

MAN WITH NATION AT HEART

A man of many qualities, Late Dr Jona Baravilala Senilagakali tried his expertise in many fields possible medicine, sports, military, academics, politics and diplomacy—all at which he has succeeded.

Dr Senilagakali's commitment and determination has bequeathed his name to become a legacy amongst the members of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) as he helped establish the RFMF Army Medical Scheme in 2001. This is an independent health program that meets and surpasses the medical needs of the servicemen and women of the RFMF.

Hailing from Waciwaci village, Lakeba in Lau, Dr Senilagakali studied at Lau Provincial High. He realised he wouldn't suffice his zest to achieve his dream on his island, hence moved to Queen Victoria School to complete the much desired education.

Living away from home, away from his mother's nurturings and father's protection at a boarding school, was a decision he had imprinted in his mind to achieve his desired results and to become an asset to his country.

Born in 1929, Dr Senilagakali's passion for care of people and service enticed him to study in becoming a doctor at the Central Medical School¹ and graduated in 1954.

He cherished his student days at CMS as most enriching and self-realizing, where he learnt that patient treatment was not the only agenda but a more holistic approach to patient care, from prevention, to treatment and welfare.

He served in numerous locations working in the health service post his graduation. With a bag of 10 years of general practice, life still needed to learn more to serve better. His quest for greater knowledge found him studying at colleges in Australia and India till 1968.

Finding himself where his heart belonged at, Dr Senilagakali returned to Fiji and served as a consultant surgeon at the Labasa Hospital, before becoming a lecturer at his Alma mater in 1970, a position he held for three years.

With his vast experience in medical profession, he was appointed as the Director of Medical Services where he served for four years, before taking the responsibility of Permanent Secretary for Health from 1978 to 1981.

His expertise, work and travel experience landed him the role of the President of the Fiji Medical Association from 1970 to 1974, and he was also a member of the disciplinary committee of the Fiji Law Society from 1998 to 2006.



A man of such caliber serving only one ministry seemed unjustifiable whereby his strength could be better utilised for the benefit for the whole nation. Hence, as part of his diplomatic career from 1981 to 1983, Dr Senilagakali served as a Counselor for the Fijian Embassy to Tokyo before becoming Consul General to Los Angeles, a position he held until 1985.

After a brief stint as a roving ambassador to Pacific Islands Forum countries, he became Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office in 1986. His final mission in the public service was to be the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, to which he was appointed in 1987.

Serving the nation as a civil servant came to a halt yet his desire to serve continued as a lay preacher in the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

He was also appointed the Chief Steward of the Yarawa Methodist Church, and served on the standing committee of the Methodist conference from 1989 to 2002.

A man born to serve his country and certainly he did with great pride and passion despite the age or situation as barrier. He also acted as the Prime Minister in 2006.

Dr Jona passed away in 2011 at the age of 81 but his legacy is and will be cherished by the military personnel in many years to come with the welfare scheme that he has established. Dr Jona is survived by his wife, Atelaite Vasu and five children.

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Footnote

¹Name changed to Fiji School of Medicine in 1961



**Late Dr Jona Baravilala
Senilagakali (1929-2011)**

**CLASS OF
1954**

Central Medical School

Qualifications

- 1954 - Graduated from Central Medical School.
- 1964 - Studied Orthopedic Surgery in Melbourne, Australia, and at the Vellore Christian Medical College Hospital in India
- 1968 - Consultant surgeon at Labasa Hospital
- 1970 - Lecturer at FSM
- 1970 to 1974 and 2005 - President of the Fiji Medical Association.
- 1974 - Director of Medical Services
- 1978 to 1981 - Permanent Secretary for Health.
- 1998 Member of the disciplinary committee of the Fiji Law Society
- 1981 - Consul for the Fijian Embassy to Tokyo
- 1984 - Consul General to Los Angeles
- 1986 - Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office
- 1987- Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs
- 1987 - Lay preacher in the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma
- 1989 - Chief Steward of the Yarawa Methodist Church
- 2006 - Prime minister