

Statement at the PRIDE Signing Ceremony, Forum Secretariat,
Wednesday, 26 November, 2003

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1. Your Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps; the Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Your Excellency Mr. Noel Levi; the Head of the European Delegation, Your Excellency Mr. Frans Baan; the New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. Adrian Simcock; the Deputy Chairman of the USP Council and other Council members; the Director Designate of the PRIDE Project, Dr. Bob Teasdale; senior officials of the Forum Secretariat and of USP, ladies and gentlemen.
2. The fact that education provides the best foundation for personal and societal development has been receiving increasing attention in the last decade or so, and the rise of what is called the knowledge economy has made this emphasis even stronger. The emphasis on education has also become stronger as we realize the important role that education plays in promoting social cohesion, thus avoiding social and political conflicts and thereby promoting the rapid development of societies. In the Pacific islands, given our recent experience of social and political conflicts, this has special significance.
3. Basic education lays the foundation of the whole education system. This project will go a long way in ensuring that access to education improves; its scope and quality are enhanced; and that countries will have the ability to plan, implement and monitor educational plans.
4. The overall PRIDE project is a partnership of Pacific Island countries, the European Union and New Zealand. PRIDE is an excellent example of what we can aspire to with proper vision and collaboration. It also shows that our friends stand ready to support programmes that make a real difference in the lives of people on the Pacific islands.
5. The PRIDE project reinforces the value of a regional approach to the fundamental development problems of the Pacific islands to take advantage of economies of scale and to assist the long-term goal of greater integration of Pacific island economies and societies. The University is fully committed to regional co-operation and integration and is prepared to play its part in their realization.
6. The University of the South Pacific is pleased to implement this project and looks forward to working with national Ministries of Education, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the European Union, NZAID, and other donors and educational agencies. We believe that we can contribute to the implementation of the project through our Institute of Education and provide sustainability beyond the life of this project. We are grateful that there is opportunity within this project to build IOE's own capacity to better serve the educational needs of Pacific island countries. We can give our commitment to effective project management; sharing of our long experience in Pacific islands education; to on-time delivery of outputs; genuine capacity building

of national systems of education; and to sustaining these programmes beyond the life of this project.

7. This project will try to promote genuine capacity building and ownership by member countries. Ultimately, it will be for the Ministers and officials to pursue their visions and strong convictions because this is the only way that the education systems will genuinely reflect the philosophies and aspirations of Pacific islands peoples.
8. We are very pleased that we have already been able to make progress towards implementing PRIDE project thanks to NZ co-funding. We are very pleased that the Director-Designate, Dr. Teasdale is among us already, and he has already met the other members of the PRIDE team, and taken part in the selection of the Advisers. With Dr. Bob Teasdale's and Dr. Ana Taufa'ulungaki's leadership, we are confident that the project will be highly successful.
9. Finally, I would like to thank all of you for coming to this signing ceremony. It shows your interest in efforts to improve the participation, nature and quality of education. With your interest, co-operation and assistance, I am confident that PRIDE will make a discernible improvement to our education, and therefore to the lives of people in the Pacific islands.

Thank you.

26 November 2003