The *Pacific Island archaeology in the 21st century* conference and this volume are dedicated to the memory of Rita Olsudong, Palau’s National Archaeologist. Rita had a strong commitment and passion to preserve the cultural heritage of Palau and she was an inspiration and good friend to fellow Pacific Islanders and foreign researchers.

Rita began her career in cultural preservation as an archaeological surveyor under Palau’s Historic Preservation Program in 1991. After earning her MA in archaeology at La Trobe University in Australia in 1995, she returned to Palau to become the National Archaeologist, overseeing all archaeological work in the Bureau of Arts and Culture and for the Republic of Palau. At the time she was one of a small but steadily growing number of indigenous archaeologists working in the Pacific.

Rita performed a number of key surveys during her tenure as National Archaeologist, identifying hundreds of significant cultural sites, and assisted the National Registrar to collect information for the Palau Historical and Cultural Advisory Board. The archaeological data obtained was vital in protecting significant historical properties and many new sites are known as a result of her detailed recording of cultural properties affected by development projects. Rita also provided invaluable assistance to foreign archaeologists in their academic endeavours and to major infrastructure works such as the Compact Road and Capital Relocation Projects.

Rita was passionate about speaking to Palau’s youth, endeavouring to instil in them a desire to safeguard their heritage. She taught at the Palau Community College and encouraged students to serve as the nation’s next generation of archaeologists and historic preservation experts. Rita was instrumental in registering four of Palau’s cultural sites on the World Heritage Tentative List; Tet el Bad (stone coffin), Beluu er a Imeong (Imeong Traditional Village), Oubalang er a Ngedebech (Ngedebech Terraces), and Uet el Daob ma Uet el Beluu and Chelechol ra Orrak (Yapese Stone Money Quarries).

Rita wanted to showcase Palau’s traditional lifeways and unique natural and cultural heritage at the Pacific Island archaeology conference, but tragically passed away just months before the conference. She was a driving force in making cultural heritage a community and national issue. Her enduring contribution is the preservation of Palau’s culture, history and prehistoric sites for future generations. Rita is survived by her husband Calvin Taurengel Emesiochel, son Brandon Ngiratong Shiro and daughter Dilreng Emesiochel.

Rita Olsudong
28/04/1965–30/03/2009