



Australian High Commission
Vanuatu

Wednesday 4 March 2020

Media Release

The Australian High Commission recognises three outstanding women

The winners of the 2020 Australian High Commission International Women's Day awards were announced on Wednesday 4 March at an event hosted by the Australian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Sarah de Zoeten.

Over 150 people attended the event to celebrate the outstanding achievements of this year's winners.



This year's winners of the Australian High Commission's International Women's Day Awards, Kelma Naupa Ishmael, Myriam Malao and Marilyn Tahi with First Lady, Mrs Estelle Tallis, caretaker Foreign Minister, Hon Ralph Regenvanu, Australian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Sarah de Zoeten, Director General of Ministry of Justice and Community Services, Mrs Dorosday Kenneth-Watson, Former Head of State His Excellency Kalkot Mataskelekele, Ms Vola Mataskelekele and Ms Relvie Poilapa representing Family Lynch.



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Each year, to celebrate International Women's Day in Vanuatu, the Australian Government presents the Andy Lynch and Hanson Mataskelekele Awards to two Ni-Vanuatu women to recognise their contributions to women's leadership and the community sector. This year, an additional special award – the 40th Anniversary Gender Equality Advocate Award - was also presented to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Australia-Vanuatu bilateral relations.

Kelma Naupa Ishmael was awarded the 2020 Hanson Mataskelekele – Women in Leadership Award for her life-long commitment to community leadership. Kelma played a role in Vanuatu's road to independence serving as the secretary to the New Hebrides Cultural Association. More recently, Kelma has spearheaded the Erromango Cultural Association's work to revive and promote the island's culture and language.

Myriam Malao was awarded the 2020 Andy Lynch – Excellence in Community Award for her outstanding work within her community. Myriam is well-known in Port Vila for her many community activities including founding the Market Restaurant Association to promote opportunities for her fellow market vendors. Myriam was also instrumental in the campaign to ban single use plastics and is a co-founder of environmental organisation, *Green Wave Vanuatu*.

The special 40th Anniversary Gender Equality Advocate Award was awarded to Marilyn Tahi for her lifetime of work to promote women's rights in Vanuatu. Marilyn was elected the first female municipal councillor in 1975. Since then Marilyn has been a tireless advocate for the elimination of violence against women and girls through her work establishing and leading the Vanuatu Women's Centre.

"I congratulate all of the award winners today. You should all be proud of your achievements because we are all tremendously proud of you" said the Australian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Sarah de Zoeten.

The awards are funded by the Australian Government and are a joint initiative of the Lynch and Mataskelekele families and the Australian High Commission. Mrs Andy Lynch was a strong advocate for equality and particularly for people living with disability. Mrs Hanson Mataskelekele was a teacher and former first lady who advanced women's rights and women's leadership.

International Women's Day is celebrated around the world on 8 March to recognise the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

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