential to make a very real difference in our region.

I cannot speak for the other nations involved in this initiative but I can see how it can benefit Fiji.

I can envisage success for this initiative as the achievement of consistent application of good engineering standards in both our publicly owned infrastructures and also in our private assets. Let us consider the possible benefits:

Damage after a cyclone/hurricane, we hope will largely be restricted to crops and trees. Where there is damage to utilities like power lines, it can be quickly repaired by locals. Homes would need only modest repairs. The reservoirs and water tanks would not be damaged.

Our major buildings would remain fully useable after a major earthquake.

The damage to coastal property, roads and community amenities after a modest tsunami would be modest – our ports would still work well.

I could go on. This is not to say that many of the things I have discussed are not well done sometimes. What we want to ensure is that they are always well done.

In the size of country we cannot operate by having very detailed written technical standards and a large number of inspectors to enforce them. Rather, we need to identify our competent engineers, and then support them to consistently apply good standards using their professional judgment. The South Pacific Engineers Association forms part of that support work.

The Association has the potential to help us here in Fiji to get our Engineers Registration Act operational – we can learn about how to assess engineers to international best practice. It can help us by linking the engineering academics at our tertiary institutions to colleagues in Australia or New Zealand. Eventually, we might have our qualifications benchmarked to the international standards we can only aspire to now. Remember in case you have not noticed, or like some who choose to determinably ignore it, this Government is all about attaining and maintaining standards and accountability to name but to essential standards.

Imagine a professional development course on earthquake engineering delivered here in Suva, or in Port Moresby, or in Apia by a New Zealand expert working with our best local talent.

The Association could also have an important role as an advisor to governments – we need the wisdom and expertise of engineers to ensure that our public financial capital is well applied, and to ensure that where we do receive aid, it is applied in the most valuable way.

It is vitally important that the Association is ours to lead. We thank the New Zealand and Australian engineering organizations, but more particularly IPENZ from New Zealand for helping to get this initiative underway. We thank them for recognizing that their role is to support, trusting us to provide the leadership. You have put considerable effort and money into getting us to this stage – we thank you for that.

To those who have committed to the Association here today – our colleagues from the first six national chapters in Tonga, the Cook Islands, Samoa, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, and also our own Fijian body, I wish you well in developing this Association. To the new elected President Leiataua Tom Tinai, we acknowledge your important role in ensuring that SPEA is enduring and makes a growing contribution to our region.

Without further ado, I wish to formally launch the South Pacific Engineers Association.