

'It's for the Tongan people', says media freedom award winner

Te Waha Nui reporters covered last weekend's Pacific Island Media Association conference at the Auckland University of Technology. Other stories are online at: artsweb.aut.ac.nz/Journalism/pima2004/

by Sudesh Kissun

Otauhu mechanic Alani Taione says he is humbled to win the Pacific Islands Media Association's annual media freedom award.

Taione, 38, who was charged with trying to enter Tonga with copies of the banned *Taimi 'o Tonga* newspaper, says he is looking to returning to the island kingdom with the newspaper.

The Tongan Supreme Court has thrown out constitutional changes and media laws that had banned the newspaper, published in Auckland, from entering the country.

The legal challenge against the Tongan Government was spearheaded by the newspaper, Taione and a group of democracy activists.

"I am proud to be given the Media Freedom Award," says Taione.

"I have not done all this for pay back but to help my family and people back in Tonga," he says.

"It is also pleasing to be recognised as role model for media freedom."

PIMA vice chairperson Lito

Vilisoni says Taione was chosen as the winner because of his successful crusade against the Tongan Government.

His case was recently highlighted by the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontières and many other international media freedom organisations.

Taione says the court decision delivered two weeks ago was a victory for media freedom in the region.

"The ruling means the right of freedom of speech and information is very much alive in Tonga," he says.

"We have got nothing out of the court case, it's a victory for the people of Tonga."

Taione says he intends to return to Tonga with copies of *Taimi 'o Tonga* as soon as he can afford to go.

"I want to go to Tonga straight away but I need to arrange finance," he says.

Taione has become a media star since taking on the Tongan authorities over media freedom.

He says winning the court case against the Tongan Government was his biggest achievement.

Taione has been living in Auckland since 1987.



PHOTO: JOSEPHINE KNOWLES

MEDIA FREEDOM AWARD: Winner Alani Taione with copies of *Taimi 'o Tonga* newspaper which can now be distributed in the Pacific kingdom.

New PIMA boss aims to lure more Pacific students to media studies

by Sudesh Kissun

Incoming Pacific Islands Media Association chairperson John Utanga wants more Pacific students to undertake journalism training.

Utanga says this will help improve coverage of Pacific issues in New Zealand media.

He says most students think only of television presenters when talking about job prospects in the media industry.

"There is a lot of hard work involved," he says.

"You have to perform well and have good writing skills and it is not just about having a pretty face."

PIMA's strategic plan was unveiled at the conference.

Utanga says it emphasises developing media as a viable career option for Pacific students.

He says PIMA will work towards raising awareness of available media job opportunities.

AUT has hosted the past four PIMA conferences and sponsors two annual Pacific media scholarships through the School of Communication Studies.

David Robie is the diversity and publications coordinator for the School of Communication Studies.

He agrees there is a need in the Pacific Island community to raise awareness about the diver-



PHOTO: SHARON MARRIS

NEW PIMA CHIEF: John Utanga of *Tangata Pasifika*.

sity of media jobs available.

Robie says currently AUT has 17 Pasifika students among about 500 students across the school's media programmes.

However, this year there is only one Pacific Islands student journalist in the final year compared to two last year.

Robie says there are several reasons for this poor representation of Pacific Islanders in media schools.

"Many Pasifika students don't see media as a serious career option, and not enough is known about the tremendous media possibilities in Pasifika secondary schools," he says.

Robie says this also impacts on reporting of Pacific issues in the media.

"I think the mainstream media have to wake up to the news market and information possibilities with the rapid browning of the nation — just as the niche Pasifika media have," he says.

"This should be an exciting challenge.

"Our media school at AUT is awake to the challenge and trying to do something about it.

"This is the third year that we have offered Pasifika media scholarships, for example.

"Now we need to cast our net

wider and target more Pasifika-oriented schools.

Robie says the mainstream media is going to be looking for more trained Pasifika journalists in future.

Alfred Schuster is AUT's senior adviser at the Office for Pasifika Advancement.

He says every tertiary institution has a responsibility to develop Pacific professionals.

Schuster says AUT's partnership with PIMA is one step in fulfilling the university's responsibility to developing media and communication studies.

Utanga says PIMA is grateful to AUT for their continued support over the past four years.

Utanga is a Cook Islander and a senior journalist with *Tagata Pasifika*, a Television New Zealand programme responsible for in-depth coverage of Pacific issues.

He takes over as chairperson from Tongan publisher Kalafi Moala.

Moala stepped down this year after three years as chief due to work commitments.

Utanga paid tribute to Moala's service saying the association was privileged to have his services for four years.

He says Moala needs time to concentrate on his newspaper *Taimi 'o Tonga*'s fight for media freedom in Tonga.

Moala was on a business trip overseas and did not attend the conference.

AUT keen to bolster ties with Pacific journalists

by Sudesh Kissun

The Auckland University of Technology may host the Pacific Island Media Association secretariat in a bid to strengthen their four-year partnership.

A discussion paper presented at the PIMA conference by Alfred Schuster of AUT's Pasifika Office suggests an office among other ideas to boost the partnership.

Schuster says the proposal stems from similar arrangements at the University of South Pacific in Fiji where regional organisations are hosted at the university.

"The concept in AUT's case would see an opportunity for a professional organisation like PIMA work alongside AUT's School of Communication Studies," he says.

"AUT will benefit from short-term courses, professional workshops, seminar series and the PIMA conference in having the secretariat set up here.

"For PIMA, the benefits would provide them with physical space to implement their own work as an advocate, professional organisation in Pacific media," he adds.

PIMA secretary Sandra Kailahi says AUT's support over the past four years has been appreciated.