

SPEECH BY THE GOVERNOR AT SICHE GRADUATION

3 APRIL 1996

Chairman of the Council, Honourable Minister of Education, Hon. Chief Justice, Ministers of the Crown, members of the Diplomatic Corps, Director and Deputy Director, staff and students, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be here at the 1996 Graduation ceremony of SICHE. I am indeed delighted to be participating on such a happy occasion.

It is my first duty to congratulate the many students who will be receiving their certificates and awards this morning. I am sure you must be relieved that the assignments and exams are over. There must be a lot of excitement that in a few moments time you will be receiving the prize of your hard work. But let me remind us all that this graduation is the result of the financial contributions, encouragement, support and hard work of many people. These include:

- the graduating students who have spent many years at primary and secondary schools before spending a few more years here at SICHE studying a range of subjects including those they have chosen to specialise in;
- the many parents and guardians of students who, under very difficult circumstances, have provided encouragement and financial support to their children so that they could attain good qualifications as a means of securing a better future;
- the Government for providing much of the financing requirements both to students as well as directly to the SICHE under very difficult budgetary circumstances;
- private companies which have consistently sponsored students, especially in the trade courses;
- the donor governments who have generously assisted SICHE financially and in kind; and finally
- the academic and administration staff at the SICHE who have served the institution with dedication and a strong sense of professionalism.

This collaboration between the Government, donors, private sector, parents, students and the SICHE staff is crucial for the strengthening and continued success of SICHE as a high quality tertiary institution. Not only that; such cooperation underpins the fundamentals enshrined in the motto "Kolej Blong Iu Mi". One hopes that this collaboration and partnership will be maintained in the future.

SICHE: Achievements

As some of us - the older ones - will recall, the beginnings of this College were some 30 odd years ago. However, SICHE as we now know, is a relatively new institution. I am told that it will be 11 years old this year. During this short span of time, SICHE has achieved a lot. In terms of student enrolment, it has increased from 641 in 1985 to 1,264 in 1996; the number of courses offered has risen from 18 in 1985 to 31 courses this year. The number of staff has grown from 84 in 1984 to 376 in 1996; and SICHE administrative budget has grown from \$2.3 million in 1985 to \$20.2 million in 1996 financial year. These statistics indicate the growth of SICHE in terms of size as well as diversification of academic courses.

Not only has it grown in size and quality; I am pleased to note that SICHE, with the help of modern technology, is now taking education to remote areas of the Solomon Islands through its distant education program. This is a very positive development and I would like to congratulate the SICHE for this initiative. Through this, one hopes that many of our fellow citizens who in the past were eager to learn but were denied the opportunity will now have the chance to enhance their own educational advancement. I note that courses currently offered under the program constitute basic secondary school subjects in arts, mathematics and science in preparation for undertaking certificate courses at SICHE. Perhaps, in the not-too-distant future, it will be possible for SICHE to also offer some of its certificate courses under the same program so that tertiary education can become more widely available to those who are living outside of Honiara.

It is also encouraging to note that SICHE, in association with USP, is now offering USP Foundation level courses here in Honiara. This will allow students to complete the first year of their USP courses here before going to Fiji to complete the rest of their study programs. I am also pleased to note that from Second Semester this year USP Degree 1 courses will also be made available at the SICHE campus. These are certainly positive steps in the progress and development of SICHE as a tertiary institution.

Challenges

Having noted the achievements of the College, I believe it would be appropriate to recognise that SICHE has its share of problems too. For example, besides the ongoing need to upgrade its teaching and other facilities, there is also the need to upgrade the academic qualifications of SICHE staff by providing training on a continuing basis. I am also aware of the mandate given to the College to convert it to university status. At the same time it is understood that SICHE is facing financial difficulties, much of which has been attributed to the budgetary constraints currently being experienced by the government. As a matter of fact, it is imminent that the expected contributions of \$13 million for 1996 financial year may not materialise. In light of these problems, it will perhaps be unrealistic for the College to expect larger contributions from the Government at the present time.

In these circumstances, the first challenge for SICHE is that it must look at other alternatives, including:

- reprioritising expenditures including reviewing the need for some of the courses which may not be very important from a national point of view
- tighter controls on administrative and capital expenditures;

- making optimum use of current donor assistance and securing more assistance from existing and new donors; and
- seeking greater community contributions including some further adjustments to fees and charges and contributions from the business community.

The measures I have just mentioned are necessary for the long term financial viability of SICHE. At the same time however, it is essential that SICHE functions as a high quality academic institution. In that connection the Government should seek to increase its contributions to SICHE as and when its own budgetary position improves.

The second challenge faced by SICHE is how to improve the quality of education and training it provides. The courses offered by SICHE are currently focussed on meeting the lower and middle level of skills required by the country. In time there will be a need for the College to also offer courses aimed at meeting the higher level skill of this country. This will require heavy investments in training of SICHE academic staff as well as the provision of the appropriate facilities and equipment. At the present moment, we can all appreciate that any efforts to achieve that are difficult. This means that we will need to continue to rely on foreign academic institutions in meeting the higher level skills required by the country while doing everything possible to upgrade the quality of training and education provided by SICHE itself.

The third challenge that I wish to flag is that, within the constraints faced by SICHE, it can make greater contributions to the country by encouraging academic staff to undertake research into important social, economic and political issues facing the nation and to serve as a think-tank on these policy issues. Such academic studies and think-tank sessions can provide an important input into the Government's policy making processes through the presentation of data and analysis which may not otherwise be available to policy makers.

CBSI's Association with SICHE

Let me now say a few words on the Central Bank's association with SICHE.

From the Central Bank's point of view, we see SICHE as an important national institution. But our own capacity to provide direct financial assistance is limited by our main mandate, which is to conduct monetary policy. Nonetheless, we have in the past provided assistance to SICHE in various ways. The main components of CBSI assistance to SICHE has been in four areas:

First, in collaboration with the SICHE, a scheme was established to provide funding for research projects related to economic and financial issues. This facility was established several years ago; unfortunately from memory it has been used only once so far. We would be willing, on a selective basis, to fund more research projects which are mutually agreed between the CBSI and SICHE and which investigate into important national or sectoral issues.

Second, until recently, the CBSI sponsored up to 6 students annually to complete their final year studies at the School of Finance and Administration. The selection of students for CBSI sponsorship is based on the recommendation of the Head of School of Finance and Administration. This facility is still available to students of the College.

Third, the CBSI, in association with the 3 commercial banks operating in the Solomon Islands and the Development Bank of Solomon Islands, have sponsored the Diploma in Banking Course at the SICHE. I am encouraged to know that among those graduating this morning will be a number who will be receiving their awards in the Banking Course. After a few years of rounding up corners, the Diploma in Banking course was started in 1994 to meet, in particular the manpower training needs of the banking sector. Up till now, the full cost of this course has been borne by the participating institutions. There are uncertainties about funding beyond 1996. It is therefore, timely to now call for discussions between SICHE and the banks to conclude this.

Finally, the CBSI has provided SICHE with a building to accommodate classes for the Banking Course. This building can concurrently be put into any other use at the discretion of SICHE. It is intended that the building, after completion of renovations, will be donated to SICHE in the near future. I am looking forward to formally handing its keys to the Director.

To conclude on CBSI's links with SICHE, let me re-iterate that we place enormous value on the educational and training role of the College. The Central Bank has a very high regard for its staff who have graduated from SICHE and we will continue to utilise the training opportunities offered here. Within our limited capacity and mandate, we would also continue to provide whatever assistance we can to help in selected activities of SICHE.

Challenge to Graduates

After taking so long to talk about the achievements and challenges of the College, I should now conclude by saying a few words to the students who are graduating today.

Let me remind you that you are a very distinct and privileged group of people. There are very few amongst us who have received the education that you have received. You are fully aware that the majority of Solomon Islanders are barely educated beyond primary school.

This privileged position you enjoy also carries with it some major responsibilities. These are responsibilities that you have towards your fellow citizens, especially those who are not so educated. They look up to you for support, guidance and leadership in whatever role you play in society. For example:

- if you are a teacher, we look to you to bring professionalism in the teaching profession. You must address the issue of how to give our fellow citizens universal primary and secondary education and how to improve the quality of that education. You must conduct yourself in a manner which will show a good example, not only to your students but to those around you;
- Or if you are plumber or an engineer, the challenge for you is how to get safe and clean water to every home in the Solomons, how to dispose of sewer and rubbish in a way which does not pose risks to human health and the environment, and how to give us good roads and uninterrupted supply of electricity.

- If you are a nurse, the challenge for you is not only to deliver effective health and medical services to our people, but also being patient with the many impatient patients in our hospitals and clinics
- And so the expectations from your community of you will be high. The challenges in your various professions and trades are enormous. You must be prepared to take on a leadership role in resolving those challenges.

As educated citizens, you must also take an active interest in the broader national issues which affect not only our own lives but also those of future generations. Be they economic, political, social or environmental issues, your brothers and sisters, who are not so educated as you are, expect you to take the initiative. After all, this is your country and you must lead and show others the way. Your active participation in these national issues is important not only for the effective working of a democratic system of government but because in so doing, you will be enhancing the level of education and awareness of others in the community.

I am sure during your time here at the College, you have had many challenges and experienced difficult times. You will agree with me that there is no end to this: for as long as we live we will continue to encounter challenges and problems. In that regard, the world outside the classroom is even more fierce. The diploma or certificate you will receive this morning is only a tool to equip you to face these challenges. The real quality of that qualification is when others can see that you're contributing towards the betterment of the community in which you serve and society in general.

I hope I have not overstayed my welcome, but may I thank you again Mr. Chairman and Directors for the kind invitation. To you all, thank you for your patience in listening to me. To SICHE and especially the graduates, I wish you all the best and may God bless you all.

Thank you.