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Award for Distance Learning Experience in a Degree Granting Programme

The recipient of this year's Award of Excellence for Distance Learning Experience in a Degree Granting Programme is a young man for whom Distance Education proved a critical turning point. His future would have been very bleak had the opportunities provided by the College of Distance Education not been available. Without them he would have spent his life as a subsistence farmer.

He received his primary education from the local community school, kilometers away from his home, and his secondary school even further away than his primary school. At the end of his Grade 10 year he became one of the many unfortunate students whom are termed "drop-outs". According to the institution that nominated him for the award, there was not even one space to enrol him.

Realising his misfortune, he went back to his village to help his parents with farming. In pursuance of his dream to become an accountant or a lawyer, he grew cabbages and sold them to pay for study to improve his Grade 10 marks through the College of Distance Education. During this time he secured a job as a casual labourer and was later drafted into the Defence force.

Before his discharge in 1997, he enrolled at the Open College and, after matriculating successfully, immediately pursued his distance education studies and graduated with a diploma in accounting. With his diploma he found a job, but was made redundant in

a downsizing exercise. When his university introduced its bachelor degree programmes in 2002, he was one of the first students.

According to the university authorities, "he had an unstoppable drive and passion to strive, as circumstances around him unfolded and crumbled, he re-oriented his focus and articulately accomplished his dreams". Today, he is serving his country as an accomplished accountant.

For the panel, he represents the very many who have to overcome enormous adversity to get their primary and secondary education, only to then become "high-school drop-outs" because of the shortage of places in Grades 11 and 12. Distance education has made a difference to Mr. Yapa, giving him a second chance, which he has taken and succeeded. In doing this, he is an inspiration to all his "wantoks", others in rural Papua New Guinea, and all those in similar circumstances around the globe.

The panel was unanimous in their resolve that Mr. Kelly Yapa will be an impressive role model for young people in developing countries and that he is a worthy candidate for this year's Award Recognising Learning Experience.

Mr. President, I invite you to present to Mr. Kelly Yapa, the Award of Excellence for Distance Learning Experience in a Degree Granting Programme.