

Dr Kwa: A life of leadership and service

DR ERIC Kwa, PhD, was recently awarded a prestigious Alumni Award for Professional Excellence by the University of Wollongong (UOW) in Australia on October 10, 2024.

This recognition comes after 30 years of public service in the country.

But Dr Kwa's success is more than a collection of titles and awards, it is a life-changing testimony; raising the flag of PNG locally and internationally, and providing inspiration for the country's future generations.

Dr Kwa, is a respected leader, a top legal scholar, educator, change maker and an example of professional excellence. He comes from remote Mararamu village on Siassi Island, Morobe Province.

Born on May 10, 1968, Dr Kwa grew up surrounded by the island's stunning natural beauty and rich cultural traditions. However, as a young boy he also faced significant challenges, particularly due to limited access to basic government services such as schools and healthcare, law enforcement, and infrastructure.

Siassi Island is part of the Siassi Archipelago, located off the southeast coast of Umboi Island in Morobe Province. Historically, copra production played a vital role in the rural economy.

However, after PNG gained independence in 1975, the withdrawal of Lutheran missionaries led to a decline in copra production, further contributing to the island's socio-economic struggles.

The Island has about 27,000 people, and still lacks many basic governmental services. The main service provider on the Island is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG).

Due to the remote geographical location of the island, it takes about six to 12 hours to travel from the island to access basic services in Lae, the provincial capital. These early experiences shaped Dr Kwa's commitment not only to his heritage but also to the broader community that he would later dedicate his life to serving.

FAMILY'S PRIORITY

Dr Kwa is a proud husband to Dr Viola Kwa and a loving father to their seven children: Galki, Jedidiah, Rabam, Garai, Yvanna, Peter, and Kamgi. Guided by his Christian faith, he attributes his success to God, hard work, the support of his family, and a deep desire to serve his people and the country.

Raised by his elder siblings, Dr Kwa speaks proudly of his older brother, Rev Peter Katu, a former pastor of the ELCPNG who served as a father figure.

Rev Katu raised Dr Kwa, instilling values of discipline, Christian principles and faith.

"I deeply honour my older brother and my older siblings for their support. Because of their loyalty, love and support, I am where I am today," Dr Kwa said.

Dr Kwa exemplifies the essence of family bonding and loyalty. He places a high priority on his family, emphasising that families should never be taken for granted. According to his core principles, God must come

first, followed by family, and then the community. These values guide his life and actions.

JOURNEY OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Dr Kwa's passion for education and leadership began during his secondary school years. His love for learning motivated him to excel at Bugandi Provincial High School and Aiyura National High School (1982 to 1987). With a strong interest in law, he pursued his Bachelor of Law at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) from 1988 to 1991. He graduated with honours as one of the top students in the School of Law. In 1992, he completed his Certificate of Admission to the Bar at the Legal Training Institute (LTI).

However, Dr Kwa's pursuit of education did not stop there. He extended his educational boundary by becoming the first student to graduate with a Masters of Laws with honours in Environmental Law from University of Wollongong in Australia (1993-1994). He later went on to earn a PhD in Environmental Law from Auckland University, New Zealand, (2001-2005). He was the first Pacific Islander to graduate with a PhD in Environmental Law. He also made history by becoming the eight person in PNG to earn a PhD in Law and the first from Morobe Province - a remarkable milestone achievement in his academic journey.

Dr Kwa's career as an educator spanned more than two decades. He began his academic career as a tutor at UPNG's School of Law in 1995 and worked his way up to become an Associate Professor, one of the youngest professors at UPNG at that time. In 2000, he was appointed as the youngest Dean of the School of Law and Business Studies.

Dr Kwa has written 13 books, including the milestone Kwa's Legal Dictionary, the first of its kind in PNG and South Pacific region. His scholarly contributions also include research papers, book chapters, and conference presentations that have been presented and published locally and internationally.

LEADERSHIP FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Dr Kwa's career is a testament to his unwavering commitment as a public servant for over 30 years of service in law, justice, and administrative governance.

He currently serves as the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Attorney General (DJAG), a position he has held since 2018. Dr Kwa also served as the Attorney General of PNG from (2020 - 2022), marking a significant milestone in his career.

He was able to participate in government affairs in legal advising, playing a critical role in providing legal counsel to the government, driving legal reforms, and strengthening national institutions and security across the country.

In addition to his legal work, Dr Kwa currently serves as the Chancellor of the Lutheran University of PNG.

His continued support of the Lutheran Church led to his appointment by the ELCPNG Church Council in 2022. He holds key

leadership positions on several national boards, including the Parole Board and the Anti-Human Trafficking Committee. Dr Kwa is also the Chairman of the Immigration and Citizenship Authority Board of PNG, the National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Committee of PNG, the Law and Justice Sector and the Social, Law and Order Sector (SLOS) of PNG, among others.

Reflecting on these achievements, Dr Kwa credits not only his determination but his faith in God, which gives him the strength to pursue these achievements and take on these responsibilities.

CHAMPION FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

Dr Kwa's roots in his community remains central to his identity and his work. The island, home to 27,000 people, faces challenges in accessing essential government services like healthcare, education, and law enforcement. As Chairman of the Siassi Foundation, Dr Kwa has been a passionate advocate for improving the community's welfare by supporting education, preserving cultural traditions, and creating opportunities for sustainable development. In showing his concern for preserving cultural traditions, Dr Kwa has written a book titled "Kowai Wisdom" (of the Kowai people of Siassi Island) in 2020.

Additionally, he has taken on leadership role in addressing law and order issues on the island. He has continued to support his people in Mararamu and other neighbouring villages through financial support, providing resources for law-and-order maintenance, healthcare and transportation—sacrifices he has made as a community leader to improve his community's well-being.

In June 2006, Dr Kwa was anointed the Paramount Chief (Baimbuk) of the Kowai people, an honour that reflects his dedication to the services and welfare of his communities. He has recently been honoured to receive the title of Baimbuk—the Paramount Chief of seven communities on the Island. He is currently the only Siassi Islander holding this title on the island.

THIS ROLE COMES WITH GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES

Dr Kwa is also deeply involved in faith-based and humanitarian work.

He is a Life Member of Gideons International and actively supports Christian youth and professional organisations. He is also a Life Member of Christian Professionals Network and also serves as Patron of the Lutheran Student Congregation of the UPNG and continues to promote the values of faith and service in his leadership. He is also the legal adviser of the ELCPNG and was actively engaged in leadership roles as Chairman in many Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

In March 2015, Dr Kwa was awarded the Scholla Kakas Award by the Government of PNG for his outstanding services to women. He is a passionate advocate for addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence (SARV). Additionally, he is the



DR ERIC Kwa, PhD (right), receiving the Alumni Award of Professional Excellence by University of Wollongong Deputy Chancellor Nieves Murray (left), in Australia on Thursday October 10, 2024.

one of the founding Board member of Femili PNG, a non-government organisation that provides support and services to victims of GBV and other forms of violence in PNG. He currently serves as the Deputy Chairman of Femili PNG.

GLOBAL RECOGNITION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr Kwa's work has triggered recognition beyond PNG. He has delivered presentations at international conferences, consulted for global organisations such as the United Nations, the World Intellectual Property Organisation and provided expert advice on Constitutional and Environmental issues. His research focus is on pressing local and global issues such as Constitutional Law, Environmental Law, Gender Equality, Climate Change, and Legal Reform. He is one of the top experts in Constitution Law in PNG. Through his local and international research work, Dr Kwa has solidified his reputation as a critical thinker and a top legal scholar advancing the cause of justice, sustainability, and human rights on a global scale.

Based on his professional history, the UOW Alumni gave an award to Dr Kwa on October 10, 2024. From a total of 190,000 Alumni around the world, Dr Kwa was successfully recognised with the Professional Excellence Award. Dr Kwa acknowledges this occasion as one of the greatest-valuable milestone achievements of his career.

INSPIRATION TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

Throughout his career, Dr Kwa has been a strong advocate for commitment, patience and consistency. His journey serves as a reminder to the youth of PNG that true leadership is not about instant recognition; rather, it is about a steady commitment to one's responsibilities and welfare of others. He hopes that his life will be an inspiration for the younger generation to emulate.

Dr Kwa's life journey is a powerful testament to perseverance, educa-



DR ERIC Kwa, PhD, celebrates his milestone achievement with his loving wife Dr Viola Kwa. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

tion, and service. From his humble beginnings of being raised by his elder siblings, he has risen to become one of PNG's most influential leaders and intellectuals. His life's work serves as an inspiration, proving that with faith in God, determination, and a commitment to serving others, one can overcome adversity and create lasting change.

Dr Kwa continues to inspire people, especially young intellectuals in PNG and around the world to dream big, work hard, and make meaningful contributions to society. His testimony is not only in his accomplishments but in the many lives he has touched through his leadership and service.

The prestigious award he received internationally by UOW is not just an honour but a confirmation of his lifelong dedication to law and justice services, education, community service and exceptional success of his career development. The award recognition shows the profound impact Dr Kwa has had on the lives on PNG, from rural communities to national governance. He believes that his story can provide inspiration for future and young leaders of PNG. His story reminds us of the profound impact that faith, patience and desire to serve can have in transforming lives, communities and nations.