

**ABUSE IN CARE ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY
TULOOU – OUR PACIFIC VOICES: TATALA E PULONGA**

Under The Inquiries Act 2013

In the matter of The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions

Royal Commission: Judge Coral Shaw (Chair)
Ali'imuaamua Sandra Alofivae
Mr Paul Gibson
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Ms Julia Steenson

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Ms Rachael Schmidt-McCleave, Ms Julia White and Ms Alana Ruakere for the Crown
Mr Ray Tuala for the Ministry for Pacific Peoples
Mr Alex Winsley for the Bishops and Congregational Leaders of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand

Venue: Fale o Samoa
141 Bader Drive
Mangere
AUCKLAND

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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1 **[9.30 am]**

2 **CHAIR:** Good morning, everybody, welcome again and this is our final day and it's wonderful to
3 see -- I'm getting to know familiar faces, it's wonderful to see the same faces in the
4 audience, it's good to you see, welcome back.

5 Before we start, I'm going to invite Reverend Maua Sola from Samoa to conduct our
6 morning lotu, our morning karakia.

7 **REVEREND MAUA SOLA:** I le suafa paia o lo tatou ali'i o Iesu Keriso. Oute fa'atalofa atu i le
8 paia ma le mamalu o le aofia. I le paia o le Royal Commission, le komisi ma le tou vasega.
9 Ae tainane le paia o le malo o Niu Sila, o le na fa'avaeina lenei komisi. Le paia o Samoa
10 ma le fa'apotopotoga, outou paia ma outou mamalu, o le a taoto. Aua o paia ma le mamalu
11 mai le vavau e o'o i le fa'avavau. Ou te fa'atalofa atu foi i lo outou fitotonu lenei galuega
12 taua. O victims, po o latou afaina ona o sauaga ma tausiga le lelei sa faia ia te'i latou a'o
13 latou nonofo i totonu o maota e vaia e le malo. Fa'afetai mo le tou loto tetele ma le tou
14 loto toa. Ua mafai ai ona fa'ailoa mai o outou lagona. Ana leai outou, e le mafai e lenei
15 komisi, ma le malo e Niusila ona saili ni auala e amata ona fofu ai lenei mataupu. Faafetai.
16 Members of the Royal Commission, members of the Pacific community and to all the
17 participants, especially those who will share their experiences and their stories, greetings to
18 us all this morning in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are some members of the
19 parish from Māngere Pacific Island Presbyterian Church who are here with us this morning,
20 and they will help us to sing our first hymn. So at this time, I will ask us to stand as we are
21 led in the singing of a hymn by the Māngere PIC church. **[Samoan song]**

22 A verse from the Bible I'd like to offer to us this morning to help ground our
23 proceedings for this last day comes from Matthew 11:28. Jesus said, "Come to me all of
24 you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Ia outou o mai ia te au, o
25 outou uma o e tigaina ma mafatia i avega, o a'u foi e malolo ai outou. "Come to me all
26 who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." One of the challenges of inviting
27 people to come and share their experiences and stories about abuse is being able to
28 overcome the barriers to talk about it. No matter what ethnic community you come from,
29 that will always be a very challenging thing to do, to talk and to share your stories and
30 experiences of abuse. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to share our hurts, to share our
31 feelings and our experiences, even if those experiences are difficult and painful. The
32 process for healing takes time and that is different for everyone, but there has to be a
33 starting point, a point which marks the beginning of healing, reconciliation and hope for the
34 future.

1 Jesus said, "Come to me all who are tired of carrying heavy loads and I will give
2 you rest." Many from our Pacific Island communities have come to the Royal Commission
3 to tell their experiences and their stories and there are many more experiences and many
4 more stories yet to be told. But the bravery and the courage of those who have shared in
5 these last two weeks and in the months the Royal Commission has been operating, this may
6 well be the catalyst and the strength for those who still live silently with their pain and their
7 grief, to one day be able to talk.

8 Today marks the last day of the Pacific investigation hearing. May God's blessings
9 be upon you, the Commissioners and all the participants and those who will be sharing their
10 stories, as well as the talanoa panels. May this day continue to be a day of healing for you
11 all and may it be a day in which the lifting of the dark cloud, the tatala e pulonga, may this
12 continue to happen. God's blessings be upon us all.

13 Before I say our closing prayer for our devotion this morning, there is a second song
14 that they would like to sing. Fa'amolemole e lava ni faiupu se lua fa'amolemole.

15 We can remain sitting for this song. **[Samoan song]** Let us pray. **[Prayer]**

16 **CHAIR:** Thank you, Reverend, and thank you for the Samoan community from Māngere Church
17 who have blessed us with their wonderful singing.

18 Before we begin, I just note that we have a presence today from the Catholic Church
19 and I acknowledge their presence. Are you appearing as counsel or is there -- do you have
20 counsel here?

21 **MR WINSLEY:** Yes, Alex Winsley on behalf of the Bishops.

22 **CHAIR:** Yes, thank you. Just acknowledging your presence and those members of the Catholic
23 Church who are here today.

24 I think no more preliminary matters and time to hear from our important witness.

25 **MR POHIVA:** Good morning, Commissioners. Our first witness for today and our final survivor
26 witness for this hearing, Commissioners, is Mr Rūpene Amato, who is of Samoan and
27 Māori descent. He grew up in Wairoa, attended Catholic primary school and was sexually
28 abused by a Catholic priest. He talks about how -- what happened and also how this has
29 impacted him and overcoming those impacts, ma'am. He is from our rainbow community
30 and he also continues to advocate for male victims of sexual abuse up until today. Before
31 we begin, perhaps the affirmation can be taken now.

32 **RŪPENE PAUL AMATO**

33 **CHAIR:** Welcome, Rūpene, wearing many hats. Each of those hats is important to us. You
34 represent a number of important issues that we're looking at, so thank you for coming. Can

1 I just ask you to take the affirmation. Do you solemnly, sincerely, truly declare and affirm
2 that the evidence that you'll give today will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
3 truth?

4 A. I do.

5 **Q.** Thank you. I will leave you with Mr Pohiva.

6 A. Thank you.

7 **QUESTIONING BY MR POHIVA:** Thank you, Commissioners. Malo le soifua oute fa'atalofa
8 atu ia te oe Rupene. Thank you for your courage in coming forward and sharing your
9 experience today. I understand that you have provided a full statement to this Inquiry, the
10 Commissioners have read that, and for the benefit of everyone here today, and also those
11 who are listening in via the livestream, your statement will be made available following
12 your evidence later on today.

13 Can I start or begin by asking you to introduce yourself and share a bit about
14 yourself.

15 A. Yes, kia ora, talofa. My full name is Rūpene Paul Amato, I was born in 1972 in a little
16 town called Wairoa in Hawke's Bay. I lived there up until the 90s until I moved to
17 Hamilton where I currently reside.

18 **Q.** Just briefly, Rūpene, can you share with us the reasons why you are coming forward and
19 sharing your experience with us?

20 A. I'm coming forward, one, to speak my truth, and two, to speak for those who haven't had
21 the ability to speak and for those who have passed who haven't had a chance to speak.

22 **Q.** Thank you. I'm now going to be asking you questions about your family background. Can
23 you share with us a bit about your parents and growing up in Wairoa?

24 A. My mother is Māori, she hails from Te Aitangi a Māhaki and Ngāti Kahungunu. Our
25 hapū is Ngāti Mākorō. My mother is one of 14 siblings. Her brothers were all whāngai
26 out to other relatives so she was raised with her sisters. There were big families back in
27 those days, an uncle I recall was a family member of 16. She lived in Wairoa most of her
28 life, went away to study nursing and then moved back to Wairoa.

29 My father is full-blooded Samoan. He moved to New Zealand for a better life in the 1950s. His
30 father was the holder of the matai title, but he died in his 30s, so as a result, my father and
31 his siblings were raised by our granduncle and the granduncle took on the matai title and
32 that matai title is now in that family line.

33 **Q.** You mentioned that your mother went back to Wairoa. Where did she meet your dad?

34 A. When my mother was studying nursing, she did that in Wellington and that's where she met

1 my father. When she moved back to Wairoa, my father followed her, and not long after
2 that, they married. It was quite difficult for my dad at that time because Wairoa's such a
3 small community where it was predominantly Māori and Pākehā and there were no Pacific
4 Islanders in our community up until my father turned up. He wasn't fully accepted in my
5 mum's family at first because he was a Pacific Islander and he was bullied and made fun of
6 because he was a Pacific Islander, so my belief is he ended up conforming to the Māori
7 community.

8 Around about that time, the Dawn Raids happened as well, so he was given grief for being a
9 Pacific Islander and an overstayer, that gave them the ability to put their prejudice on him
10 at that time. However, when he married my mother, even though he was still given grief
11 about his Island nationality, he took on a Māori name. He's acknowledged by that Māori
12 name to this day. He gets mail under the Māori name, and because he'd been entrenched in
13 our community for so long, sometimes people don't actually realise that he is of Samoan
14 descent. That was a difficult time for him, being a Pacific Islander in such a small
15 community, and he was subjected to a lot of prejudice.

16 **Q.** And that was by the community that he was in?

17 **A.** Not only the community, but certainly my mum's family weren't helpful in that regard.

18 **Q.** Prior to being given a Māori name, he had a Samoan name?

19 **A.** Yes.

20 **Q.** How did that situation impact on you as children or you and your siblings?

21 **A.** Well, interestingly, at that time, my mum and her family were subjected to disciplinary
22 action if they spoke Te Reo Māori. Because my father was trying to conform to that
23 community as well, as kids we weren't taught Te Reo Māori and we weren't taught anything
24 in regards to our Samoan language or heritage. That impact is still with us today.

25 **Q.** So your evidence is your mother's Māori or Te Reo language wasn't passed on to you when
26 you were young?

27 **A.** No, and also because I'm a first generation of a New Zealand-born Samoan, it was almost
28 like being identified as Samoan was wrong and that we were a nation that was beneath
29 others. Also, growing up, we saw the grief that our father got for being Samoan, so we
30 never identified as being Samoan because we saw that with him when we were growing up.

31 Further in life, another Island family moved to Wairoa and we saw their children getting grief for
32 being Pacific Islanders. So it was easier for us to identify as being Māori, which we did.

33 **Q.** Just to clarify, that was you and your three brothers and two sisters?

34 **A.** Yes, I have three brothers, two older than me and two sisters who are older and a brother

- 1 that's younger. Our older brother was killed in a rugby tackle in the 90s.
- 2 **Q.** That was later on?
- 3 **A.** Yeah.
- 4 **Q.** You talk about being impacted by -- or your identity being impacted when you were
5 growing up. You also -- did you see any fa'asamoa practice or any Samoan language being
6 spoken at home growing up?
- 7 **A.** The only time I saw that was when dad would take phone calls from relatives either in
8 Wellington or Samoa, and that was pretty much the only time we heard him speak Samoan.
9 When he did speak Samoan, you could tell he loved speaking Samoan, his face would light
10 up, he was always happy and jovial on the phone, and it was quite good to see that he was
11 able to touch base with his upbringing and his culture. When he would finish the phone
12 calls, he would be happy for a little bit, and then you could see that he missed home, he
13 missed his culture, he missed his family.
- 14 **Q.** How did you feel about that growing up?
- 15 **A.** Growing up, you kind of didn't really understand it at all. It was more of a -- you know, as
16 kids, you kind of brush it off and you just think, "Oh, another Islander speaking Island",
17 because that's how we conformed to the community as well.
- 18 **Q.** I understand that your -- currently, your link to the Samoan family is through your sister?
- 19 **A.** Yes, so at one stage, my sister, when she was 16, was sent over to America to live with my
20 father's relatives. So she learned more about fa'asamoa and she also learned more about our
21 genealogy and our practices, and because she lived with our Samoan relatives over in
22 America, she had more insight, and so now that she's returned to New Zealand back in
23 Wairoa, she guides us around that culture.
- 24 **Q.** Thank you, Rūpene. Just going back to growing up, I understand there was a lot of alcohol
25 and domestic violence at home?
- 26 **A.** [Nods].
- 27 **Q.** And financially, what was it like?
- 28 **A.** Financially, dad fortunately got a job working in the railways, and at the time, we were a
29 poor family and our relatives were poor as well. Dad would continuously send money over
30 to the Islands to our family. At that time, we couldn't understand why, because we suffered
31 as a result. There was always the power that was disconnected, the phone was
32 disconnected, and fortunately for me, I was in a big family so we learned to live off the
33 land. We would go to our grandparents' where we planted vegetables and then we would
34 harvest that and divide that among our families.

- 1 **Q.** Because it was a rural area and you were able to do that?
- 2 **A.** Yeah.
- 3 **Q.** I'm now going to ask you about school, and the Catholic Church growing up. You also had
4 a connection to the Rātana Church, is that right?
- 5 **A.** Yes, my mother's -- my grandfather on my mother's side was a bishop in the Rātana
6 Church, and so we would attend that church, which was every first Sunday of the month.
7 That was the only time I would see our family speaking Te Reo Māori. My grandmother,
8 who was a firecracker of a woman, she was quite loud, feisty -- small and demure, but, you
9 know, she could whip you with her language. But when she spoke at church, her
10 demeanour would change, her voice would -- and tone would be more quieter than what she
11 usually was, and it was almost like she was ashamed or was very tentative around speaking
12 Te Reo Māori. That happened across the board with a lot of my relatives. Whenever they
13 spoke Māori, it was more of a quieter tone.
- 14 **Q.** What was the connection with the Catholic Church?
- 15 **A.** So my father was -- sorry, is Catholic and we originally went to a primary school where it
16 was predominantly Māori, and then in the 80s, because dad was connected to the Catholic
17 Church, we inevitably moved over from that school to the Catholic school in Wairoa, and
18 that's how we started our education through that school.
- 19 **Q.** When you moved from -- when you moved to the Catholic school, was that all of your
20 family or just part?
- 21 **A.** All of us, except for our older brother, who was on his last year of intermediate. He refused
22 to go to that school.
- 23 **Q.** What was the -- what was it like in terms of the ethnicity of students at that school, the new
24 school?
- 25 **A.** It was a big difference. Most of the Pākehā community went to the Catholic school. It was
26 actually considered a flash school and if there were Pākehās at that school, that means it's
27 got to have been good education. So, in a way, we were quite blessed that we were able to
28 be in this school where it was deemed to have a higher education. But the cultural shift was
29 different from being in a school where it's predominantly Māori to being in a school where
30 it's predominantly Pākehā.
- 31 **Q.** In what way?
- 32 **A.** It was -- I guess for me it was a cultural shift because we were raised Māori, and to be in a
33 school where our neighbours were at that school, our family were at that school, and then
34 being shifted into a predominantly Pākehā school where the Bible was part of that learning,

- 1 that culture shift was quite different.
- 2 **Q.** I understand that there were different churches or Catholic churches at the time, there was
3 one at your school?
- 4 **A.** Yes, there was one attached to our school, and there was another one just up the road from
5 where I was raised. The one that was up the road from where I was raised was where
6 predominantly Māori parishioners would attend. I believe it was because there was a marae
7 attached to that particular church, so there was more of a Māori essence around that church
8 because of the parishioners.
- 9 **Q.** What church was that called, the one with the Māori presence?
- 10 **A.** The Saint Theresa's.
- 11 **Q.** And the one at your school was St Peter's?
- 12 **A.** Yes.
- 13 **Q.** Just to clarify, St Joseph's was your school?
- 14 **A.** Yes.
- 15 **Q.** You talked in your statement about a priest who was good in your eyes. Can you tell us
16 about him?
- 17 **A.** There was a priest at our school named Father Snowden. He was amazing. He had a lot of
18 time for us kids, he was kind, looked after us. If we were good, we'd get lollies. He was
19 part of the community. Anything the community wanted, he was there. He was -- he was
20 an amazing priest and we all trusted him, we all got on well with him, you could have a
21 joke with him, he was awesome.
- 22 **Q.** I understand that that was your perception of what priests were like at that time?
- 23 **A.** Yes.
- 24 **Q.** Rūpene, I'm going to ask you about the abuse that happened, and as you know, your
25 statement is available and the Commissioners have read the details of what happened to
26 you. For the benefit of everyone here, that will be made available later on. Can you tell us
27 about that, if you like, bearing in mind that you are free to talk about it as much or as little
28 as you want to.
- 29 **A.** Okay. So when Father Snowden passed, another priest came into the church, and at the
30 time sex education was coming out as part of the curriculum for education. We were given
31 a yellow piece of paper the size of a Post-it, and told by the teacher, which was usually a
32 nun, my teacher at the time was a nun, she would give me the yellow piece of paper and ask
33 me to take it to the new priest, which I would. Once I gave the yellow paper to that priest,
34 he would say, "While you're here, come inside, let's have a talk." Father Snowden would

1 do that with us as well, it was no problem, we'd leave with some apples and it was usually
2 to help him stack wood, so thought nothing about it. And then once we were inside, once I
3 was inside the house, he would talk to us about -- talk to me about sex. Sorry, I refer to
4 "us" because there was a group, so if I refer to "us", that's why I say "us".

5 When entering the room, he would start talking about sex and then ask for me to remove my shorts,
6 which I did, and then he would fondle and grope me through my underwear. That felt
7 wrong, but when you're a kid and you -- it's just a shock, you don't know what to do, you're
8 stuck in this house, you believe that this is a leader, and so it was just devastating to
9 actually have that being done to me.

10 **Q.** I understand that you were at the time exploring your own sexuality?

11 **A.** Yeah, I mean when I was younger, I always knew that I was different. Growing up, then
12 you knew what the word was, you know, being gay. However, that at that time it wasn't
13 very Catholic, and so to have this man abuse me made me question, "Is this my path?"
14 Because I was -- I knew I was attracted to men, and here's a man abusing me. Is that what I
15 have to look forward to when I grow up? And I actually hated the idea of being gay.

16 **Q.** So that had quite a big impact on you?

17 **A.** Yeah, yeah, significant at that time.

18 **Q.** You talked earlier about "us", and just to clarify, during the times you were in with the --
19 your abuser, it was just you alone on those times, but you're referring to "us" as in you
20 found out later there was a group of you children that were abused as well, is that right?

21 **A.** Correct.

22 **Q.** I'll ask you about that later on, but I understand that the abuse also happened during
23 confessions?

24 **A.** Yes, so in confessions, you see them on the movies, you've got the priest in one room and
25 you're in another and there's a wall. At our church, that never existed, so when I was a kid,
26 you just walked into an open room and there were two chairs, one was where the priest sat
27 at and you sat on the other chair, and that was how confessions were run. And he would
28 always drop sexual innuendos to us while during confessions, and would want to fondle
29 you again at that time, and always insisted on getting a hug before we left confessions.

30 **Q.** According to your statement, the abuse happened during confessions happened a lot more
31 than the individual private abuse?

32 **A.** Yeah, because when we were asked to go in with that yellow piece of paper, that would
33 have only happened to us twice, but because we were continuously at church, confession
34 was something that we did quite regularly, and so my abuser had easy access to us, and

- 1 because it was in a confessional, the door was closed and people knew not to go in there.
- 2 **Q.** Just getting now to that time when you realised it wasn't only you, how did you come to
3 realise that?
- 4 **A.** One playtime, a group of us were sitting together and one of the girls had mentioned that
5 the priest had tried to grope her breasts and that she had hit his hand away. When she said
6 that to us, another kid said, "This is what the priest had done to me", then another one.
7 There would have been at least 12 of us sitting around and we all had experienced
8 something similar. Mine wasn't as bad as some of the others. And I think because we were
9 able to talk about it and realise that this was happening, it got to the point where we would
10 see other kids with this yellow piece of paper heading towards the priest's house and we
11 knew exactly what they were going in for. So we would give them grief, we even had a
12 nickname for the priest, we would often refer to him as the feeler. And so that was part of
13 us mocking children because we knew what was going to happen.
- 14 **Q.** When you realised that it was happening to other children, I understand you all agreed to
15 tell your parents?
- 16 **A.** Correct. So we had had enough by then. Like I said, when we saw other children go, when
17 they would return, we would say, "Ah, did the feeler have a go at you too", and they would
18 say, "Yes". And so we decided as kids that it was wrong, somebody needed to know, and
19 so we all agreed that we would tell our parents that night after school, we'd go back and tell
20 our parents. I chose not to tell my parents for fear of retribution, and also, you know, the
21 church is an institution where you think there's love and trust and faith, and so it would be
22 my word against the church. I also feared that I'd get a hiding for saying my truth, so I
23 chose to be quiet on that subject. I did however find out that other children had spoken to
24 their parents about the abuse, and subsequently they told their parents and some parents
25 went down to the school and complained about what happened, and then he was gone the
26 next day. We never saw him, we didn't know what happened -- it was just weird. He was
27 there one day, we saw him, and then we told -- our parents were told and then he was gone.
- 28 **Q.** So basically when the complaint was made by other parents, he, or your abuser, was no
29 longer seen by you?
- 30 **A.** Yeah, we never saw him again.
- 31 **Q.** Did the school or church talk to you about what happened to him?
- 32 **A.** No. We just knew that our parents had gone in and supported us. If it wasn't for them
33 going into the school and talking, I believe it would have been -- we would have been on
34 the rope for something worse. Looking back, it was like he was grooming us children,

1 weeding out the ones who were strong and preying on those who were weak. It was a poor
2 community so there were a lot of us children who were raised in poverty and the church
3 was a light for many families. And so we just -- I believe that if it wasn't for those parents
4 doing what they did, it would have been worse.

5 **Q.** And again, you're referring to other parents making the complaint?

6 **A.** Mmm-hmm.

7 **Q.** But you're not sure whether your parents knew about it because you certainly didn't tell
8 them yourself?

9 **A.** No. But because of the Inquiry, I've been speaking with my parents and that was a question
10 that I raised with them, and they hadn't been contacted either about anything, before or
11 after. It was quite weird, to be honest, it was almost like there was a fog of uncertainty that
12 fell on us as children and on the school, and there was no communication with us or support
13 or questions or any interviews. It was just left hanging. And that's part of the reason why
14 I'm here today too, is to clear the fog for my classmates and hopefully they can find peace.

15 **Q.** I understand you had a close friend or a girl you talk about, was -- is unable to speak to us.
16 She passed away for different reasons, and is that part of the reason why you are here
17 speaking for her?

18 **A.** Yeah. She was strong, she was the one that kind of led the way, and it's sad that -- it's good
19 that the Inquiry's happening, but it's sad it's taken so long. She would have been amazing.

20 **Q.** Take your time, Rūpene.

21 **A.** So I'm talking for her. She was strong for us, so I've got to be strong for her, and I hope my
22 story helps all those kids that I went to school with so that they know that our story's told
23 and that something needs to be done and that we learn from this and we protect our kids.
24 The faith is amazing, and through the faith, I found healing and forgiveness, and that's one
25 of the things that I've learned in being strong, and certainly I hope that my story helps
26 somebody else so that they know that they're not the only ones, and that there is support for
27 people.

28 **Q.** We certainly thank you for your courage in coming forward today, Rūpene. When you're
29 ready, can you tell us about sharing your experiences from your primary school days
30 through to high school? I understand that that helped you a lot?

31 **A.** Yeah, I think -- I was very fortunate because there were a group of us that were able to
32 share our stories and that was a good way for us to heal. Even when I left the Catholic
33 school and went to college, I was in school with some others who had faced the same thing,
34 so we would talk about it, we would often reflect about what happened, and that was quite

1 healing for us as well. So even through -- going through college, it was good to have those
2 people around.

3 **Q.** Reflecting back on it, I think you say in your statement that it was similar to like group
4 therapy sessions?

5 **A.** Mmm.

6 **Q.** Is that right?

7 **A.** Yeah. I would absolutely agree because it was something that we could all relate to,
8 something we all went through, and even though the school and the church neglected to put
9 support around us, we found our own support by sharing our stories with each other, and I
10 believe that that was actually quite helpful for me.

11 **Q.** Moving on to college, you gravitated towards teams or --

12 **A.** Yeah, I felt more safe with teams, so -- I was always quite active and I felt that sports,
13 growing up, was quite important for me and that also helps with the healing. So I was
14 involved -- actually, anything I could get into, I was playing. Like a lot of Pacific
15 Islanders, actually. So, you know, I think we're quite naturally talented when it comes to
16 sport. And so I played every sport but found that I excelled most in netball and so
17 I gravitated to netball, and represented the sport for New Zealand for both indoor and
18 outdoor netball. I would still share my story around abuse through my lifetime, trying to
19 normalise the fact that this happens and it shouldn't be brushed under the carpet, it should
20 be out in the open so that we can deal with those issues.

21 Then when I left Wairoa and moved to Hamilton, I was up at university -- I was told when I was a
22 kid, knowledge is power. When you're a kid you don't understand that, you just kind of
23 brush it off. But then when I became independent, I understood that, so I got a bit fierce
24 when it came to education. So I went to university and I am a firm believer in social
25 justice, so because of that and because of my past, I volunteered to be a board member for
26 Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse in Waikato. I am a union organiser, so I absolutely
27 believe that social justice, because it wasn't there for me, I'm going to ensure that people
28 can have that.

29 **Q.** Just in terms of your sexual orientation and identity, I understand that that -- the abuse
30 impacted you and only more recently when you represented New Zealand in the netball,
31 you became more comfortable with that, is that right?

32 **A.** Yes, there are a lot of gay people who play the sport, gay people play a lot of sport, but
33 certainly, at the time when I was playing netball, I found a camaraderie, a brotherhood, a
34 sisterhood of friends which made me feel comfortable and put me on track to be part and

1 open of the rainbow community that I'm involved with. I also am an advocate for rainbow
2 workers within the workforce and I sit on a board called "Out at work", a network for
3 rainbow workers and trying to ensure that they are inclusive in work -- in their work
4 environment or workplace and try and make sure that there's no discrimination against
5 them.

6 **Q.** I understand that you have been impacted in terms of your church life, being distant from
7 your church, is that right?

8 **A.** Yeah, I'm not practising Catholicism, but certainly I acknowledge the teachings that I've
9 had, being raised within the Catholic faith and the amazing principles of that faith, I've
10 held. But going to church to me is a bit -- I'm not ready. I believe I will be ready at some
11 stage, and I think this Inquiry has actually helped me with my healing. So I'm keen, when
12 I go home next time, to actually go to those churches. Because the faith itself is good, there
13 are some great things that I've learned from my faith and I hold on to those quite dearly,
14 and I still have little habits that I was taught when I was at Saint Jo's. If I hear a fire engine,
15 I tend to stop and have a prayer. If I hear or see an ambulance, I'll even -- if I'm driving, I'll
16 even say, "Bless those people and those who are going to help." Those little things to me
17 came from my faith, and so I -- even though I'm not a practising Catholic, the principles
18 that I enjoy, I still do. And I think those are great little things that everyone should do.

19 **Q.** Rūpene, you also provide some views about what should happen to your abuser and also
20 what can be done for children. Can you take us through your views and share with us what
21 should be done?

22 **A.** Yeah.

23 **Q.** Paragraph 73 of your statement, if that helps.

24 **A.** Thank you. The first thing I had concerns over was when my abuser left our school, I was
25 concerned of where he went and if there were any other kids that faced what we went
26 through and may not have had the opportunities that we did to deal with that issue. So I
27 believe there should be further consequences toward my abuser. I'm just going to read this
28 part now.

29 I believe that he should have been prosecuted for what he did, if not something else to hold him
30 accountable and to prevent him from moving on somewhere else and continuing the cycle
31 of abuse.

32 Following on from the abuse, the school should have had someone speak to us about what had
33 happened, what was done about it and how to get support if we needed. The school didn't
34 do that.

1 In order for children within the Catholic Church to feel comfortable about disclosing any type of
2 abuse, there needs to be a neutral person that children can talk to. This neutral person
3 would not be part of the Catholic Church or the Catholic school. The children and parents
4 should be made aware that there is an independent person they could talk to. The trust
5 which children have in this person is the key, as children won't speak unless they can trust
6 that the person will help them and is able to do something about the situation.

7 Being on the board of Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse in Waikato, I have come to learn that there
8 is a lot of power in sharing a story, particularly for those who are survivors of sexual abuse,
9 who feel that they are alone. It would be great if it were normalised to have someone like
10 myself or other survivors who work in these fields to go into schools, to share their
11 experience and inform children and young people that supports are available for them. The
12 systems and supports that are set up to help young survivors of sexual abuse need to be well
13 thought out and in touch with the reality of children at schools.

14 **Q.** I understand that to close off, you have some further thoughts that you would like to share
15 with us before I hand it over to the Commissioners if they have any questions?

16 **A.** So other thoughts is need to encourage people to look at how survivors can help survivors.
17 There is a shortage of psychologists, how can they help others. The church should track
18 down people and apologise and have a tailored approach for each individual survivor, and
19 there should be some way of recognising the wrong done. Some kind of recognition of the
20 harm and the wrong that's been done, so that it doesn't happen in the future, and also allows
21 the school or the church to acknowledge it.

22 I also believe that there are funding issues for support for survivors, and that there should be a set
23 funding irrespective of the Government in power. I believe there's like a yo-yo effect, one
24 Government puts in funding for support, another one takes it away, another one puts it in,
25 another one takes it away, and that seems to be a problem for me.

26 **Q.** Thank you very much, Rūpene, for sharing with us, fa'afetai tele lava, malo le fa'amalosi.
27 I'll now hand it over to the Commissioners who may have questions or final remarks.

28 **CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Pohiva. Do you mind if we ask questions? Some of my colleagues
29 might have questions.

30 **A.** Yeah.

31 **Q.** All right, thank you.

32 **COMMISSIONER STEENSON:** Tēnā koe, Rūpene.

33 **A.** Kia ora.

34 **Q.** I don't have any questions for you, just to say ngā mihi nui ki a koe, thank you for coming.

- 1 A. Thank you.
- 2 **COMMISSIONER ALOFIVAE:** Malo le soifua maua ma le lagi e mama Rupene, Talofa lava,
3 lovely to see you this morning. I was really encouraged that you said your faith has really
4 helped you find the healing and some restoration. Have you ever thought about maybe
5 bringing a claim against the church for what happened to you and the other young people?
- 6 A. No.
- 7 **Q.** Is it something you might be interested in or?
- 8 A. To be honest, I haven't thought about it. My first step when I heard this was happening was
9 to actually have the ability to tell my story, that's as far as I've gotten.
- 10 **Q.** Okay, lovely, thank you for that.
- 11 **COMMISSIONER GIBSON:** Thank you for sharing so much. Did you ever find out whether
12 the church or the school did something to stop the priest having access to children or --
- 13 A. He was just there one day and gone.
- 14 **Q.** Still, to this day, you don't know whether he --
- 15 A. I have no idea where he went to after our school.
- 16 **Q.** Thank you.
- 17 A. The thing that stands out to me is there were groups. There was about 20 of us kids that
18 experienced this, and so I wanted -- I feel our story should be told, yeah.
- 19 **CHAIR:** Yes, it's frightening to think of the potential number of victims who might be out there
20 that we don't know about.
- 21 A. **[Nods].**
- 22 **Q.** I have a question before we close, Paul. Do you prefer to be called Paul or Rūpene?
- 23 A. Rūpene.
- 24 **Q.** I'm sorry, I saw your second name and gravitated, I apologise for that.
- 25 A. That's okay.
- 26 **Q.** I want to ask you about your idea of the church tracking down people. So that's one of your
27 additional matters that you've added. So there are two things. First of all, have you heard
28 that the Catholic Church does have a process whereby people who have been abused by
29 church or church members or leaders, that they can come and bring a claim, have you heard
30 that there is a process for that?
- 31 A. No. I only accidentally found out about this through the media.
- 32 **Q.** Right.
- 33 A. So that prompted me to go onto the website and register.
- 34 **Q.** For the Commission?

- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. But you didn't find out that there was also a Catholic process that you could go through?
- 3 A. No, and I guess that's because I had distanced myself from the religion.
- 4 Q. Yeah, and that leads me then to the next part, and that is your idea, and you're not the only
5 person who's had it, that maybe the church and others, other churches should take the lead
6 and be proactive in signaling to the general public that, A, there are processes to go to if
7 you need them, that's the first thing, but also to actively advise people about the wrongness
8 of this behaviour and how to stop it. Do you agree with that?
- 9 A. Yes. Yes.
- 10 Q. So rather than the survivor having to take the proactive step of going and finding, the
11 church comes and finds you?
- 12 A. Yeah, if the church had some kind of media outlet for those who have experienced abuse
13 through their organisations, then I would have gone that way. But like I said, because I saw
14 this on the news, it was something that prompted me to register.
- 15 Q. Thank you for sharing that important idea and thank you again for your extraordinary story.
16 I particularly liked the fact that young people got together and through their collective
17 strength, they found a way through, and that's a heartening story, one we don't hear enough
18 of, I'm afraid, but it's good to hear that at least you took some power to yourselves. So
19 thank you for that, Rūpene.
- 20 A. Ka pai, thank you.
- 21 Q. I'll leave you now with Dr Erueti.
- 22 **COMMISSIONER ERUETI:** Tēnā koe, Rūpene.
- 23 A. Kia ora.
- 24 Q. Kua tae mai ki te tuku kōrero pono ki mua i te aroaro o te Kōmihana. Tēnei te mihi
25 mahana ki a koe e te rangatira. E mihi ana ki tōku whanaunga o Taranaki, tēnā koe. I want
26 to acknowledge and recognise your strength and courage to come and speak before the
27 Kōmihana and in public as well and in front of the church, and to recognise the -- this is a
28 kaupapa that has come up in other hearings with the faith about the challenges that come
29 with disclosure, but there's an added dimension too I think with Pasifika and Māori
30 communities to the sort of barriers that are posed upon those who are abused in making
31 disclosures. I recognise the difficulty with your dad being a staunch Catholic and an active
32 Catholic even today and how difficult it would have been for you to have said something.
33 It's not only your fear of not being believed. So I think we need to recognise too your
34 courage in coming forward today and in speaking your truth. I was struck also by what you

1 said about your sexuality and the impact that had upon you, your sexual orientation, to be
2 abused by a male at that time when you were searching for your identity.

3 A. Mmm.

4 **Q.** And the impact that that has had on your life. I think it's important to think about, because
5 you're an advocate and your quest for social justice, I hope you're able to pursue that
6 through the church, through a claim with the church. I also wonder if we might do a plug
7 for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse, because I know that's a very important organisation,
8 it's great to see you have a governorship role there, and I wondered if you might be able to
9 say a little bit about what that organisation does.

10 A. So the Male Survivors of Abuse was set up a few years ago now and they provide support,
11 whether it be financial, whether it be mental, simple things. If they haven't got kai, then
12 they supply kai. If they are struggling with rent, they help out financially. It's a great way
13 to encourage men, because there is this thought that men are supposed to be proud and
14 manly and so it's very difficult for men to come forward about their abuse. And because
15 they struggle with that, then they struggle mentally.

16 So what we found with a lot of survivors is that they are heavily institutionalised through mental
17 health facilities as a result of them not being able to overcome the abuse that happened to
18 them, and it's also preventing suicide, because that's quite prevalent within people who have
19 faced abuse. So the board has a very practical and holistic view of surrounding that
20 individual with support in any aspect that they need. Some days, the survivors are good
21 and can function amazingly, and sometimes it's just a reverse where they live in that
22 darkness. It's a mission to try and draw them out of that darkness, to let them know that life
23 is actually worthwhile.

24 **Q.** That's awesome that you're doing that great work, so ngā mihi on behalf of the
25 Commissioners. I want to thank you so much for your testimony today. Kia ora.

26 A. Kia ora.

27 **CHAIR:** If I may put a plug in, if your male survivors are victims of abuse in state or faith-based
28 care, they're welcome to register, they're welcome to come along. They don't have to make
29 a public statement like you, they can make a written statement, they can talk to a
30 Commissioner in private, anyway they feel comfortable, but if telling their story is a help to
31 them, then we would welcome them to be encouraged to come along.

32 A. Thank you.

33 **Q.** Yes, so thank you for your presence again.

34 **AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Excuse me, I just hope if I can speak on behalf of the Samoan

1 community. I want to acknowledge that man there.

2 **CHAIR:** Would you like to come forward so we can hear you. Thank you for coming forward.

3 Could you tell us your name?

4 **AUDIENCE MEMBER:** My name is Sui Po i Po Tagaloa Sa. I share my story a couple of
5 months ago at the beginning of the year on Tagata Pasifika, the same topic. I couldn't go
6 away today without acknowledging your courage. Momoli la'u fa'afetai le alofa ma le
7 agaga lelei o le atua, ua maua lenei avanoa e mafai ai ona tatou talanoa se mataaupu ua leva
8 tele alo ma fanau o le tatou atunu'u o lo fa'apena ua a'afia ai. Ae le mafai le tatou atunu'u
9 ona talanoa se tulaga ua fa'asamasamanoa. Fai mai le tala a le atunuu, e a fua manuia mai
10 mauga. E momoli la'u fa'afetai o lea ua amata mea. Faafetai lou alofa aua e fa'asino mana
11 le tagata e aumai e le atua. Fa'afetai lea ua aumai e le Atua le auala e mafai ai le
12 faasootai. I was born and raised in Samoa, I moved here in 2003, I was 23 when I moved
13 here. I was brought up without a dad, my dad passed away before I was even born. I was
14 sexually abused in Samoa, I was an overstayer here for five years. I am now married to a
15 European, have two beautiful kids. I was foster parents for five years. I am now in a
16 fitness, health and well-being in Otahuhu. I was working for Better Blokes. Better Blokes
17 is part of Male Survivors of Aotearoa. I am now setting up a Pacific Male Survivor in
18 Auckland. It's only just start.

19 A. Nice.

20 **Q.** But, e momoli la'u faafetai ma la'u faamalo i le toa, fa'afetai. Pau lea o le matou tatalo ia
21 faatasi mai le alii. Ia tauaveina lou malosi ae maise o le toa aua le tautuina o le tatou
22 atun'uu. To'atele nisi o alo ma fanau o le tatou atunu'u o lo a'afia. Sa taumafai pea. Ai se
23 a? Faigata le agunuu a le tatou atunu'u. E faigata le tautala i le agaga fa'asamoa i le tulaga
24 o le sexually abuse. Ae fa'afetai o lea ua amata mea. E momoli la'u fafaetai i le paia ma le
25 mamalu o le tatou atunu'u, Amaise ia le mamalu o Samoa o le fa'agaugaufia i lenei itula o
26 le aso. Faatasi mai le alii. I wanted to say thank you to you guys as well. Thank you, the
27 judges, for all the work that you guys have done. Thank you, Tania, I have met you a
28 couple of years ago through my journey. Thank you for your courage to actually put these
29 events up, it's only the beginning. May God bless all of us and show courage in our
30 community. This needs to stop. Thank you. **[Applause]**

31 **[Samoan song]**

32 **MR POHIVA:** Thank you very much, Commissioners. Can I ask that you remain and we'll just
33 do a quick swap over for our next witness.

34 **CHAIR:** Very well, thank you. This is what's called a pregnant pause.