



The “Bula Bulletin”



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‘Blessed be... the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God...’
2 Corinthians 1: 3-4 (NRSV)

A Fijian Farewell: Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda

- Former President and Paramount Chief, Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda left office on 30th July 2009. At the age of 88 he was the world’s oldest head of state.
- It was Josefa Iloilovatu who appointed Frank Bainimarama Prime Minister in 2007, and he also overturned Fiji’s Constitution in 2009 after the courts challenged the legitimacy of the military coup.
- Among other life-time achievements he was also a lay preacher for many years and the Vice-President of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma in 1997 and 1998.
- He died on 6th February 2011, a little over a month after celebrating his 90th birthday.



The funeral cortege, Tuesday 15th February

Suva was brought to a virtual standstill as the funeral cortege temporarily halted activities in the central area of the city. Hundreds of people lined the streets to pay their last respects as the procession slowly made its way along the main thoroughfare, the Victoria Parade. It took an hour to reach Walu Bay, where the casket was transferred to a purpose-built hearse for the journey to Iloilovatu’s home village of Viseisei in Vuda, north-western Viti Levu.

Schoolchildren, scouts, city workers, residents and curious tourists waited patiently for up to two hours for the body of Josefa Iloilovatu to pass, many of them sitting in deference to Fijian tradition that dictates that commoners cannot stand in the presence of a high chief. As the procession passed, all were silent; the only sounds came from the Fiji Military Forces band.

At the front of the cortege were 300 soldiers. Marching immediately behind Iloilovatu’s casket was the military elite of Fiji, fronted by President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and Prime Minister Commodore Frank Bainimarama.

Preparations for the Chiefly funeral

It took 6 hours for the hearse to make the journey to Viseisei village, where the body of Josefa Iloilovatu was to rest for two nights. As custom dictates, the beating of the lali (wooden gong) in the village signified that the Vanua* of Vuda was in mourning. It was also reported that the entire village was

* **Vanua:** The Fijian term, vanua, has physical, social and cultural dimensions. It means more than just the land, with its animals, plant life and other objects on it. It also includes the social and cultural system – the people, their traditions and customs, beliefs and values. According to Ravuvu (1983) the vanua contains the actuality of one’s past and the potentiality of one’s future. It is an extension of the concept of the self.





decked out in black as a mark of respect, and the night prior to the funeral, no person or even animal was allowed to be found outside.

Josefa Iloilovatu's legacy: Faith and practice

While criticised by some, Iloilovatu was generally thought of as an honourable man caught up in a time of political upheaval. He was a man of faith, thrust into leadership and trying to do his best...

In 2005, Josefa Iloilovatu opened the National Day of Prayer. He asked Fijians to seek God's wisdom to find the way forward for the nation; he added, "There are prayers that help us last through the day and endure the night... there are prayers that yield our will to a will greater than our own."

He also called for personal and national reconciliation and forgiveness among Fiji's people, saying: "Whatever you sow you shall reap. If you sow the seeds of harmony, peace and goodwill you will reap the fruits thereof. If you sow the seeds of discord, hatred and injustice you cannot expect to reap good results."

And it was Josefa Iloilovatu who tried unsuccessfully to mediate between the military and the government of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase prior to the 2006 coup.

On news of Josefa Iloilovatu's death, UN Resident Coordinator, Knut Ostby, commented that "Fiji, and indeed the world, has lost an extraordinary leader whose commitment to the progress of his country and the betterment of all its citizens was total. We will miss Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda's diplomatic skills, vision and his humanity."

God bless
Julia

Prayers & reflections:

- Pray for those who are bereaved that they may feel comfort in their loss.
- Pray for the people of Fiji that they may receive just and fair leadership.
- Pray for those who face difficult decisions and situations in their workplaces.
- Reflect on how we might react when our beliefs and circumstances collide. Would we:
 - a) stand up against what we perceive are wrong-doings to the possible detriment of all?
 - b) decide to do the best we can at a personal level in order to maintain our own standards? or,
 - c) choose to turn a blind eye in the hope that the situation will self-rectify over time?

