



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Apia, 10 December 2025 – *Celebrating International Human Rights Day***

The Office of Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institution (Office), in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), has run a variety of activities in the lead up to International Human Rights Day, culminating with a full day of events at Tanoa Hotel on the Day itself.

Human Rights Day is celebrated every year to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948.

The international theme for this year's Human Rights Day was '*Human Rights - Our Everyday Essentials*'.

Thinking about human rights as 'everyday essentials', rather than as abstract concepts, recognises how human rights exist in our daily lives, in ways we may not always notice. Human rights are the essentials we rely on every day – from the food that we eat and the air we breathe, to the words we speak, the opportunities we pursue or the protections that keep us safe.

In the lead-up to Human Rights Day 2025, the Office and OHCHR ran an art and poetry competition for children, which asked entrants to creatively describe the rights they consider their 'everyday essentials'.

The Office and OHCHR also co-hosted two special editions of TV 5's Thursday night Trivia on 27 November and 4 December, which tested participant knowledge about international human rights.

The Office also ran a green drive to collect fresh fruit and vegetables for donation to Mapuifagalele Home of the Elderly. All staff members of the Office participated in delivery of the fresh produce on 8 December, followed by a cultural exchange between staff and residents and a lively siva.

The celebrations on Wednesday commenced with an open exhibition of entries received for the art and poetry competition, followed by a screening of the documentary *YUMI – The Whole World*, which showcases the journey of students from the Pacific who demanded legal accountability for climate change at the world's highest court. The audience was then

treated to a Q&A and reflection session hosted by Patrick O'Grady Walshe (OHCHR) and youth climate advocates Audrey Lee Hang and Luna-Rossa Lomitusi-Ape.

In the afternoon, an awards ceremony was held to give out 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> prizes to winners of the art and poetry competitions, Trivia, and to announce the winners of the Office's annual Human Rights Champion Awards.

Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Honorable Afamasaga Leone Mati opened the proceedings with an introduction to the theme of this year's International Human Rights Day, reiterating Parliamentary support for the promotion and protection of human rights (see attachments for Keynote Address)

Karla Hershey, UN Resident Coordinator for the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau, gave a moving and inspirational Keynote Address, reminding the audience that human rights form the foundation of daily life. Ms Hershey stressed the importance of Constitutional protection of human rights, an independent judiciary, a parliament that passes and enforces laws that protect human rights, and an independent National Human Rights Organisation to monitor, investigate and advise government on human rights issues. Ms Hershey also highlighted the essential role of a free press and civil society organisations in supporting human rights awareness and education (see attachments for Opening Remarks)

The Office was grateful for a video message of support received from the Government of Samoa, and delivered by Prime Minister, Honorable La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Fosi Schmidt. The message, which was posted on the Government's official communication channels on Wednesday evening, honoured International Human Rights Day and reminded us that human rights are not just legal obligations, but lived realities (Video Message linked here: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1961542791057427>)

The Office is pleased to announce its 2025 Human Rights Champions:

#### **Luna-Rossa Lomitusi-Ape – 2025 Young People's Human Rights Champion**

Luna was chosen as this year's Young People's Human Rights Champion in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of climate action and sustainable entrepreneurship.

#### **Goshen Trust – 2025 Community Human Rights Champion**

The Goshen Trust was selected for the Community Human Rights Champion Award in recognition of the organisation's unique contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of mental health and quality care. The award was accepted by Naomi Eshraghi, Chief Executive Officer, Goshen Trust on behalf of the organisation.

#### **Rudy Barley – 2025 Media and Creative Arts Human Rights Champion**

Rudy was awarded the Media and Creative Arts Human Rights Champion Award posthumously in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of press freedom and educational awareness. Rudy's mother, Margie Barley, accepted the award on his behalf.

**Women in Business Development Inc (WIBDI) - 2025 Business and Human Rights Champion**

WIBI was selected for this year's Business and Human Rights Champion in recognition of the organisation's outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of sustainable entrepreneurship and equal employment. Fumiaono Rosalia Me, WIBDI Culture & Protocols Adviser, accepted the award on behalf of WIBDI.

**Tiara Tuulua – 2025 Komesina o Sulufaiga Award**

Tiara was chosen as the 2025 Komesina o Sulufaiga Award recipient in recognition of her exceptional contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of quality care, maternal health, and the rights of the child.

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