

A LEGEND OF MEDICINE, SPORTS AND POLITICS

A formidable opponent on the rugby paddock, gentle and caring when attending to sick patients, a hard-working and committed community advocate, a strong politician and Speaker of the House - these are just some of the striking qualities best used to describe the late Doctor Apenisa Neiori Kurisaqila by those who worked alongside him or were close to him.

Probably one of the highlights of the late Dr Kurisaqila's bravery and dedication to the rule of law was when he bravely confronted a group of armed men who had stormed into parliament in 2000 to overthrow Government.

Dr Kurisaqila, who was the Speaker of the House ordered the rebels to leave the premises immediately and reminded them that their acts were illegal.

"He told the intruders they had no right to be in parliament with weapons. When the gun men tried to intimidate the members of parliament, he faced the rebels and told them to shoot him first if they dared to. Everyone knew him and no one dared to do anything. He later just walked out of parliament," said Litia, the daughter of the late Dr Kurisaqila.

One of Dr Kurisaqila's closest colleagues was former Prime Minister Major General Sitiveni Rabuka. According to the former

PM, the late Dr Kurisaqila was a person who worked with great passion and always with a sense of humility.

"Dr Kurisaqila was a very committed Cabinet Member in both the Interim Government of 1987 - 1992 and during his term as Speaker of the House from 1992 - 1999 during my tenure as Prime Minister," shared former PM Rabuka.

"He (Dr Kurisaqila) was responsible for the inclusion of Dentists to be addressed as Doctors and also the programme to allow staff nurses to continue training in medicine to become Medical Practitioners and eventually to be Medical Officers.

"As the Speaker of the House, he was very patient, but firm also in his ruling. He was very fair in his allocation of time and his attention to the Members of the Opposition, sometimes to the discomfort of Government Members.

"He was a very loyal Cabinet member in the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's government, his Interim Cabinet of 1987 - 1992, and became a very strong member of the SVT Party under my leadership. He stood for election in Nadroga knowing fully well that he was up against the strong following that the late Ratu Osea Gavidi commanded in the Province. He turned down my offer to stand in an SVT 'blue ribbon' constituency

because he believed he had the interests of the people and the province of Nadroga and wanted to continue to represent them in Parliament," said Mr Rabuka.

The former PM said the late Dr Kurisaqila taught him a great deal, lessons which he carries with him until today.

"Although he was much older than I was when we were together in Government and in Parliament - him as Speaker and I as Prime Minister, his professional respect for me as Prime Minister and as a co-member of Cabinet under Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara taught me a lesson in humility - a lesson I will never forget and one I will be forever grateful to him for," reminisced Mr Rabuka.

Dr Kurisaqila was a star athlete and featured for the Nadroga and national rugby team where he played at No.8. He was a member of the national rugby team which toured New Zealand in 1957. The forward was the toast of the Flying Fijians when he dived over for the winning try against the powerful Maori All Blacks in Dunedin.

Despite hanging up his rugby boots, he still devoted himself to sport through leadership and administration as the President of the Fiji Rugby Football Union. He served as a long-time member of the Fiji Rugby Union Board (Council in those years) and was

rightly accorded the honour of Life Membership by his peers. Dr Kurisaqila was a founding member of the Board of Trustees when the Constitution of FRU was redesigned. Mr Rabuka also served on the first Board of Trustees with Dr Kurisaqila.

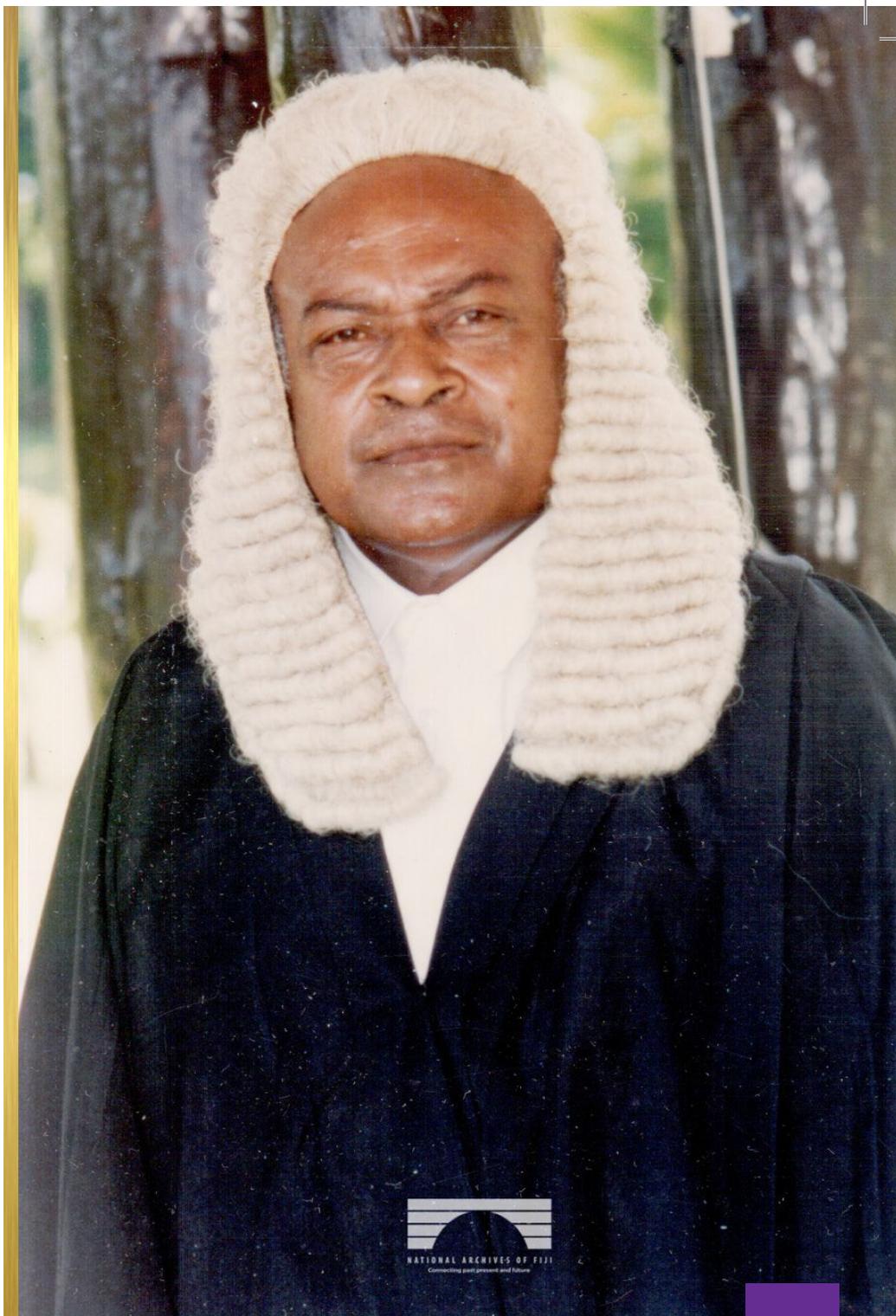
“All in all, the late Dr Apenisa Kurisaqila was a great man who conducted himself with much humility and was well respected by everyone,” said Mr Rabuka.

Dr Kurisaqila hailed from Rukurukulevu village, Cuvu, Sigatoka and had a twin sister, who passed away in her teens. He was married to his classmate from Lelean Memorial School Temalesi Buadromo Lagi Kurisaqila.

Mrs Kurisaqila, 81, reminisced through her clouded memories of school days. She said Dr Kurisaqila was the head boy of the school and a very dedicated student. He was a strong athlete, yet a very humble person.

“He was a very hardworking and caring person, who always went out of his way to help others. His family and traditional obligation were very dear to him” Mrs Kurisaqila related.

“**He told the intruders they had no right to be in parliament with weapons. When the gun men tried to intimidate the members of parliament, he faced the rebels and told them to shoot him first if they dared to. Everyone knew him and no one dared to do anything. He later just walked out of parliament.**”



Late Dr Apenisa Neiori Kurisaqila (1933-2001)

CLASS OF
1958

Central Medical School

Qualifications

- Graduated Central Medical School in 1958
- Diploma in Tropical Medicine from Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine - 1973
- Served as Minister for Health and Social Welfare 1982 - 1987 and as member of the Alliance Party.
- President of the Fiji Rugby Football Union
- Served as Minister for Health in the interim Government 1987 - 1992.
- Appointed Speaker of the House in June 1992 and held that position until the May 19 Coup, 2000.
- Chairman of the Parliamentary Appropriations Committee from 1992 to 2000.