



Memorial for Sisiliah Puleheloto, Niuean RAMSI Participating Police Force adviser

Special Coordinator Graeme Wilson

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It is really touching to see so many people here. I thank you all for taking the time to attend this afternoon's memorial service. Your presence is testament to the enormity of the ferry tragedy for the people of Tonga. It also reflects the love that was felt by so many for the person we are honouring today.

For many within RAMSI, it has been hard over the past two weeks to believe that one of our youngest and most promising officers has been lost to us. Sisiliah Puleheloto or 'Sisi', as she was known to most of us, had been with RAMSI just under a year when she took her leave last month to travel to her mother's homeland, the Kingdom of Tonga, for the first time. None of us considered that this might be the last time we would see that wonderful Pacific smile or hear her cheerfully agree to take on yet another task.

In the time Sisi had been with us, she had managed to make an enormous contribution that belied her 23 years of age. This was both through her work in the Solomon Islands community as a member of the Participating Police Force (PPF) but also as a warm and outgoing member of the wider RAMSI family. I think it is safe to say that Sisi was instantly liked by all who came in contact with her, whether they were members of RAMSI or Solomon Islanders. I am aware that many of you here today, especially those involved in our Community Outreach program, knew her very well. Such was the impact of the news of Sisi's tragic disappearance, we decided to suspend all our outreach activities for a week to honour her memory and give everyone a chance to come to terms with the loss of such a vibrant young colleague and friend.

Today, our thoughts are also with our Tongan friends and their fellow countrymen, particularly the grieving families in Tonga. With the sinking of the Princess Ashika ferry, they have suffered the devastating loss of many loved ones.

Just a few months ago, we had chosen Sisi as the member from Niue to be profiled in a special booklet we were preparing on RAMSI's work here in Solomon Islands. In many ways, Sisiliah epitomised what RAMSI's motto *Helpem Fren* is all about – showing a big heart and working energetically with colleagues from across the region to help Solomon Islanders build a better, safer future. The first female police officer from Niue to represent her country in an international mission, Sisi, in her interview for the profile, described her work in the PPF's Community Relations team as being about providing the 'human face' of RAMSI. She said: "Having a meal, playing some games and sharing a laugh can be just as important as traditional policing activities."

I had seen this for myself when I'd come into contact with Sisi during her official outreach activities but also during some of the many out-of-work hours she put into the community here, including at our

Saturday afternoon Auskick clinics at the Honiara High School where Sisi was an enthusiastic participant.

The last time I personally saw Sisi was when she performed a traditional Niuean dance for RAMSI's 6th Anniversary Island Night here on these very lawns last month and later invited me up to dance with her alongside Prime Minister Sikua. I remember asking her if she could pass on any tips on dancing the Pacific way and she said I was doing just fine. That was Sisi: always positive, always reassuring.

I had earlier made a point of congratulating Sisi on her wide-ranging and energetic contribution to RAMSI and said I hoped she could extend her time with the Mission. Sadly the beautiful Sisi will not be returning to us but she will live on forever in the hearts of those who knew her.

We are rightly grieving Sisi's passing today. But I'm sure she would also want us to take up where she had left off and continue building on RAMSI's partnership with the people of Solomon Islands. We can draw strength today in knowing that we can carry Sisi's warm smile in our hearts wherever we go and whatever we do – I know I will.