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MADAM SPEAKER TOOK THE CHAIR AT 1.00 p.m.

OPENING PRAYER

MADAM SPEAKER (N. RATTLE): Please be seated Honourable Members and our guests. It is the first time I have come into this room and feeling the warm, normally it is so cold in here. I think it is because of all our guests that are here with us today, which is wonderful.

Firstly, my thanks and acknowledgement to our Pastor for the wonderful message delivered to us today which we trust will help with our deliberations today. I see amongst us today our friends in the Public Gallery there are many present in this House who holds important titles in our society today.

If I miss and do not include you in my acknowledgements and welcoming messages one by one, I ask for your patience and apologies if I do miss you out.

First, greetings to the President of the House of Ariki Tou Ariki, I welcome you on behalf of all the staff of Parliament and Members of Parliament. Also to all the Ui Ariki who have not made it here today, I am sure you hold them in your heart and I acknowledge them as well.

I would like to greet especially Mrs Akaiti Puna, welcome to Parliament. On the Manihiki side, I welcome the sister of the Prime Minister as well as the elder brother of the Prime Minister, Pae Puna, greetings to you all.

Greetings to all of you who work in the various agencies of Government as well as the staff of the Prime Minister's office I greet you all. I also believe amongst us are supporters of the Prime Minister sitting in the Public Gallery today, greetings to you all.

I would now like extend our welcome and greetings to Dr Christopher Watkins who is the High Commissioner of Australia, who is with us today. It is not the first visit of His Excellency to the Parliament. Because we have a partnership with the Parliament of Western Australia, we are very pleased he is able to be with us today.

I also want to extend a warm welcome to her Excellency, Tui Dewes from the New Zealand High Commission and the Deputy High Commissioner of New Zealand, Miss Halina Cook – welcome.

The Parliament has had the pleasure of meeting our two ladies from the High Commissioners' office just last week. I also extend greetings to our Solicitor General, Stuart Baker from the Crown Law office and the Deputy Solicitor General, Kathy Bell who also have been with us throughout the last few days.

Therefore, may I encompass all of you who are seated in the Public Gallery today and say, we are very pleased to see you and you are most welcome to be here with us for this afternoon's Sitting.

Greetings to all of you our Honourable Members in the House today. Greetings also to our people in the Northern Group and the Southern Group islands and on Rarotonga listening by radio and watching by livestream – Kia Orana.

This time we are moving to the Order of business of the House of Parliament. Honourable Members we have now come to our Question Time for half an hour.

QUESTION TIME

I see the Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa, you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you very much Madam Speaker. I have two questions to ask together. Yesterday, I did not have adequate time to ask my questions because of too many speakers. Before I do, let me greet as the Member of Parliament for Matavera to all of you in the Public Gallery who has attended Parliament today – Kia Orana to all of you.

I only welcome you on behalf of the people in my constituency Matavera. I will leave the others to offer their own welcome. So I greet you all in the Name of our Lord and Saviour.

My first question is to the Minister and Member of Parliament for Tupapa, George Angene and my second question is to the Member of Parliament for Murienua. Patrick Arioka.

Madam Speaker, when we came to Parliament yesterday, I saw the Member of Parliament for Tupapa and he was wearing a pink suit. I was not very sure why he wore pink suit yesterday.

Today, he is wearing a yellow suit. Maybe there is an occasion why he is wearing this colour today. So maybe the Honourable Minister Angene can clarify my first question.

My second question is to the Member for Murienua regarding the vanilla growers. Today, we see how difficult things are. The growers have received their loans through BTIB and they need help although they have been given five years grace period to pay their loan when their vanilla are ready and when they make revenue on their vanilla.

My question to the Member is, is there any assistance from the Ministry of Agriculture for the vanilla growers in terms of growing their plants and so forth.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member, and I see the Honourable Minister George Angene.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Madam Speaker. To all of us in this Honourable House, greetings. Those of you watching live stream, New Zealand, Australia and globally, greetings.

Thank you to the Member for your question. Yesterday I wore pink, and today I am wearing yellow. I explained the pink suit and that is because of the effort to keep peace, it is not about breast cancer but to promote peace. Today, I am wearing yellow to promote the objective of uniting us all as one like how we are united in the Cook Islands Party.

Today, I attended the Cook Islands Party Conference, I entered, I participated under the peace and I exit with the same feeling. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Patrick Arioka.

MR P. ARIOKA: Thank you Madam Speaker, and greetings to all of us in this House. Those who are able to be witnesses in this House, greetings to you all. A question has been raised by the Member of Parliament from Matavera. This is a simple question and a simple answer that has already been answered before.

It is very simple Madam Speaker. The requirement for the growers to pay their loan has been put on hold until July next year. There are still some weaknesses that is faced by our growers in planting vanilla. However, I would like to assure you with the support of the Minister of Agriculture that we are doing everything possible to support our vanilla growers. May I also add that these are the last growers and they are being supported. I know that they are working together to make this possible.

Secondly, those who are very strong in this area today, let me assure you that there is support in the area of Agritec for you to go forward. In addition, we would like to support those who are active in growing vanilla and to advise you that this area will be improved in the future.

So those are my answers to the question raised about the situation of the vanilla growing here in our country.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member.

May I just remind the Members that no personal questions are allowed, it is about the business of Parliament and so we do not want to hear about the colour of the Minister George Angene's clothing in future and also if you have already asked the question before, do not ask it again.

I see the Honourable Tamaiva Tuavera, you have the Floor.

MR T. TUAVERA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Greetings to all of you today, those of you who are in the House, maybe to support your Government, and to those of us on this side, greetings.

On Monday, I spoke of a horrible accident that happened in my village of Ngatangia, and I heard the Prime Minister say, ask and you shall be given. Before you resign Prime Minister, this is my question to you, regarding the Warrants of the Community Police in Takitumu. I ask Sir that before you resign if you can please grant us our Warrants for our Community Police in Takitumu

because this helps to prevent accidents like this. I saw the benefit during the time our Community Police were operating. Therefore, my question if you can please grant this request. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the Honourable Prime Minister, you have the Floor.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Ngatangia. If only you asked me yesterday maybe I could have done it last night. We are travelling to Titikaveka very soon so I am running away from your request. However, the spirit of the question is sound because our Police do need assistance. But at the present time this is the responsibility of the Police Commissioner. If I put my nose in then I will be accused of political interference.

So the Commissioner is still in the position for one more month so please go and see him, and if it would help please tell him that the Prime Minister who just retired support this request.

Madam Speaker, sorry I forgot my manners can I extend greetings to everyone in the Public Gallery in addition to the warm welcome and acknowledgement you have extended earlier. I especially want to acknowledge my Office Support Staff and also my family. This is the first time I have seen my brother Pae is able to walk, and to all the friends, greetings. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Prime Minister. I see the Honourable Terepai Maoate you have the Floor.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Madam Speaker, and greetings to all those in this House. I extend a very warm welcome to those who have come from the island of Aitutaki, greetings to you and all other heads that are present in the Public Gallery. To our Government, to the Prime Minister, Colleagues and the Opposition, greetings to you all.

I want to ask my question to the Minister in the yellow attire. Before I ask my question, I would like to thank this Honourable Minister, and I know that there will be changes in the Government with the positions and you are sitting next to an important person that you are able to influence.

We have come through this difficult time of the COVID-19 and we are working towards the future. It is not only the Minister for Finance who have given support to our people, but you the Minister for BTIB have been helping people to help our community. A message have been received that the support that is given through the BTIB will stop in support of those who have borrowed money through BTIB has been reduced. Therefore, I stand on behalf of those businesses who have borrowed money through BTIB if you can extend that period not to just six months but 12 months. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, and I see the Honourable Minister George Angene.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Minister of Parliament from Aitutaki for your question. Due to this pandemic period, I have put a hold on the interest on the loans at BTIB. On your question if we can do this again, surely we can do everything, if there is a will there is a way. I will work with the Minister of Finance for assistance until we reach the end of the year and I am sure he will support it.

On your question regarding the interest of the loans, I am sure we can achieve this. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, and I see the Honourable Member William Heather, you have the Floor.

MR W. HEATHER: Firstly, greetings to you Madam Speaker as well as to our people, friends and family in the Public Gallery. My question is to the Minister George Angene.

Madam Speaker, if I may take a minute or two to thank all of you in Government, in Parliament the public and our people for coming to my family bereavement services. Thank you to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, I heard you were present on the day but there were so many people and I did not get to meet you.

To the rest of Cabinet Minister, Members of Parliament, the Government and the Opposition sides, as well as to all the people that came on the day, I thank you in the Name of the Lord and Saviour.

My question to the Minister. Yesterday you spoke in the House regarding your daughter supervising the prisoners conducting the tree trimming activities. Maybe there were not enough workers and maybe there were not enough managers to take care of the workers. My question to you is what is the policy for the Ministry of Justice or Corrective Services on this issue?

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, and I see the Honourable Minister George Angene.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Madam Speaker and to the Honourable Member for your question regarding my daughter looking after the prisoners. I think you didn't listen properly to what I said yesterday. I never said that my daughter was looking after the prisoners. However, I did say my daughter was looking after these young people. On top of that, I did not initiate her as a manager for these young people.

I have three male workers. She met with my CEO and she asked that she wanted to work in this department. It is not according to your statement that it is looking after the prisoners but rather to look after these young people. That is the answer to your question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable William Heather again.

MR W. HEATHER: Yesterday Honourable Minister, all of us Members in the Opposition heard you loud and clear. I asked them as to what they heard...

HON. G. ANGENE: Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: What is your Point of Order Honourable Minister?

HON. G. ANGENE: I don't know whether this is a supplementary question or he is just standing to say something.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member do you have a supplementary question?

MR W. HEATHER: Yes Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR W. HEATHER: Then on this issue Minister if you can clarify who is looking after these prisoners.

HON. G. ANGENE: On the supplementary question who is looking after these youth prisoners. I have three workers, there is one aged 40 years and another 60 years and plus my daughter they all work together.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much and I see the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa, you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Madam Speaker I see our time moving fast. My question is to the Member in yellow. Madam Speaker, I asked this question at passed Parliament session. Right now Madam Speaker, I see they are stripping the roofing iron of the building for the Ministry of Culture.

I believe I was the only Member of Parliament that asked the Minister that when the time comes to change the roofing, I requested about a thousand sheets for us in Matavera. However, the work that is being done is good.

So my question to the Minister is if you can assist this request to help the people of Rangiatea with their roofing of their homes – that is my question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Minister George Angene.

HON. G. ANGENE: Madam Speaker, on the question from the Member from Matavera because you asked at the last Parliament sitting. I answered and said we are fortunate we have many blessings. We have two places that make roofing iron on Rarotonga. I recall my answer was that we should consider the people in the Outer Islands. The people in the Northern Group and Southern Group because they are the ones that find it difficult to acquire roofing iron.

According to the teachings in the book of Proverbs, it says, “*Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened, ask and we will see what will happen*”. Yes, maybe for Rarotonga we can look at helping the Churches in their work.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Only 17 seconds, so I think, quickly, quickly. Honourable William Heather.

MR W. HEATHER: My question is again to the Minister. My question to the Minister is, the three people you mentioned, are they Wardens or they have just been brought in from the public.

HON. G. ANGENE: I see Madam Speaker that we have run out of time maybe I will answer this question at the next Parliament Sitting. However, a short response, these people work for the country.

MADAM SPEAKER: I shall watch that yellow colour whether it is a colour of unity. Thank you Honourable Members that completes our half hour of Question Time.

We will now go to the business of the House. Maybe there will not be many more times I call the Honourable Prime Minister Henry Puna. This is your Ministerial Statement or valedictory address.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Kia Orana to you and everybody here in this Honourable House this afternoon. Madam Speaker, I rise to give my valedictory speech before relinquishing the high office of Prime Minister of our little country.

Greetings to you and all the Honourable Members of this House. Kia Orana to my colleagues in Cabinet and Government and to the Leader of the Opposition and your Members.

To the Queen's Representative Sir Tom Marsters and Lady Marsters, President of the House of Ariki and Koutu Nui, our Religious Advisory Council and all your respective Church members and everyone listening in to our Parliament today, Kia Orana.

Madam Speaker, on the 30th November 2010, exactly three thousand five hundred and ninety one days ago, I took the Oath of Office of Prime Minister of our little paradise and had this to say then – Today we do more than celebrate this important occasion. We rededicate ourselves to the high calling of our country and our people. So let us begin this hard work today and together recognising that beneath all our differences, we are all one people, we are all Cook Islanders.

Madam Speaker, I and my Government have always endeavoured to live up to this ideal, rededication, togetherness, oneness despite our differences. I believe that we have succeeded in manifesting this spirit in many of our achievements. Solar energy for all of the Outer Islands, the appointment of women Heads of Ministries, eight out of fourteen today, the passage of the Marae Moana Act without a single dissent in this House and the comforting reality now that our country is still COVID-19 free largely because we are united in accepting that we are all in this together.

I am also pleased to report that just over two hours ago, the Cook Islands Party in its Conference manifested this spirit of unity by voting unanimously in support of our new Leader.

Madam Speaker, I would like now to begin proper by extending very special greetings to my people in Manihiki. To the people of Tauhunu and Tukao our sister villages that sit like pearls in the palms of God's hands, Manihiki is that special.

There is a very special pee that I would like to try and give justice to it. Madam Speaker, it has been my honour to represent the people of Manihiki in this House and to stand for them on the national stage of issues and concerns as their Member of Parliament, as Prime Minister and as Leader of our little country.

To all my people, I thank you for your trust and for your support in the realisation of what we have accomplished together during my time as your Member. Our two harbour development projects, water tank rehabilitation, lagoon clean up, solar power generation and new airport terminal

together with the imminent sealing of our runway have strengthened and will strengthen our life line to the outside world and help prepare our island for further economic capacity building in the years ahead.

Madam Speaker, in presenting this valedictory address today, I also stand to honour our leaders of the past including Dr Robert Woonton who before me also served the people of Manihiki as Member of Parliament and as Prime Minister. Dr Woonton also faced the challenges of atoll isolation and constraints, balancing the competing interest of small village survival in the North with centralised economic demands here in the South. For a Prime Minister, this can be an enormous force of pressure and often times an uncomfortable task.

Many times, I have had to tell my people that as the metua of our little country, we needed to be patient and suppress our own needs while we address the needs of others first. But, Madam Speaker the journey has been worth it. Yes, the interest of Manihiki have stayed close to my heart as has the need for our nation as a whole to recognise the unique conditions of those who are living far from the comforts of life and the easy access to supermarkets and shops, to mechanics and engineers for vehicles and an international airport, to restaurants and pubs and to fully equipped health centres and schools.

I pledged to serve the people of Manihiki as their Parliamentary servant and the welfare of the island and its communities will stay with me in whatever role I can play for our people or with whatever encouragement I can provide to our young leaders of the future.

As a younger man, and that cannot have been that long ago, I also look to our leaders for encouragement and guidance. The late Sir Geoffrey Henry was one of those leaders who provided support where it was needed. Our Party Leader was renowned for recognising youthful potential and was often the encouraging force behind those who demonstrated the qualities and abilities to advance quickly. His foresight nurtured leaders of the future, the quality we should all uphold.

In fact, I can truly say that the landscape of political leadership was shaped greatly by Sir Geoffrey Henry and our former Prime Ministers and while the company of those men has since been depleted we have had the benefit of an extended and expanded blue print from which to build further because of them.

In their footsteps we gained a stronger foundation for self-determination, a framework of governance where the future is mapped by our own talent and foresight and where the measures of success as well as failure are our own.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members we stand stronger today because we have taken ownership of those past efforts and we will continue to do so if we are to stand together.

The legacies of leadership will help us going forward. Even as I stand here to pass the burdens of leadership onto the shoulders of your new Prime Minister, I have the utmost confidence that with each link in this chain of succession, the Cook Islands will continue to grow with stability and resilience.

Over the past ten years the rate of growth and expansive development here at home has been partly fuelled by a progressive building of relationships abroad. Our revenues from export tourism dollars reached record highs over recent years before the onset of COVID-19 and the driving force of our international diplomacy has rewarded us with more fruitful development assistance from our key partners.

Madam Speaker, many of our domestic projects would not have been possible without face to face diplomatic interaction at the highest levels, meeting in foreign capitals all around the world. In doing that Madam Speaker, I have learned to shut my ears off to the constant criticism that the Prime Minister was travelling too much. After all, we must accept now that Government business today is international business, and our place in the world's affairs must be engaged at the levels we have now secured for our future wellbeing.

As I leave office today, our International partnerships have doubled. The Cook Islands now enjoys fifty four formal diplomatic ties with nations within the region and around the world. Many of those ties with countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Japan, South Korea, India as well as the European Union has brought immeasurable benefits right through to our smallest communities. Our graduation last year to a higher income country took effect at the beginning of this year ironically arriving at a time of considerable progress and advancement while on the gust of having to prepare for the hugely negative impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the looming challenges our Nation had the proven financial integrity to access important assistance from global mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund and had our resilience further strengthen by linking into the Pacific Fund establish for insurance against disasters.

I digress at this point to acknowledge the wonderful efforts of our officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, they have worked tirelessly including travelling endlessly to expand our diplomatic footprint. So, to Tapaeru and your staff meitaki ma'ata for your excellent work. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that this national level of capability today has its origins in the visionary dreams of former leaders. One important and lasting example is the direct line from the announcement by Papa Arapati Henry to exercise sovereignty of our oceans resources right through to the expansion of our International Fishing Agreements and the establishment of a formal framework to govern our seabed minerals.

Honourable Members, our role today and into future years is to preserve the sustainability of these resources for the generations of the future, for that reason and to uphold our obligation is internationally as well as domestically the framework of Marae Moana was passed three years ago. Marae Moana was not just an affirmation to ourselves of the importance of our future it was also our message to the world that the natural resources of our EEZ would be forever be protected under an umbrella sustainable use, a balance in keeping with agreed United Nations principles that our little country would take such a strong position of international leadership is testimony to a transformed sense of sovereign responsibility irrespective of our size or weight as a player in the global arena.

The Cook Islands would no longer plead its case from the perspective of a Small Island Developing State but from the vantage point of a large ocean state, this has been the underlying theme of our voice and of our actions over the past decade. In harmony with that perspective the articulation of

national goal to transform our energy sector was given life more than eight years ago following the Declaration of Renewal Energy Targets in 2011. The steady conversion of electrification throughout our islands to solar power has generated numerous benefits while we continue to pursue the major challenge of transforming Rarotonga. For those of you lucky enough to have been to paradise that is Manihiki you would have seen firsthand the benefits of solar power. Diesel fuel electricity for example no longer reflects the major share of our greenhouse gas emissions, every Outer Island is free from the dependency of costly bulk fuel shipments and will help set up in enabling environment for electric vehicles which is already part of a new priority for our transport sector.

Madam Speaker, the paradise we call home is the core vision of these initiatives which has been in force over nearly ten years. The land based transformation of energy is sustainability of our oceans resources under Marae Moana and our reach for a better future by standing strong together present a formidable front to the outside world and the pressures it can bring. Madam Speaker, ladies and gentlemen the day will come when all Cook Islanders would be able to proclaim success in having secured a totally clean and green environment despite the odds. This is the distinction that would set us apart from the rest of the world. This is the position from which our pristine environment can generate sustained economic opportunities. This is the vision that can provide the security for our sustained wellbeing into the future.

My goal as Prime Minister was to set out controls to the heart of this vision but Madam Speaker the inevitable challenge all leaders must face is the support of those who must bring your vision to reality. Leading the Nation as one is the most noble of duties but one that can also prove to be the most elusive. The decisions you make may have far reaching consequences and the need for support is as crucial as it is broad. Future goals will depend on the ability to secure that support, to mould that support which will come if the realisation of those benefits changes the lives of people for the better.

Madam Speaker this voluntary stepping down from high office today is the first in our 55-year history as a parliamentary democracy. And while this transition is breaking new political ground today our obligation as representative of the people should remain focused on a spirit of national togetherness rather than political ambition.

My encouragement now would be on the need for our people to come together in support of the efforts needed to manage these difficult times ahead. The past seven months of uncertainty have been stressful and discomfoting for us all. However, our role as a Government has been to provide as much support as is practicable while ensuring we spare the course of securing our health and safety.

The key to preserving our COVID-19 free status will continue on our ability to work together as one to stay committed as one and be considerate of each other as if we are one. Vigilance and patience should be our guiding principles and our confidence in the authority of our health experts should inform our behaviour.

Amid the clouds of the unknown we as a people are made stronger by the certainty of our faith in God and the knowledge that he will guide our way forward. My favourite text is Proverbs 3:5, 6

it says, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your path.*”

Madam Speaker, from the moment of taking office on 30th November 2010. My own path would be touched by many who chose to serve our people but sadly would be taken from us all too soon. And here today represent the start of a roll call of honour I wish to recite as a personal tribute.

Sir Geoffrey Henry – Prime Minister
Sir Dr Terepai Maoate – Prime Minister
Dr Joseph Williams – Prime Minister
Papa Pupuke Robati – Prime Minister
Papa Inatio Akaruru – Deputy Prime Minister
Robert Wigmore – Deputy Prime Minister
Papa Kura Strickland – Minister of the Crown
Papa Dan Kamana – Minister of the Crown
Peri Vaevaepare – Minister of the Crown
Nandi Glassie – Minister of the Crown
Albert Peto Nicholas – Member of Parliament
Mii Parima – Member of Parliament
John Tangi – Member of Parliament
Pukeiti Pukeiti – Member of Parliament
Tony Armstrong – Member of Parliament
John Henry – Member of Parliament
Tiaki Wuatai – Member of Parliament
Tekii Lazaro – Member of Parliament

In addition, at the beginning of my term, Papa Tepure Tapaitau – who was a Minister and a High Commissioner to Wellington.

I also wish to remember the colleagues I worked with at the official level and with deeply saddened to farewell them.

Navy Epati – Public Service Commissioner
Aukino Tairea – Secretary to Cabinet
Tesa Temata – New Zealand High Commissioner to the Cook Islands

May they all live in our memory with the honour deserving of one who served and served with excellence.

Madam Speaker at this point I should really talk about the achievements of my Government.

MADAM SPEAKER: Just take a seat while we deal with the procedure, Honourable Prime Minister. I see the Honourable Tingika Elikana.

MR T. ELIKANA: Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker in view of the time, I rise to move a Motion:

For the suspension of Standing Order 54 (2), in particular the requirement that we suspend from 2.30 p.m. until 3.00 p.m. If we could suspend that to allow for the completion of the business of the House today

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I seek a Secunder for the Motion.

Secinded by the Honourable Minister Mark Brown

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Honourable Prime Minister you may continue.

HON. H. PUNA: Madam Speaker I should talk briefly about our achievements now. But I won't because the truth is I don't like talking about my achievements. I would prefer others to talk about them or let history pass judgment on whether my prime ministership has been a success or a failure. But there have been many highlights but I will only touch on one.

In November 2017, I was privileged together with the Forum Leaders of the Pacific to have an audience with the Pope at the Vatican. I took a beautiful rosary made of black pearls as a gift. I have photos that show our audience with the Pope in his secret meeting place, and even a couple of photos that my wife and I had taken with him.

I am not a Catholic I think I'm still SDA but it was still an honour to be in the presence of the Pope and that is something that we will always treasure.

At this point in time Madam Speaker, I want to extend some thank you message to a lot of people.

First, I want to say thank you to my current Government team. To the Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and Caucus Members. Team, thank you so much for your trust and loyalty. Thank you even more for your unwavering commitment to the foundation of our Government – team work.

I also want to say thank you to my previous Cabinets in 2010 and 2014. The current Queen's Representative was the first Deputy Prime Minister in the first Cabinet and then in 2014, Teariki Heather was the Deputy Prime Minister. I say thank you to them because we might have had different agendas but as a team we worked very well and closely together.

I also want to say thank you to all the public servants and the Heads of Ministries. You guys are the ones that are working at the cold face of our service delivery to our people. You are also responsible for bringing to reality the many innovative and successful projects we have all worked on. Our success is your success and I thank you all for your efforts.

I also want to thank our Traditional Leaders, the Ui Ariki of our country, you have been strong partners of Government in many development projects. The Marae Moana, Te Mato Vai, our new Immigration Bill and many others. Thank you to you all for your support.

Madam Speaker, we are a Christian nation and I would love to say thank you to our Spiritual Leaders for keeping us true to our commitment in the preamble to our Constitution that we are a Christian country and for your Prayers and words of encouragement, I am deeply indebted.

I also want to say thank you to my Support Office family, Edwin Pittman, Amanda Blake Pauka, Apii Vakai, you guys were there for me 24-7 and at the heart of everything that has happened in this country over the past ten years. We were also blessed with the services of Trevor Pitt for a while and even now and then and recently with the addition of Teariki Vakalalabure in an Executive Advisory role.

Finally, my families. Thanks to COVID-19 my children all overseas they are not able to be here. This is in stark contrast to my swearing in on 30th November 2010 when they were all present. But I sincerely want to thank my family for letting me get on with the job without interference or pressures. We all know that sometimes family can be a real pain but instead my family has given me their support, their Prayers at all times. I can only wish that Mama and Papa were part of our journey but it has been a truly wonderful journey.

Finally, but most of all to my wife Akaiti, thank you for being my rock. I would not have made it this far without your love, your support and encouragement.

Madam Speaker, with these words of appreciation I also extend to you for your guidance and rulings and convey to this Honourable House and all its Members my sincere gratitude for their kind support over the past ten years of my Prime Ministership. We have upheld our Oath of service to higher authorities and met the demands placed upon us by this institution of Parliamentary integrity and in the process, Madam Speaker I believe we have made each other better representatives of our people and I truly believe that this Honourable House in the past ten years have become less combative but more consensual.

Madam Speaker, the challenge of leadership therefore lies not on the shoulders of one but on the backs of us all to carry forward. The successes of Government are achievements for us all for in serving our Nation we bring honour to this House. I extend to you all a heartfelt *meitaki maata* and Kia Manuia and May God Bless us and Bless our little paradise. Thank you.

(Applause)

Madam Speaker, can I just add at this point in time that the people of Manihiki have composed a beautiful song for me and they have asked if that can be played now before any discussions take place with your indulgence. It is always a humbling experience to hear from others what they think of you. It may not be too positive but it's still very humbling but my people of Manihiki have really composed a beautiful song that conveys their sentiments and their feelings for their Member of Parliament. Thank you very much.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Prime Minister. We have done many things the first time in the last few Sittings and this can be certainly one of them. It will be our pleasure to be able to allow you to play the song that has been especially composed for you as Member of Parliament for Manihiki.

(Song dedicated to the outgoing Prime Minister being played)

MADAM SPEAKER: That was wonderful. Thank you for sharing that with us, Hon. Prime Minister, beautiful words to the song. I am sure the people of Manihiki will be very, very sad to see you leave your Prime Ministership role but they will still be very happy to have you as their Member of Parliament, it's wonderful.

For those of us who don't understand the words of the song, they are really, really beautiful words and perhaps they should one day translate it into English so it can be understandable for everybody although you wouldn't get the real meaning of it in English but that was beautiful. That was a father that's Tarau Kaina and his daughter Beni. Beni is actually married to my young nephew Kaina who's a fisherman on the island. Beautiful singing and you should have also sung with them. But she spoke to me a bit about how that came about because of the life of the people of Manihiki and I can honestly say that the Prime Minister is Papa Henere and Mrs Prime Minister Mrs Akaiti Puna is Mama Akaiti and I have seen the children hang around holding hands and running around with their Member of Parliament and their Mama. So, it is very touching. Thank you for sharing that with us, it is very fitting.

We will now move on, does anybody want to contribute to speak or we just leave it at that it is so beautiful. I think it would be nice to leave it at that. Did you want to open up for debate, Prime Minister? You want me to open it up? If any Member would like to speak to the Prime Minister's speech we will give you the floor if you'd like to do that? If there are no further speakers, we will move on to the next business. We will move on to our last business for the day and that is on the Notice of a Motion and I call on the Honourable Henry Puna, the Member of Manihiki to move a Motion.

HON. H. PUNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is the best part of today. Madam Speaker, I have the pleasant duty to move:

That pursuant to Article 13 (2) (a) of our Constitution, this Parliament expresses its confidence in the Honourable Mark Brown as Prime Minister following my resignation

On the last matter I can advise that my resignation letter has been delivered to His Excellency the Queen's Representative.

MADAM SPEAKER: I see the Honourable Tehani Brown.

Seconded by the Honourable Tehani Brown

I propose the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

If there are no speaker, I put the Question. I recognise the Honourable Selina Napa.

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker, if I may speak to the Motion that has been put to the Floor.

MADAM SPEAKER: You may.

MRS S. NAPA: Thank you. Madam Speaker before I speak to the Motion, let me first acknowledge and greet our people, those of you who are here in the House in the Public Gallery as well as our people throughout the Cook Islands listening in, Kia Orana.

Madam Speaker, I would like to make some comments on this Motion pursuant to Standing Order 397 (3) (a) and that is a Minister must attach his written resignation with the Motion and to say also that this Motion did not meet the requirement of sitting on the Order Paper for 14 days. The Government already knew of this and they often discussed the transfer from the Minister to the new Prime Minister. If they had placed the Motion on the Order Paper 14 days prior, maybe those of us on the Opposition will have no issues. This Motion was only placed on the Order Paper yesterday and the Motion was only dated on Monday, 28th of this month.

I can see that there are a lot of proceedings in Parliament that we are not complying.....

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member, can I please interrupt you. May I explain that the Motion was given to Parliament on Thursday but unfortunately our printer was down and they did not manage to print that Motion until you had left the Sitting on Wednesday. You departed from the building but they were put in your pigeon holes. Therefore, as far as the staff of Parliament are concerned, the two days of observing two days notice was done.

MRS S. NAPA: Madam Speaker, when we asked the reason behind why the Motion was only just tabled on the Order Paper yesterday, although the reasoning was that Parliament printer was not working, but still the two days requirements does not meet the Standing Order 397(3)(b) two weeks' notice must be lodged with the Speaker before a Motion can be moved and seconded.

Madam Speaker, I also note on the Notice of Motion that the Motion was put on the Order Paper by the Honourable Henry Puna, Member of Parliament for Manihiki. According to Standing Order 397(3)(a) a Minister must attach his written resignation with the Motion. So, when the Motion was tabled on Monday was there a written resignation by the Prime Minister attached to the Motion?

Madam Speaker, I am standing here as Member of Parliament not supporting the Motion unless the proper process has been seen through. Madam Speaker, it seems to be the practice of this Government to push and bulldoze motions through this House because they have the numbers, we do not have the numbers.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Member, can I refer you to the Constitution as to where this process is happening. We have known that the Prime Minister has announced that he was going to resign as the Prime Minister, and then Article 14(3)(c) if the Prime Minister resigns his office by writing under his hand delivered to the Queens Representative and which he has done, he has delivered his letter.

So, in Article 13(2)(a) we are following the appointment of the Prime Minister as we are in session since we are Sitting and the Queen's Representative will appoint a Member of Parliament who commands the confidence of the majority of the Members of Parliament which is what we are doing now.

I see the Honourable Tina Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker and to all of us Kia Orana. Kia Orana to those in the Public Gallery and I see the team from Aitutaki for the Cook Islands Games are present. Kia Orana to the Kaumaiti. Kia Orana Madam Speaker and staff of Parliament.

I did not stand before to reply to the speech by the Prime Minister because I believe a time will be allocated such as now. It is sad Prime Minister that you have to step down especially when quite a lot of people have confidence in your leadership, and I do want to congratulate you for the ten years that you have been leader. I will talk about the new Prime Minister when that time comes, so just note that I am not ignoring you Honourable Mark Brown.

I like your song, the wording, the narration and what it tells us. I was going to move a Motion earlier that we would hear it only if you and Akaiti were to do a waltz. I was not sure whether the Members of Parliament on your side will support that Motion.

Madam Speaker, I want to address the matter raised by the Member of Parliament for Titikaveka. There is no issue about 13(2)(a) and no issue about 14(4)(c). Let me in a nutshell describe to you what we think the problem is?

Firstly, the notice is defective, it is defective for two reasons. One is the actual notice itself and two Standing Order 397. I will explain why I say it is defective. It was a Motion by the Honourable Henry Puna. We were told on Tuesday that it was received by the Acting Clerk on Monday. He had not resigned at that point and therefore we heard that he resigned this morning – now. Therefore, under 397(3) this Motion was moved while he was a Minister and if I am right, then it should have had his resignation with it that is what 397 says.

The second thing is that it should then sit in this Parliament for fourteen days. The third thing under 397(3)(c) is that it should appear on the Order Paper. I say it has not appeared yet because the notice is defective so it needs to be done properly so that it can be properly included on the Order Paper.

Now, the second reason is that there is no way of avoiding 397 even if there was a Motion to suspend under Standing Order 4, which cannot be moved now because we are in debate. Standing Order 397 specifically says whenever a Motion to suspend Standing Orders is moved and passed,

the Speaker shall, it is not a may - shall take cognizance of the following conventions and restrictions.

Madam Speaker, I don't think you have a discretion. My position is and I put it to you there is no discretion for you under 397. You must take the restrictions as described in 397(3) and I will ask first that we get some rulings made on whether or not the notice is defective.

Secondly what Standing Order that will entitle this House to avoid Standing Order 397. I am happy to answer any other questions.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. Since I have been a Speaker from 2012, this is a convention to Standing Orders and it happened after something happened here in Parliament but if I can refer you to the reading of this Standing Order which is how we have practised it because whenever the Budget is moved to shorten the time, it could never be used, guillotine.

Now if you read, this is the confusing thing about this, whenever a Motion to suspend Standing Orders is moved and passed, the Motion is being moved, we're about to put it to the vote which means whether it is passed or not, the Speaker shall take cognizance of the following conventions and restrictions.

We have had many times where we had to refer to where according to this it is moved and it is passed before the Speaker considers the Standing Orders below. So these Standing Orders have never been used since 2012.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker the problem you have is that there is no Motion on this Table to suspend Standing Orders.

MADAM SPEAKER: Right, there isn't.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: We have gone straight in the notice. But what this says that even if there was and there isn't one, and there can't be one because under Standing Orders 4, you cannot suspend a Standing Order during debate, and we are in debate. This has nothing to do with the guillotine of the Appropriation Bill because it directly refers at 3, to no Motion of confidence or no confidence the Standing Order is very particular as to the application of this 397.

With respect Madam Speaker, it is no answer to say, well we have done this in the past and if it's been done and it's wrong, it's wrong. I think we need to mindful also that Standing Orders are formulated under the Constitution, and I am looking at Article 34 (5).

So if there are Standing Orders which is like this one has been established under the Constitution, I see no way that we can say well, this has been the practice in the past because in my view Madam Speaker the Standing Order is very clear and it addresses this very matter. I am not sure that we can go to 106 and abridge the notice sign to two days because that is a general version whereas this Standing Order deals particularly with confidence vote. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you and I see the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. H. PUNA: I just want to make a few comments in response to the expected comments from the Opposition. Because it seems very clear to me and to the people in the Gallery that this technical matter is being allowed to cut across what has been a very important occasion today.

Standing Order 397 arises if there is a Motion to suspend the Standing Orders. The introductory wording of the Standing Order makes it very clear. There has been no Motion tabled to suspend any Standing Order. And the other important point Madam Speaker is this, our Standing Orders do not cover a situation such as the one here in this House now.

In fact, you can through all the 397 Standing Orders not a single one speaks about a resignation of a Prime Minister while in office and to allow for a transition to take place. And that is not surprising Madam Speaker because the reality is it is fact that nothing like this has ever happened in our country before. It was never thought off and it was never practiced.

Otherwise I am sure that those Members of Parliament before us would have addressed that in their reviews of the Standing Orders. Yes, we have seen Motions of no confidence from the Opposition on the Order Papers many times in the past. And I dare suggest that this Standing Order was meant to manage and control situations like that.

Hence the reference to 6 months to relapse before the filing of Motions of no confidence. But the Motion I have just moved is something totally new in this Parliament and it is not catered for in our Standing Orders. Which in my opinion Madam Speaker brings us to the clear provisions of the Constitution.

The supreme law of this country and you have touched on it earlier. This Parliament is free to transact any business that is within the provisions of the Constitution. So what do we do in a situation like this? For me that allows you to exercise your discretion in order that we can comply with the clear provisions of the Constitution.

I would suggest that in a situation like this, the proceedings in this House cannot be questioned in a court of law, and so we need to be innovative as long as we comply with the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution is very clear this Parliament is in session I have tendered my resignation. The letter has been accepted by the Queen's Representative but there is no guidance in our Standing Orders as to how we precede in a situation like this. However, I would suggest that it should not stop this House so long as it has the required support among Members to proceed with the Motion that has been seconded already.

Those are my comments for now, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister. And that exactly is how we are handling this according to the Constitution. According to since we have known that the Prime Minister was going to resign, and since we are in session and this is the way we have decided to make this.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker, I am going to ask that because this is an important matter and since Crown Law is here, you might take some advice on this issue because during the week we have had matters happen in Parliament which is not in my view according to the Standing Orders.

Your Opposition do not want to be part of a Parliament that is not in compliance with its Standing Orders. And yes Mr Prime Minister, I did have a look and see and check out what a Minister means to check whether that includes you. But if you look at the definition of Minister, it says, those people in Cabinet.

However, I do not believe what I am hearing, you are being asked to move a Motion or put it to a Question when in fact it is not compliant with the Standing Orders. That is our position Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members we are going to suspend for 10 minutes and we will return after that.

Sitting suspended at 3.31 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.56 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members, please be seated. Parliament is resumed and I call on the Member, Honourable Tingika Elikana.

MR T. ELIKANA: Thank you Madam Speaker. In view of the time, I would like to move a Motion:

That Standing Order 54 (2) relating to Sitting days and hours of sitting be suspended to allow this House to deal with all the business before it until it is completed

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, is there a Seconder for the Motion?

Seconded by the Honourable Patrick Arioka

I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members, we have had a conversation with the Queen's Representative and the Queen's Representative pursuant to Article 32 (a) has requested to have the Members of Parliament present for a special meeting to be convened immediately outside of Parliament meaning not formal like this. This is the type of procedure set in 1983 opinion of the Court of Appeal which the Queen's Representative will be following.

Given the process, the Question to the Motion will not be put. The Acting Clerk will chair that special meeting. So what we will do now, we will suspend Parliament – I see the Honourable Tina Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker, I think I heard you refer to Article 32 (a).

MADAM SPEAKER: Sorry, 13 (a) I beg your pardon.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Madam Speaker, before we can move on and move out of Parliament, we on this side of the House would like a ruling on the process that we have just started and then adjourned. We think that the ruling needs to happen so that rather than just leave it in limbo, because it is a process that has been started and it needs a ruling because as I understand it we did get to the end and then some advice was sought.

We are aware of the 1983 Court of Appeal opinion which at that time in 1983, an option was provided by the Court of Appeal and that opinion was to resolve a situation where the Court did not feel that it should embarrass a non-Member Speaker by saying that that vote will not be counted. That was the reason why the option to go outside Parliament and have only Members of Parliament still sitting in here but outside Parliament and our request Madam Speaker is, if we are going there, let us get a ruling on the current process, close that up and then we move on.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Honourable Member. The Motion that was put was actually also seconded, and normally in Parliament, we would put the Question on that. However, the Honourable Selina Napa and the Honourable Tina Browne brought that to be an issue that it is not proper, the Motion is not handled, the notice of it is not handled properly because we were referring to the Standing Order 397.

However, when I refer to the Standing Order 397, it is a totally different process as to what we were considering doing within the Constitution. Therefore, we did seek the advice of the Queen Representative and as I said, we will not put the Question on the Motion that was put because it is being placed to be incorrect and we do need to move on with the business of the Parliament for the good of the country. We do have to make a decision today as we are in an unusual circumstance with the situation of the COVID and I do believe the situation is now in the Queen Representative's hands.

Therefore, I would like to suspend Parliament now and all Members of Parliament can remain in this room if all our guests could please move into the dining room. I do not know how long we will be here and what will happen then is the Acting Clerk will direct a meeting as if they were at the Queen Representative's house or outside of Parliament without the process that we are doing now.

When they have done that special meeting, we will convene Parliament again to receive the result of that special meeting and the steps from there on, I will let you know depending on the result. Parliament is suspended until such time as the special meeting is over.

Sitting suspended at 5.08 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.29 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: Honourable Members, please be seated. Parliament is resumed.

Well, what I will do now is announce the procedure so the public will understand what has happened this afternoon. So, when the Question – do you have confidence in Mark Brown as the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands was asked, those who agreed were 13 Members of Parliament. It was noted that one Member was absent in the House. There were no count for those who said no, or who disagreed because all of the Opposition Members had left the room. However, there were 13 Members of Parliament who voted positive was required as majority vote.

(Editor's Note: The Speaker's announcement regarding the vote is the result from the Queen's Representative special meeting conducted outside of Parliament. For the reason that Parliament Sitting suspended for the special meeting to take place, the audio recording discontinued)

Vote result from the Queen's Representative Special meeting:

Confidence in Hon. M. Brown as Prime Minister

1. Mr Henry Puna
2. Hon. Mark Brown
3. Hon. Robert Tapaitau
4. Hon. Rose Toki-Brown
5. Hon. Vaine Mokoroa
6. Hon. George Angene
7. Mr Patrick Arioka
8. Mr Albert Nicholas
9. Mr Tereapii Maki Kavana
10. Ms Tehani Brown
11. Mr Tai Tura
12. Mr Tuakeu Tangatapoto
13. Mr Tingika Elikana

The Opposition Members abstained from voting and left the House:

1. Hon. Tina Pupuke Browne
2. Mr Terepai Maoate
3. Mr Tama Tuavera
4. Mr William Heather
5. Mrs Selina Napa
6. Mr Vaitoti Tupa
7. Mrs Tetangi Matapo
8. Mrs Agnes Armstrong
9. Mr Wesley Kareroa
10. Mr Manuela Kitai

Absent in the House:

Mr Nooroa Baker

MADAM SPEAKER: Therefore, congratulations to the Honourable Prime Minister, Mark Brown as that was the result that then took you to the Queen's Representative to be sworn in and for your Warrant to be given. Therefore, may I give you the Floor so you can tell the rest of us who were not with you as to what happened there.

HON. M. BROWN: I rise to accept with the greatest honour and utmost respect the confidence bestowed upon me by the majority of the Members of Parliament of this House as Prime Minister of the Cook Islands.

Upon my swearing in as Prime Minister I was able to advise His Excellency the Queen's Representative of the Members of Parliament that will be sworn in as Cabinet Ministers. I am pleased to report to you and to our people listening in the Members of our Cabinet include the Honourable Robert Tapaitau as the Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Rose Toki Brown as Cabinet Minister, the Honourable George Angene as Cabinet Minister, the Honourable Vaine Mokoroa as Cabinet Minister and the newly appointed Cabinet Minister the Honourable Patrick Arioka.

His Excellency the Queen's Representative accepted the recommendations put forward for the swearing in of the Ministers and they were duly sworn in. He further passed on his words of encouragement to the Cabinet and to the Government Caucus Members and although there was a delay in the process the major thing is that, the democracy of our Constitution was upheld. We were pleased, Madam Speaker to be able to demonstrate to His Excellency that at the end of the day this House that we have returned to report back to our people that our Constitutional democracy was upheld in its finest traditions.

As a Government, Madam Speaker we will continue the good work this Government has undertaken since the elections two years ago and we recognise with great humility the sacrifice made by the previous Prime Minister Henry Puna in allowing the new blood to come through into the Cabinet. The self-sacrifice and the easy transition demonstrated in our Party Conference earlier this morning, Madam Speaker demonstrates that at least this side of the House has been able to show a maturity in our politics that is sadly lacking in the other side of the House.

With those words, Madam Speaker I solemnly undertake to fulfil and carryout the duties of Prime Minister with my Cabinet and with the Members of my Caucus to the best of my abilities, so help me God. Kia Orana, Kia Manuia.

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you very much Prime Minister, Mark Brown. There is going to be some getting used to changing the names of people seated around in this room. Please allow me the time to congratulate the Honourable Robert Tapaitau for your new position as the Deputy Prime Minister and may I also extend congratulations to our new Minister, the Honourable Patrick Arioka.

May I also extend further congratulations to our Ministers who have remained, the Honourable Minister Vaine Mokoroa, Honourable Minister George Angene and the Honourable Minister Rose Brown.

May I also say to our former Prime Minister, the Honourable Henry Puna what a pleasure it has been to work with you as the Prime Minister of this country. I am not sure if the people who were seated in this House and all the people who are listening in know that you are responsible for my sitting in the Speaker's Chair and I cannot let that go without acknowledging it, recognising what an honour it has been that you invited me to take this role. I am most grateful for that and I hope I have served our country as you had expected that I would. As a Manihiki woman, I am very proud of the way the people of Manihiki embrace you in the way that they do with love, conviction and supporting you in what you do for the island.

When we started this afternoon with your wonderful address to the people of the Cook Islands and the song that was shared with us, we were all jubilant, excited, happy and a little bit of sadness as well.

I feel that we need to apologise to your family for what started off to be a really exciting afternoon and in some way was dampened with the activities in the House. However, the result of what has come out of your passing down your legacy to our new Prime Minister has succeeded and that needs to be jolly for all of us.

I am sad that there is absolutely not a Member on the other side of the House because that is the reason that Members of Parliament are elected by the constituents that they are their representatives in this House and sadly they are missing tonight. However, we will leave it at that.

So, Honourable Members we are going to have a closing payer but before that, you are going to move a Motion Honourable Leader of the House?

MR T. ELIKANA: Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to move:

That this House adjourn *Sine Die*

MADAM SPEAKER: I look for a Seconder?

Seconded by the Honourable Member for Manihiki, Henry Puna

MADAM SPEAKER: I put the Question:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Please say a closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

MADAM SPEAKER: Parliament is adjourned *Sine Die*.

Parliament adjourned at 7.47 p.m.