

For Official Release
PR 001-05182023
Office of the Governor
Utulei, American Samoa
May 18, 2023



Swains Island 98th Anniversary Celebration

“Olohega is like a root of a plant. You nurture and take care of it until it grows. Olohega needs a lot of development...the people should not follow the government, the government should follow the needs of the people.”



Swains Island is a small atoll located in the central Pacific Ocean, approximately halfway between Tokelau and American Samoa. The island has a long and fascinating history that spans thousands of years. These early settlers were skilled navigators and seafarers, and they brought

with them a rich cultural heritage that included complex social structures, intricate artwork, and sophisticated systems of agriculture and fishing. In 1925, Swains Island was formally annexed by the United States and made a part of American Samoa. However, the island was allowed to maintain a large degree of autonomy, and its traditional system of governance and customs was largely left intact. Today, Swains Island remains one of the most remote and least developed places in the world.

On May 11, 2023, the Governor of American Samoa, Honorable Lemanu P.S. Mauga led a delegation traveling to Swains Island to celebrate the 98th anniversary since Swains Island was annexed by the United States of America and became a part of American Samoa. The delegation included several directors and a few members of the Swains Island community living in Tutuila. Honorable Governor Lemanu P.S. Mauga presided over a flag ceremony on May 13, 2023, held at Taulaga Village, Swains Island. The United States National Flag was raised by the American Samoa Law Enforcement Officers Joseph Lumana'i and Punalilo Tipa, honoring the sovereignty of the United States of America over the Territory of American Samoa. The American Samoa flag was raised by Major (MAJ) Hannah Vaouli and Private First Class (PFC) Anderson Pa of the United States Army Reserve signifying the protection of the United States of America over its territories, and the Swains Island flag was raised by the Honorable Representative Su'a Alex Jennings and Reverend William Pedro representing the oldest and original families of the Olohenga. Reverend Mageo P. Mageo led the ceremony with an invocation, followed by the keynote address delivered by Honorable Governor Mauga and Representative Su'a Alex Jennings who spoke on behalf of the people of Swains Island.

Governor Lemanu acknowledged the ancestors of *Olohega* and their grit in developing and habitating the Swains Island in the early years. "*Olohega* is like a root of a plant. You nurture and take care of it until it grows. *Olohega* needs a lot of development. You are precious with great potential". Governor Lemanu added, "the people should not follow the government, the government should follow the needs of the people." This is in reference to the long standing request of the *Olohega* community to visit and explore the potential of Swains Island.

The historical event took place in front of the church building in the center of the *Malae* in the village of Taulaga which was built in 1888. "Swains Island and her people are finally being recognized. I am truly grateful to the Governor of American Samoa, Honorable Lemanu Mauga, for making this trip happen. Olohenga (Swains Island) has so much to offer the people of American Samoa regarding resources. The Governor did this because he believes there was opportunity in Swains Island. With the right plan and proper investment, Swains can provide so much for American Samoa as a whole", expressed Swains Island Representative Su'a Alex Jennings.

The Swains Island community expressed their hopes for future investments and the development of the Island with resources to attract its people to return to live there again.

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