

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

by

Hal Wootten AC, QC

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We came primarily to hear Dr Ramos Horta this evening, so our revels now are ended, and I must not detain you with too long an epilogue. But I would very much like to make the acknowledgment the program contemplates, and share the emotions this evening has evoked in me. There are three emotions, which I can pair with three acknowledgments – pride and joy with acknowledgment of the honour you have done me tonight, gratitude with acknowledgment of the many who should share that honour, and humility with an acknowledgment of our guest, Dr Jose Ramos Horta, as a representative of all those who, unlike me, have given their lives to, or sometimes for, their vision.

First may I say how glad I am that this is not the Hal Wootten Memorial Lecture. After so many years one might reasonably expect the founder to be decently interred. Just how long ago it all was came home to me a while ago when I learnt that the most junior member of our original staff had retired from the Bench because he had reached judicial retiring age.

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote of the secret isolated joy of the thinker, who knows that a hundred years after he is dead and forgotten, men who have never heard of him will be moving to the measure of his thought. I cannot aspire to such a joy, but I would not trade for it the open, shared joy of knowing that 35 years after forming a vision men and women who know my name, use it in friendship, and have given it to a lecture series, still share and strive for my vision. I spoke at the graduation on Friday of that vision, of the great achievements of those who have worked to implement it, and of the difficulties it faces today. Now is not the time to repeat this, and I simply say that I take unfeigned pride and joy in the fact that so many value the vision that they have honoured me in the naming of this Lecture series.

It is with gratitude that I acknowledge the many who, back in 1970 and in the 36 years since, have not merely shared that vision, but helped develop and shape it and have not infrequently made considerable sacrifice to keep it alive. I think of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Rupert Myers, who embraced it so generously and is happily still with us, and of two other senior officers of the University who have passed on, the pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Rex Vowels, who so often smoothed the way for us, and the head of the Tertiary Education Research Centre, Professor Fred Katz, who worked with us to develop the small group interactive teaching model that became distinctive of the law School.

All the original academic staff are still alive –Curt Garbesi, Garth Nettheim, Bob Hayes, Tony Blackshield, and Richard Chisholm, as are Rob Brian our Librarian and Peter Wildblood our Administrative Officer. Then there were the students, one of them now the Chancellor of this university, who shared the two years in the huts and responded so enthusiastically to the idea that they were starting the traditions of a new institution.

I cannot name all those –academic staff, administrative staff, and students – who have since contributed to the vision, but I acknowledge you all and gladly share this honour with you.

Finally with humility I acknowledge our speaker tonight, as a representative of all those who, in contrast to me, have had to suffer and sacrifice for their visions. One thinks of Martin Luther King, who gave his life for his vision of a day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, would be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" Of the lawyer, Nelson Mandela, who told the judge who could sentence him to death that he cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons lived

together in harmony and with equal opportunities, and that it was an ideal which he hoped to live for and to achieve, but for which, if needs be, he was prepared to die. He lived and achieved his vision but only after a quarter of a century of hard labour in prison. Of Jose, our old friend and guest tonight, who gave thirty years of his life, much of it in exile from the country he loved, to achieving the independence of his country, only to find it had continuing problems to which he still devotes his life.

By contrast I was able to pursue my visions without disturbing my middle class professional comfort, secure in a free country under the protection of the rule of law. At one time there were three visions, all with their headquarters in the wooden huts on the lower campus. There was Lawasia, of which I was Honorary Secretary- General, with the vision of uniting the lawyers of Asia and the Western Pacific in an organisation that would strengthen their independence, and their commitment to the rule of law, human rights and professional service to their communities. A week ago I was in India, attending Lawasia's fortieth anniversary celebration, happy to see it strongly led by committed Asian lawyers who honoured me with life membership.

Then there was the Aboriginal Legal Service, essentially an attempt to bring the rule of law to a section of the Australian population who were often denied it. Despite ups and downs over the years, its successor has just won on open tender funding to represent Aboriginals all over New South Wales. Something I treasure were the words of an Aboriginal woman in Redfern responding on Late Night Live a while back to Phillip Adams' question about how her involvement began. She referred to a time in the early seventies when some young Aboriginals explored new possibilities and Professor Hal Wootten –'he's a judge now' –came out to the Block with some students. She said 'It was a time when everything seemed possible'.

It was a time where everything seemed possible too for the third vision housed in those huts, the Law School itself. The essential vision was to give students a rich, rewarding and maturing experience and to send them out with their own vision of a worthwhile profession committed to upholding the rule of law and human rights, advancing justice and serving not just the rich and powerful but the whole community. Much has proved possible, much remains to be done, there are new problems to face, but the vision remains alive, and will I believe help to carry the Law School on to a future of continuing high achievement and service.