

# SENDOFF SPEECH TO GRAND CHIEF SIR MICHAEL SOMARE

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Today we pay tribute to a great leader, an icon in the rich history of Papua New Guinea – Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare. Occasions like this are reserved only for people who have done so much outside of themselves. It is a time to recognize the messenger and the message he will leave behind for us and the next generation to keep and cherish.

My personal encounter with Sir Michael Somare dates way back to our younger days. Fate must have brought us together over barbecue and beer in Wewak. Little did we know that soon we would be working together and forge a path for this nation. I was then full of idealism and he was brimming with pragmatism. The combination of two different yet attuned minds resulted in greater efforts to trail blaze a path not many at that time dared to tread. Our minds were somehow shaped by the events of the tumultuous 60's when young men in America were sent to wage war in Vietnam, where personalities like Martin Luther King and the Kennedys were taking the world in storm with their ideals and advocacies, the impending domination of communism, the construction of Berlin Wall, Cuban Missile crisis, Civil Rights protests among others. Shouts of freedom from colonialism, racism, inequality, communism and capitalism reverberated in all corners of the world. I must say the stage was set, the curtain rises.

If there is anyone who would have known him up close as a person, I consider myself honoured and privileged. He is not perfect like all of us. There will always be critics and dissenters from his style of leadership but this I have to say, for over 49 years in public service that I have known him he gave his whole life to the people of Papua New Guinea. He was true to his commitment to the people. He pursued relentlessly the right to be free and pushed to unify a diverse country like Papua New Guinea. He did much and he did them faithfully. This I would say is loyal service at its best yet to be matched by and emulated by our current breed of politicians. He exercised his role as a true politician – guided by his faith and embracing his role as a vocation, he ventured

into the unknown responding to a call without fear. He was there always ready to listen and to implement results of choices and judgements. Unknown to him perhaps, his biggest contribution was in politics in the tradition the philosopher Aristotle and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas who believe that politics is the noblest of sciences because it is through politics that one can do the most good by passing good laws and politics in the natural order. He exercised and maximized his political strength systematically by not taking the shorter route of traditional politics where the needs of a select few typical of a Melanesian mind takes precedence over the common good. Instead of shrinking from the challenges of his time like the fear of independence and the injustices of colonialism he literally gave himself to pursue his vision of an inspiring future for Papua New Guinea. It was a mark of a true leader when he took the bold step of making things happen and taking ownership of major decisions unpopular as they might have been.

I owe him much. For a pragmatist to put his full trust and confidence in an ideologue like me is a rarity. Here is a man whose vision is achieved because he trusted everyone, he encouraged camaraderie and he collaborated without any reservation if only to achieve results. Upon my election in 1972, he made me Deputy and working Chairman of the Constitutional Planning Committee paving the way for everything that we citizens are enjoying now. Later he made me the Minister for Decentralization that again opened more doors of opportunities for governance and development in every province in Papua New Guinea. Our professional relationship was never near perfect. We had clashes and disagreements in many instances. There came even a point where I challenged and stood up against him. This, however, did not deter us from reconciling and collaborating to secure the best collective interests of Papua New Guinea. How can you turn against a man who all the way was a sincere and charismatic politician? His reputation to calm things down where there were incongruities and eventually convince everyone to move forward is an endearing trait that makes him a cut above the rest.

Si Michael Somare, the man of the people clearly understood that Parliament is the best venue where one can do the most good for the whole country; where his commitment to serve the people is

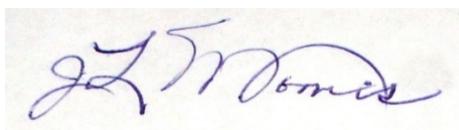
unparalleled; where collegiality or first among equals (primus inter pares) took precedence in his leadership style. All these things clearly indicated the quality of a true leader who never assumed that he was better than everybody else. At this juncture, may I on behalf of the people of Bougainville express our heartfelt gratitude to this man who together with Sir Paul Lapun stood up for the just right of the landowners against CRA and the Colonial Government when many leaders opted to look the other way and keep quiet. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare understood and supported the peoples; aspirations and grievance and rights not to mention that we were the first provincial government to be recognized under his vision of decentralization.

As the curtain falls, we give our applause and standing ovation. Thank you! May history be fair to you, acknowledge your contribution to this nation and the Pacific Region and put you in its annals which you rightfully deserve.

So long my dear friend! We who share your dream stand ready to forge a new human solidarity necessary for the transformation of our society so that your legacy of always imagining inspiring future will be realized.

God bless Papua New Guinea!

God bless you Sir Michael Somare!



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