

For Official Release
PR002-06182024
Office of the Governor
Utulei, American Samoa
June 18, 2024



The American Samoa Delegation concludes its FestPac Journey at the closing ceremony of the “World’s Largest Family Reunion.”



On Sunday, June 16, 2024 the *Panina* or Closing Ceremony of the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture took place at the Stan Sheriff Center - University of Hawaii. It was a final gathering where all participating island nations came together to bid each other farewell and celebrate a week and a half of heritage performances, informative and visual exhibitions, and strategic initiatives aimed at promoting creativity and innovation in the Pasifika community.

The closing ceremony included a National Roll Call, where islands had the opportunity to showcase their appreciation through short chants and rallies. The American Samoa delegates

sang “*Ua Faafetai, ua malie mata e vaai*” (literal translation: “We are thankful and satisfied with what we saw/see”), a song traditionally sung after gatherings to give thanks to the host.

Kalani Ka’anā’anā, Chair of the 13th FestPac Commission, welcomed the delegates and shared a quote from the previous FestPAC by Emile Kairua, which resonated with the sentiments he felt during the past 11 days of this year’s FestPAC journey: “Let us not be the generation that is so awestruck by our predecessors that we fail to add to the greatness of our line.” He further stated, “How does one add to the greatness of our line? We make our people’s interests our priority, we fight for them, we heal them.”

This was followed by a heartwarming formal address by Aaron J. Sala, PhD, FestPac Hawaii 2024 Festival Director. He said, “There is a part of me that is not yet in the room because the prolific nature of this activity is hard to bear..... More than one hundred thousand people engaged with the Festival. For all of you living here in the diaspora, this festival is for you. This opportunity is ours to give to you so that you might know that we see you.”

Dr. Sala made a powerful stance of the Festival’s true purpose, “The power of this festival is not what will happen tomorrow; the most important part of this festival is when the ten year old born to Palauan parents was able to visit his people and in twenty years, is getting a PhD in Ocean Science because of concerns about the oceans around Palau.” Dr. Sala closed with, “And how wonderful it is to be in the fold of our great oceans in a time that God has given us to celebrate each other, with each other... *Ou te faatulou atu ai i lo outou paia, Tulou, Tulou lava.*”

The transfer of the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture was a significant moment where the current host country passes the torch to the next host country of FestPAC. The honor was provided to Honorable Governor Josh Green, M.D. and Māpuana de Silva.

The chair of the Council of Pacific Arts and Culture, Emile Kairua, invited everyone in attendance and all Pasifika people around the world to start planning their journey for FestPAC 14 to be held in New Caledonia in 2028.

“We will return to our home islands to replenish, to reload and to return to FestPAC 14,” said Kairua, the Secretary for Cook Islands Ministry of Cultural Development. “Let us all make the next family reunion in 2028 the biggest and the best.”

The American Samoa Delegation honored Dr. Aaron J. Salā and the Host Country State of Hawaii with a carved canoe, symbolizing the continuous shared journey of the Pasifika people towards “Regenerating Oceania” and paying tribute to our ancestors. This canoe serves as a gift to future generations, who will all hold the *Foe Uli* of the canoe, symbolizing unity and progress for Pacific communities.

Director of the Samoan Language Commission, Peseta Tialuga Sunia Seloti, began with remarks recognizing Dr. Aaron J. Sala as the "Son of Samoa" before presenting the carved canoe as a token of appreciation. Peseta emphasized, "We are extremely proud of our son, Aaron Salā. This is our culture in action. In Samoa, family is everything... Samoans go out of their way to acknowledge their family; we are Aaron's family."

The delegation's carvers, Mr. Ioane Tauai and Mr. Fitulua Matamua began the canoe project in American Samoa and completed it on-site at the Bishop Museum in Hawaii.

As we close out the 13th FestPAC 2024, the Pacific Community (SPC) initiates preparations for the 14th FestPAC 2028, scheduled to take place in New Caledonia, a French Territory in the South Pacific.

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