

Full text: Helen Clark's apology to Samoa

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6 minutes to read

Rt Hon Helen Clark, Prime Minister

Address to state luncheon, Samoa

12.00 noon Monday 3 June 2002 (Samoa Time)

11.00 am Tuesday 4 June 2002 (New Zealand Time)

Ou te fa'a talofa atu, i le paia maualuga ole aso.

It is a pleasure to be in Samoa for this important fortieth anniversary of Samoan independence.

On behalf of all the international guests here today, thank you to the Head of State and to the government and people of Samoa for your warm welcome to us.

The links between New Zealand and Samoa go back a very long way. Samoans and Maori are distant relatives, with Maori travelling down to Aotearoa by waka from their ancestral Polynesian homeland many centuries ago.

European colonisation reached New Zealand just as it reached Samoa. New administrators from afar replaced the local rulers. In New Zealand it was the British, and in Samoa it was the Germans and later the New Zealanders who came. This week we celebrate the fact that forty years ago Samoa regained its independence, and became the first Pacific island nation to do so.

Samoa today is acknowledged as a leader in the South Pacific. It is a nation which New Zealand is proud to call a friend. We work with Samoa in the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and the Pacific Islands Forum. We support Samoa's development through our overseas aid programme. And many of our citizens are also the sons and daughters of Samoa.

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In my time as Prime Minister, I have seen my government and the Government of Samoa work together on a number of critical issues.

Only two weeks ago, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele was together with me and other leaders in East Timor to celebrate that new nation's independence. Samoa has sent a number of its police to help East Timor and their contribution has been greatly appreciated.

The Government of Samoa has also been a strong advocate for upholding the principles of the Pacific Islands Forum and of the Commonwealth; principles to which my government is also strongly committed.

Samoa's voice has also been heard on the need to manage the Pacific's fisheries; to provide sanctuaries for the great whales which roam our oceans; to act against the global warming which could have catastrophic effects for some of our neighbours; and to keep our region nuclear-free.

New Zealand is pleased to back Samoa's development with support particularly for the education and health systems. We work closely with Samoa to ensure that what we do meets Samoa's needs.

For many decades now, people from Samoa have come to settle in New Zealand. More than 115,000 people in our country identify as Samoans.

The early migrants came to work in our industries which were crying out for labour. They were hardworking and good citizens. They created communities and families in New Zealand. They contributed to our economy and laid the foundations for the vibrant Samoan community in New Zealand today.

Now we see their children and grandchildren in all walks of life in New Zealand.

Samoans are to be found in our Parliament, our public service, and in the professions, business, and the church. Only a few months ago we were proud to appoint New Zealand's first Samoan judge.

Samoans have also made an amazing contribution to our sporting life and to the arts and culture of New Zealand. Samoan painters, poets and writers, dancers, musicians, and fashion designers are helping create a new Pacific style in New Zealand.

Now, by supporting capacity building programmes in the Samoan and other Pacific communities in New Zealand, we are working to enable many more to participate at all levels of our social and economic life and to make their unique contribution to our country.

Today we come to celebrate Samoa and its people, its culture and heritage, and the beauty of its lands and its seas. We know how dear to Samoans their sacred links to the land, the sea, and their villages are.

We come to acknowledge the contribution of independent Samoa to the wider regional and international communities of which we are part. We come to say thank you to Samoa for the gift to New Zealand of its people and for the part they are playing in our society.

But before coming today I have also been troubled by some unfinished business. There are events in our past which have been little known in New Zealand, although they are well known in Samoa.

Those events relate to the inept and incompetent early administration of Samoa by New Zealand. In recent weeks as we have been preparing to come to Samoa, there has been a focus on those historic events, and the news has been a revelation to many New Zealanders.

That focus has come about because my government believes that reconciliation is important in building strong relationships. It is important to us to acknowledge tragic events which caused great pain and sorrow in Samoa.

In particular we acknowledge with regret the decision taken by the New Zealand authorities in 1918 to allow the ship Talune, carrying passengers with influenza, to dock in Apia. As the flu spread, some twenty two per cent of the Samoan population died. It is judged to be one of the worst epidemics recorded in the world, and was preventable.

There were also the shootings in Apia in December 1929 of non-violent protestors by New Zealand police. At least nine people died, including Tupua Tamasese Lealofioaana III, and fifty were injured.

The early colonial administration also banished Samoan leaders and stripped some of chiefly titles. These actions split families apart and many families lost their titles forever.

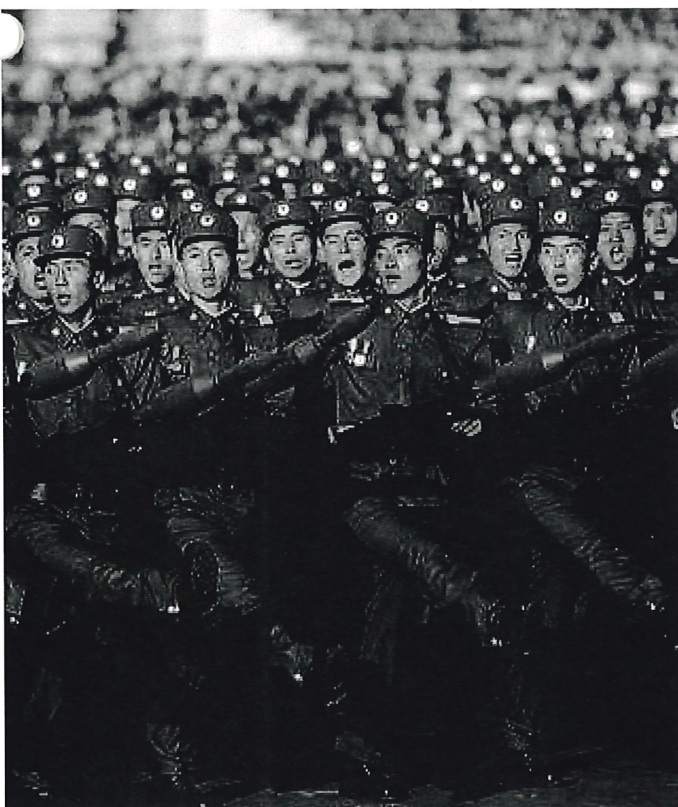
On behalf of the New Zealand Government, I wish to offer today a formal apology to the people of Samoa for the injustices arising from New Zealand's administration of Samoa in its earlier years, and to express sorrow and regret for those injustices.

It is our hope that this apology will enable us to build an even stronger relationship and friendship for the future on the basis of a firmer foundation. **New Zealand and Samoa are bound together by our geography, our history, our cultural and family links, and today by our trade and diplomacy. It is important that we are also bound by our mutual respect for each other.**

Today as a symbol of our relationship we present to Samoa a waka huia, used to hold precious taonga. The taonga we treasure today is our relationship with the people of Samoa. May it go from strength to strength.

Ia ola Samoa.

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