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RAMSI Farewells PPF Officer Lost in Tonga Ferry Tragedy

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The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has bid a final farewell to the young Participating Police Force (PPF) officer, Sisiliah Puleheloto, lost in the recent ferry tragedy in Tonga.

Hundreds from the Mission and nearby Honiara communities attended a moving memorial service held in the mission chapel at RAMSI's headquarters last Thursday.

RAMSI Special Coordinator, Graeme Wilson, said the young police woman from Niue, who worked in the PPF's Community Relations Team, had made an enormous contribution to the Mission's work that belied her 23 years and would be deeply missed.

"In many ways, Sisiliah personified what RAMSI's motto Helpem Fren is all about: showing a big heart and working energetically with colleagues from across the region to help Solomon Islanders build a better, safer future."

Mr Wilson said the Mission's thoughts were also with present and past Tongan contingent members and their fellow countrymen and women, particularly the grieving families in Tonga who had suffered such devastating losses with the sinking of the Princess Ashika ferry on 5 August.

The Commander of the Participating Police Force (PPF), Wayne Buchhorn, said 'Sisi', as she was popularly known, was one of two officers who made up RAMSI's Niue contingent and the first female officer to represent her nation in an overseas mission.

"Sisi's dedication to her work, particularly her community relations work with RAMSI, earned her the respect of her RAMSI colleagues," Mr Buchhorn said.

"With her positive attitude and smiling face, Sisi also built strong working relationships with many community groups and non-government organisations and was a role model for many." "She will be missed by all, both in her own nation with its police force of 16 members, but also by the many friends she had made around the world in her short life," Mr Buchhorn said.

The service conducted by New Zealand military chaplain, Father Darren O'Callaghan, was attended by representatives of many of the local communities Sisi worked with during her nine

months in the Mission. Several of them spoke of her ready smile and great way with children.

“We need more officers like her who work easily with our communities and relate so well to our children,” one community leader told those gathered.

Senior members of RAMSI’s Pacific Islands Contingent, of which Sisi had been its youngest member, broke down when recalling how she had brought the contingent together, using her innocent ways to cajole them into doing what she wanted.

“She was a young girl with a big heart who loved to organise, especially to organise us!” said Fijian police officer, Sala Vakaturigani. “But God has promoted her to end her mission. Sisi has a new mission now.”

Ms Puleheloto had been on a month’s leave when she decided to travel to her mother’s homeland, the Kingdom of Tonga, for the first time. She had been expected to return to her work with RAMSI at the end of this month.

“Sadly, the beautiful Sisi will not be returning to us, but she will live on forever in the hearts of those who knew her,” Mr Wilson said.

Ms Puleheloto is the fifth active member of the Mission to die in the six years since RAMSI first deployed to the Solomon Islands in July 2003.

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