



OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

PUBLIC REPORT

ON THE RETURN FLIGHT OF AIR VANUATU FROM SAMOA ON 23 MARCH 2021

06 June 2022



REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

OMB21/0023/2021/01

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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Investigation is to determine:

- a) the reasons why an Air Vanuatu flight carrying Vanuatu students to study in Samoa on 23 March 2021 was refused disembarkation by the Samoan authority causing the aircraft to return to Vanuatu with the passengers; and
- b) whether the amount of funds spent on the flights was planned or appropriated for by the Vanuatu Government for that very purpose.

2. SCOPE

The scope of this Investigation is:

- a) firstly, to determine whether appropriate authorities in Vanuatu made proper arrangements with the destination country (Samoa) for the flight on 23 March 2021;
- b) secondly, given the COVID-19 scenario, whether COVID-19 protocol procedures were adhered to prior to the departure of the aircraft from Port Vila; and
- c) thirdly, whether the amount of funds spent was appropriated for.

3. ISSUES

The following issues arise in this matter:

1. whether proper arrangements were made between the Secretariat of the National Scholarship and Training Board (Scholarship Office), Air Vanuatu, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and Samoa prior to the NF988 flight departure on the 23rd of March 2021;
2. whether proper communications were made between Vanuatu local authorities mentioned in 1 above given the Covid-19 scenario; and
3. whether the funds expended were appropriated for.

4. BACKGROUND

1. On 24 March 2021, the *Daily Post* Newspaper published an article titled; “*Samoa Refuses Entry for Vanuatu Students.*” The local Newspaper reported that the Ministry of Health in Samoa refused to allow the students travelling on chartered Air Vanuatu flight NF988 to disembark because Air Vanuatu crew had failed to take COVID-19 tests before travelling.
2. On 25 March 2021, *Daily Post* Newspaper carried another article titled; “*Air Vanuatu got clearance to fly to Samoa: CEO Finau.*” The Chief Executive Officer of Air Vanuatu, Mr Atu Finau responded to

the article carried by the *Daily Post Newspaper* on 24 March 2021 that the airline had the clearance from the CEO of Samoa's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to fly the students to Samoa.

3. On 26 March 2021, *Samoa Observer Newspaper* published an article titled; *"Vanuatu students rejected at border"*. The article further stated that the students were denied entry due to the failure of the Air Vanuatu flight crew to meet Samoa's corona-virus health requirements.
4. The *Samoa Observer Newspaper* also reported that Dr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, the Samoan caretaker Prime Minister, said; *"[i]t's an action and message to be sent out to all the countries that we are in contact with and intend to fly to Samoa, to be vigilant... this is the reason why we are still spared [from the virus], by standing by our restrictions and enforcing them. So if one of them is a carrier of the virus, the students whom they came with may have been affected."*
5. After the Air Vanuatu flight returned to Port Vila, another flight was arranged on which the students were taken to Samoa on Saturday, 27 March 2021. This time the Air Vanuatu crew complied with the COVID-19 requirements of Samoa.
6. Due to the circulated media reports, the Ombudsman began his investigations to determine the veracity of the matter.

5. OUTLINE OF EVENTS

1. On April 9th 2021, the Ombudsman interviewed the Chairman of National Scholarship and Training Board (NSTB), Mr Collin Natonga. He said that this Air Vanuatu Chartered flight – NF988 was the last of the two flights organised by the Scholarships Office to transport Vanuatu students to Fiji and there-on onward to Samoa.
2. He said; *"Fes of all mifla long skolasip ofis hemia hemi last flight blong boardem ol last students afta long fes flight we hemi go long Fiji. Long fes flight [NF988] ia, skolasip ofis tru long ministry blong education mifla nao I fundem, hemi 1 chatered flight hemi flaem ol students blong Fiji we hemi go drop off long Fiji mo hemi pickimap few passengers blong Fiji oli jump wetem 35 or 36 students blong yumi long Samoa we chattered flight blong gavman I go blong drop off..."*
3. Mr Natonga said that he received first-hand information from the Principal Scholarships Officer, Mr John Kaltau, that the flight was on its way back from Samoa to Port Vila, and he began facilitating the arrangements for their quarantine. *"Be somehow, mi stap mi harem*

nomo oli email I kam oli talemaot long mi se plane blong ol students blong yu we blong go long Samoa inomo possible so oli sta flae I kam bak. So mi ting se hemi normal nomo be naia I gat ol issues blong COVID-19 hemi kam in so mi stat blong fascilitatem ol students blong mi blong oli kambak mo blong stap wea lo quarantine... from nomo I gat sam passenger blong Fiji I bin stap inside long plane, therefore COVID-19 protocol I apply long country blong yumi ... Therefore oli kam oli olwe go long quarantine long Ramada."

4. Mr Natonga said that in order to find the reasons for the returned flight, it would be helpful to speak to the airline and the relevant authorities concerned. He reiterated; *"Be blong ansarem stret se why nao oli kambak, hemi stap between airline mo foreign affairs blong olgeta nao kivim stret ansa long bihaf blong mifla everiwan.... be ino bisnis blong mi blong mi ansarem, they are airline staff, they are not my students. That's why mi se I proper blong ol authority I kam in long ples ia."*
5. On 09 April 2021, the Ombudsman spoke with Mr Greg Wilson, Chief Commercial Officer, Mr Raymond Haoul, Acting Airport Manager and Mrs. Jocelyn Doro, Operations Control Centre of the Air Vanuatu Office. Mr Wilson explained that; *"wanem I happen, olsem yumi save, oli kasem long we ol authority blong Samoa oli no allowem ol students blong disembark. Reasons blong olgeta we oli kivim long mifla, oli talem long mifla se ol flight crew, ol flight crews and engineers. From mifla I gat tu pilot, 1 engineer and 5 cabin crew. Oli talem se I gat 1 requirement we ol crew blong mifla oli must be tested. So because of oli no tested, therefore the students cannot leave the aircraft. Mifla I explain long olgeta se, ol students ia everybody oli tested, okey crew blong mifla oli no bin tested, be mifla I kamaot long 1 COVID free country. Toktok we oli kivim long mifla se ol students ia oli mix wetem ol cabin crew blong mifla, ol students ia naia oli become contaminated.... So reason ia nao I mekem se aircraft had to turn around and kambak with the students."*
6. In order for Air Vanuatu to fly to another country given the COVID-19 scenario, an application has to be made to the relevant authorities for an approval to enter that particular country. Mr Wilson said; *"Now, normal process blong mifla taem mifla I apply long any country, mifla I nid blong karem apruvol from yumi stap long taem blong COVID, I semak naia taem mifla I wantem go long NZ or Ausie, mifla I mas apply I go tru long Civil aviation then civil aviation I tekem application blong mifla I go long COVID comiti we I comprise NDMO & civil aviation olgeta I apruvum. So hemi sem samting wetem Samoa. Raymond wetem team blong hem olgeta nao I lukaotem ol applications blong regulatory long entry premises blong mifla."*
7. Mr Raymond Haoul, Acting Airport Manager explained that; *"Mi bin start application blong Samoa 2 weeks bifo plane I go. Umi bin mekem fes flaet finis I go be requirement blong COVID test blong ol crew blong yumi I no gat yumi go nomo be oli acceptem yumi"*

nogat any issue. Hemia flight we I go karem ol students blong yumi I kambak, be taem yumi go ia nao oli holemtaet. Taem mi sta mekem 1 regulatory application ia, mi copy CEO blong PM's ofis, CEO blong health wetem CEO blong local transport, everi 1 ia oli gat copy be ino gat wan I advisem mi se ol requirement ia mifla mas karem se ol crew oli mas testem olgeta fastaem bifo oli go, be hemia ino gat nomo. Afta we flight i sta long graon long we nao issue ia i jes kamaot be spos oli bin sta advisem yumi in advance, bae ol crew blong yumi oli test bifo oli go."

8. The Ombudsman obtained copies of email records between Mr Haoul and Ms Peseta Naoumea Simi, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, Government of Samoa. Apparently, Mr Haoul informed Ms Peseta only on 18 March 2021 that Air Vanuatu was planning to perform a charter flight to Apia via Nadi on Tuesday 23 March 2021. The email stated

*"On Thu, Mar 18, 2021 at 1:48 PM Raymond Haoul rhaoul@airvanuatu.vu wrote:
Talofa Mrs Peseta*

We are planning to perform a Charter flight from Port Vila to Apia via Nadi on Tuesday 23th March 2021.

The purpose of flight : USP STUDENT CHARTER

➤ Aircraft ownership and/or Operator (Air Vanuatu)

➤ Aircraft type (737-800)

A/C Registration (YJ-AV8)

➤ Flight classification (charter)

Maximum Take Off Weight (77000KGS)

➤ Flight itinerary

TUE 23 MAR NF988 VLI-NAN 0800-1045 Charter Flight

TUE 23 MAR NF988 NAN-APW 1145-1550 Charter Flight

TUE 23 MAR NF989 APW-VLI 1650-1715 Positioning Flight

- SAN Schedule (attached)

- AOC (attached)

- Air Worthiness (attached)

- Certificate Of Registration (attached)

- Insurance (attached)

- YJ-AV8 Noise Certificate (attached)

Passenger list and Gendec will forward to you shortly

Kind regards,

Raymond Haoul

Acting Airport Manager

Air Vanuatu (Operations) Ltd | Port Vila | Vanuatu

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9. On 18th March 2021 (same day) a response was sent by Ms Peseta stating that the "requests requires Cabinet approval which we will

process as soon as possible and will appreciate passenger list for our planning purposes.”

10. On 19 March 2021, Mr Haoul emailed over the passenger list to Ms Peseta. Mr Jeffery Hunter, (Occupation and title not mentioned in documents supplied) only acknowledged a response on 22 March 2021 after Mr Haoul had followed up also via email asking for phone numbers and COVID-19 committee member's names and email addresses in Samoa. These information's were provided by Mr Hunter via email.
11. On 22 March 2021, an approval email was received from Ms Peseta stating that “ *please be advised that clearance has been given for the Vanuatu students charter expected to arrive in Samoa tomorrow March 23rd. Belinda, please issue diplomatic clearance to boarder authorities.*”
12. Mr Wilson further explained; “*so taem hemi (Raymond Haoul) kam bak blong talem se he's not getting any response, flight happened on a Tuesday, Thursday or Friday mi contactem olgeta long Foreign Affairs (Vanuatu) blong askem olgeta se yufla save help in any way?, Long taem ia nao oli explenem long mifla se no bae olgeta i putum 1 application from Vanuatu foreign affairs I go long Samoan foreign affairs and mi no bin andastanem hemia be mi ting se hemi tru a diplomatic note. So that diplomatic note will cover our application. So Monday, it was by email that mifla I karem apruvol. 1 line apruvol. Usually long experience blong mifa se bae mifla I go long Australia for example, everi flight blong mifla we bae oli go, oli kambak bae oli ripitim same samting, be oli kivim ol requirments I kam long mifla, blong go long Fiji I semak, bae oli talem long mifla, even though mifla I operate last year this year, oli talem same samting. From mifla I no save ol requirments unless yu talem long mifla to comply we will comply and make sure we always in compliance. 1 line response from Samoan authorities through to foreign affairs in Vanuatu which is then passed on to us. So mifla I mekem assumption se okay apruval I kam, flight apruvol is all okey, we are okay to operate. It was not until after the flight we oli jes sta sendem email I kam long mifla blong talem se hemia nao ol requirments. And the requirements they introduced was January.*”
13. Mr Haoul reiterated that; “*ol requirments ia olgeta i sendem i go nomo long foreign affairs be airline nogat. Foreign affairs long Samoa i sendem i kam long foreign affairs blong yumi be ino kam long Air Vanuatu.*”
14. The Ombudsman obtained a copy of an email dated 24 March 2021, sent from Mr Henry Taiki to recipients including Mr Wilson. Attached to the email was the Samoan Ministry of Health Special Travel Advice to travellers entering Samoa (January 11, 2021), and Samoan Ministry of Health Medical Clearance Health Documentation Check-in Form MoH 001/20, which all travellers entering Samoa must take note of and complete before boarding the aircraft. Apparently, this email and

documentation reached Air Vanuatu after the flight NF988 returned from Samoa.

15. Mr Wilson confirmed that for the second flight that Air Vanuatu operated to Samoa on 27th March 2021, the COVID-19 protocol requirements were adhered to. *"So taem mifla I operetm next flight blong olgeta long [Saturday 27 March 2021], we had to get the pilot tested, cabin crew tested, [and] engineer tested."*
16. On 13 April 2021, the Ombudsman spoke with the Director of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr Yvon Basil, and Senior Protocol and Consular Officer, Ms Eslyn Kaltongga. Mr Basil confirmed that; *"long question about ol requirement, ol requirements oli bin submittem long January, everyone oli been inform long ol requirements ia, ol requirements ia oli bin change from time to time, because COVID inomo same mark. I kat some country we oli considered as High risk and yumi long time ia yumi nomo stap same mark and yumi long time ia yumi kat wan COVID case, so ol thing ia oli change."*
17. Mr Basil further explained that; *"ol arrangement we oli ko oli no bin done through foreign affairs, olketa blong scholarship oli bin ko straight long airline toktok wetem airline and toktok directly wetem ol airports wetem ol authority wetem Samoa on this flight, until long time wei long final week taem oli ko wei oli no bin karem any response taem oli kam long mifela long foreign affairs, so mifela I traem long last days before flight depart mifela itraem karem wan approval long Samoa hemi no easy ... even when Aircraft i stap long Samoa blong traem karem that approval blong oli save allowem ol students blong yumi blong oli disembark long aircraft."*
18. Mr Basil added that; *"follem normal time blong business taem ino kat COVID, Airlines I mekem every arrangement blong hem olbaot long airport mo ples we I wantem ko long hem be long taem blong COVID, oli needim special authorization for landing, and hemi foreign affairs nomo ikarem out from Government, Government hemi foreign affairs so yu no save ko long airline, oli must kam tru and mifela nao must seekim permission blong Government blong Samoa through long foreign affairs blong grantem permission blong aircraft (flight) I land from ol boarder I close istap. Long time olsem ia Government nomo I kivim authorization long foreign affairs."*
19. As to the cost of the second flight to Samoa, Mr Basil said that; *"long side blong cost hemi between ministry blong finance mo ministry blong Education mo air Vanuatu."* On behalf of Air Vanuatu, Mr Wilson said that; *"to help with the cost, mifla I putum cost I kam taon. This is how umi ranem charter, umi mas mitim ol cost blong hemia, hemia, hemia. So mifla I tokbaot se umi stripim I go taon cost ia hemi just blong pem fuel, landing,[mo] air traffic control charge."*

20. Documents obtained from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management indicate that the first flight conducted by Air Vanuatu on 23 March 2021 was for a chartered amount of VT12,995,725.
21. The second charter flight which Air Vanuatu operated on Saturday 27 March 2021 was for a quote of VT6,632,500.
22. In total, the Government of Vanuatu had spent VT19,628,225 of Public Funds.

6 DISCUSSIONS

1. The first issue that arise in this matter is whether proper arrangements were made between Scholarships Coordination and Training Unit Office, Air Vanuatu, Department of Foreign Affairs, and the destination country (Samoa) prior to flight NF988 leaving Port Vila on the 23rd of March 2021.
2. In the aftermath of the incident, a question that comes to the forefront to be asked and answered is - who has the original responsibility to arrange the trips for students awarded scholarships to get to their institutions.
3. Under the scheme set up under the Education Act No. 9 of 2014 (the Act), the Training and Scholarship Coordination Unit (the Unit) assist in managing the carrying out of the functions and implementation of the decisions of the National Scholarship and Training Board (s. 68 of the Act).
4. The logical conclusion to this is that the Unit assists the Board to make practical arrangements to get the awardees to their institutions, wherever that may be. This, in my view, is a core function of the Unit.
5. Due to COVID-19, other institutions like Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, as a matter of necessity, become part of the team to consult regularly to ensure smooth and professional standards are maintained to get the students to their destinations and at the same time ensure the safety of the receiving state and Vanuatu as well.
6. It is evident that COVID-19 protocols have changed the normal way of doing business generally and especially in this matter of operating flights abroad. Because of COVID-19, the borders of Samoa were still closed and in order to land an aircraft there, Government of Vanuatu through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would have to seek permission through a Note Verbal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Samoa. This did not happen for the first Air Vanuatu flight NF988 going via Nadi on 23 March 2021.

7. Mr Yvon Basil, Director of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation stated clearly that; *"taem ino kat COVID, Airlines I mekem every arrangement blong hem olbaot long airport mo ples we I wantem ko long hem be long taem blong COVID, oli needim special authorization for landing, and hemi foreign affairs nomo ikarem out from Government, ... so yu no save ko long airline, oli must kam tru and mifela nao must seekim permission blong Government blong Samoa through long foreign affairs blong grantem permission blong aircraft (flight) I land from ol boarder I close istap."*
8. Mr Basil further said that; *"ol arrangement we oli ko oli no bin done through foreign affairs, olketa blong scholarship oli bin ko straight long airline toktok wetem airline and toktok directly wetem ol airports wetem ol authority wetem Samoa on this flight."*
9. It is clear from the evidence of Mr Yvon Basil in paragraphs 7 and 8 above that during this COVID-19 situation, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation became the authority in Vanuatu responsible for making arrangements for flights to a foreign country like Samoa for permission to land our students then. With this new responsibility, it is the duty of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to inform Air Vanuatu and the Scholarships Coordination Unit immediately of the new requirements. Unfortunately, it failed in its duty to do so in good time and therefore occasioned the first flight to return with the students, an extra flight to be organized and extra costs incurred.
10. As evident from Mr Haoul's email to Ms Peseta on 18 March 2021, the Airline went straight ahead to contact Samoan Ministry of Foreign Affairs without the knowledge of the Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was only after no response was given that Mr Wilson sought assistance from the Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He said; *"so taem hemi (Raymond Haoul) kam bak blong talem se he's not getting any response, flight happened on a Tuesday, Thursday or Friday mi contactem olgeta long Foreign Affairs (Vanuatu) blong askem olgeta se yufla save help in any way?"*
11. Mr Haoul said that; *"Mi bin start application blong samoa 2 weeks bifo plane I go..."* The Ombudsman's investigation revealed that Mr Haoul only began to let the Samoan authorities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) know about the flight arrangements on 18 March 2021, four (4) days before the flight was to occur.
12. In addition, as seen by the email from Mr Taiki to other recipients including Mr Wilson, Air Vanuatu only became aware of the Samoan Ministry of Health Special Travel Advice for Travellers Entering Samoa (January 11, 2021) on 24 March 2021, after the flight NF988 returned from Samoa on 23rd March, 2021.

7. RESPONSES BY THOSE WITH FINDINGS AGAINST THEM

1. Before starting this enquiry, the Ombudsman notified all people or bodies complained of and gave them the right to reply. Also, a working paper was provided prior to preparation of this public report to give the individuals mentioned in this report another opportunity to respond.

2. Responses were received from the following:

- Mr John Kaltau – He queried whether the Ombudsman can also investigate the National COVID-19 Taskforce and its responsibilities regarding this matter. He questioned the Ombudsman's recommendation #2 in his working paper.

- Mr Yvon Basil (Director, Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation) and Ms Eslyn Kaltongga (Senior Protocol officer), they reiterated the role that Foreign Affairs play in facilitating the flights abroad during COVID-19 situations and also for the Samoa flight. Mr Basil said *"Scholarship Ofis o Scholarship Board, oli bin go stap negotiate flight ia directly wetem Air Vanuatu vnis and without informem mifala long Foreign Affairs. Nao normally taem we ..Air Vanuatu I fly igo long ol normal destinations blong hem, olsem ol main port of entries blong hem olsem Australia mo New Zealand, hemia olsem hemi garem flight agreement vnis long hemia so hemi gat network blong hem vnis istap so hemi stap go nomo I kam folem routine we hemi stap usum oltaem. Be taem ikam long ol kantri olsem Samoa mo Solomons, I nidim wan spesel authorization blong go land long ol kantries ia. And blong garem ol pipol igo long ol kantries ia that authorization can only be obtained through Foreign Affairs... So mifala ino save about flight ia until Air Vanuatu I go ino save obtainem authorization, and that's when they come back to us. So long case blong mifala long Foreign Affairs, ol exchange blong mifala hemi blong level blong diplomacy nomo, olsem Foregn Affairs to Foreign Affairs. We don't communicate with Health in Samoa. We don't do that. Mifala I go long Foreign Affairs ale Foreign Affairs emi communicate wetem Health mo evri department o internal consultations blong olgeta, sem mak wetem yumi long ples ia. Taem we wan flight emi kam, mifala I consult wetem Health ale mifala I report bak igo long Foreign Affairs (overseas) se this is the requirement on the ground. So we don't consult with Health. So taem we Foreign Affairs (Samoa) I sendem authorization long mifala se the flight is good to go, we take it as oli consultem olgeta, oli mekem evri samting ia.*

So hemia nao, olsem sam additional information blong yumi andastanem nomo wea ples we mifala I kam insaed long hem. So sipos we Scholarships (Ofis) I bin consultem mifala long first place we oli kamap wetem tingting blong mekem flight ia, bae yumi no go

we oli kamap wetem tingting blong mekem flight ia, bae yumi no go thru long evri samting we yumi stap go thru long hem tetei. But reason se oli bin traem thru long airline, ino wok aot ale oli kam long mifala long las minute. “

8. RESPONSE TO ISSUES

1. Firstly, whether proper arrangements were made between Scholarships Office, Air Vanuatu, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the destination country (Samoa) prior to the NF988 flight departure on the 23rd of March 2021.

The answer to the first issue is in the negative. No proper communications and arrangements were made in due time between Air Vanuatu, Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Scholarships Coordination Unit Office. It raised a question of whether there exists a proper communication channel between these relevant agencies of the Vanuatu Government during this COVID-19 era.

2. The second issue is whether proper communications were made between Vanuatu local authorities mentioned in 1 above given the COVID-19 scenario.

The answer is also in the negative. No communications were made swiftly to arrange for the flight NF988 on 23rd March 2021.

3. The third issue is whether the funds expended were appropriated for and spent properly.

The answer is partially in the positive and partially in the negative. Even though the funds might have been appropriated for, paying for the same flight route twice is an unplanned exercise. The Government of Vanuatu consequently spent VT6,632,500 more on the same purpose which could have been easily avoided.

9. FINDINGS

- Finding 1: The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, through its Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, -
- (a) failed to communicate to the Samoan Ministry of Health Special Travel Advice for Travellers Entering Samoa (January 11, 2021) to Air Vanuatu when they became aware of it;

(b) was negligent in its duty to inform Air Vanuatu and Scholarship Office in good time of the special requirements by Samoa as a consequence of COVID-19 Pandemic situation; and

(c) failure to inform the authorities in paragraph (b) above consequently resulted in:

- the Air Vanuatu Flight to Samoa on 23 March 2021 refused dis-embarkation of students and returning with them to Vanuatu;
- an extra flight being organized on 27 March 2021 to take the students again to Samoa in full compliance of the Samoan requirements under COVID-19 protocols; and
- unplanned costs incurred by the Government of Vanuatu.

Finding 2: The preparation by Air Vanuatu to fly the students to Samoa on 23rd March 2021 was too close to that date and allowed for errors or changes.

Finding 3: The National Scholarship and Training Board and the Scholarships Coordination Unit also failed in their duty under section 68 of the Act to ensure that the students' trip to Samoa was properly planned and coordinated and the students were transported to Samoa without any problems. During this COVID-19 Pandemic, the duty of the Board and the Unit is heightened further to ensure that the students' travels are arranged in good time and importantly to be able to make changes at the last moment to avoid unnecessary costs and other implications.

Finding 4: The consequence of the non-collaboration of the relevant Government agencies namely, the National Scholarships and Training Board, the Scholarships Coordination Unit, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and Air Vanuatu resulted in an unnecessary Government spending of VT6,632,500 a figure which could have been avoided.

Finding 5: Air Vanuatu, the Scholarship's Coordination Unit and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation all failed to take extra precaution due to COVID-19 to adhere to the COVID -19 protocols of Samoa.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

I make the following recommendations:

1. During this COVID-19 Pandemic era, relevant Government agencies (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, National Scholarship and Training Board, Scholarship Coordination Unit, and Air Vanuatu) must establish frequent dialogue to update each other on protocols and procedures of work and business in order to avoid further unwanted spending of public funds, public embarrassment, and diminish respect for the Government of Vanuatu.
2. The Public Service Commission should take appropriate disciplinary actions by reprimanding the heads of the Training and Scholarship Coordination Unit and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.
3. Air Vanuatu must liaise with Department of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the Training and Scholarship Coordination Unit and put in place immediately protocols to be followed during this COVID-19 Pandemic or any other such circumstances that may occur in the future.

Dated 06 June 2022.



Hamlison Bulu
OMBUDSMAN OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU