

**SPEECH BY THE SAMOA HIGH COMMISSIONER & DEAN OF THE DIPLOMATIC  
CORPS (H.E LEASI PAPALI’I SCANLAN) AT THE GOVERNOR GENERAL’S  
MATARIKI RECEPTION ON 24 JUNE, 2022**

E nga Mana, E nga Reo, E nga rau Rangatira ma.

Talofa Lava, Tena Koutou Katoa.

Your Excellencies, Dame Cindy Kiro & Dr Richard Davies

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, High Commissioners and your Spouses

Mr Rod Harris (Chief of Protocol) and Senior Staff of the Protocol Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade,

Staff of Government House, Ladies & Gentlemen.

It is always an honour and privilege for me to be allowed to speak in Government House, especially on this special occasion of Matariki. I believe this is the first ever Indigenous Public Holiday in New Zealand’s history!

Thank you, Your Excellencies, for inviting our Diplomatic Corps Family to celebrate together with yourselves the Festival of Matariki this evening.

The last time our Diplomatic Corps Family were invited to Government House, was when Your Excellency hosted us to your first ever Official Reception, after you were sworn in as the Governor General of New Zealand in September last year.

Being invited as your first Official Guests to Government House as well as celebrating your first Indigenous Public Holiday for Matariki with our Diplomatic Corps Family, is indeed a very Special Honour that will remain with us for a very long time – Thank you, Your Excellencies.

Matariki is also celebrated and remembered in different ways in other countries of the Pacific.

To us in Samoa, *Matariki* is translated as *Mata’ali’i*, which means the *Eyes (Mata)* of the Chiefs (*Ali’i*)

*Matariki (or Mata’ali’i)* therefore refers to the Eyes of our Chiefs or our Ancestors who are continuously watching over us. These are the same Ancestors that guided our journeys throughout history to where we are today.

They steered and protected the Peoples of Polynesia on their Wakas, many hundreds of years ago, as they sailed the vast Pacific Ocean and settled in new territories like Aotearoa, New Zealand.

In our Samoan Custom, as in many other Polynesian Cultures, before we deliver formal speeches, we always acknowledge and pay tribute - firstly to God Almighty and then to our Ancestors. We acknowledge their precious contributions to our history and we ask for their ongoing protection on our Countries and our Peoples.

The celebration of Matariki is a reminder of *where we came from, where we are now and where we are going!* It is an opportunity for us to remember our *Cultures, our Traditions and our Languages.*

It is a time for us from the Pacific to celebrate and value our special relationship and shared *Whakapapa* with our Maori brothers and sisters.

Two weeks ago, Joyce and I were honoured to have been granted a private audience with their Majesties *Kiingi Tuheitia* and *Makau Ariki*. In our discussions, Kiingi Tuheitia expressed his wish for more frequent and closer contacts between the Maori People and the Peoples from the Pacific.

His Majesty noted the importance of having our histories and languages taught at schools so that our children and future generations are aware of our close historical ties and connections.

Matariki is the start of the Maori New Year. And, for us, the start of new beginnings.

As a Christian Country, Samoans also refer to God as '*Ali'i*' or '*The Supreme Chief*'. Matariki or '*Mata o le Ali'i*' is therefore often referred to as the '*Eyes of God*' that continue to watch over us and protect us.

At this time, when the world continues to encounter many new challenges, perhaps it is time for us to change our approach and seek divine intervention to help save our planet!

Finally, it is our wish that the '*Mata o le Ali'i*' or the '*Eyes of God*' will safely guide the many members of our Diplomatic Corps Family who are returning to their home countries, at the completion of their terms in NZ, before the end of this year.

We also pray that *Matariki* will continue to look after Your Excellencies (*Dame Cindy Kiro and Dr Richard Davies*) as well as all the Good People of this beautiful country Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Happy Matariki Day. No Reira, Tena Koutou, Tena Koutou, Tena Katou Katoa!

**SOIFUA MA IA MANUIA**