

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR

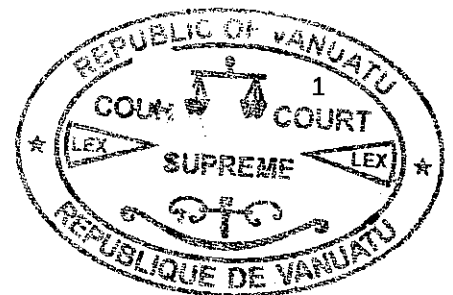
v

RICHLY BULE

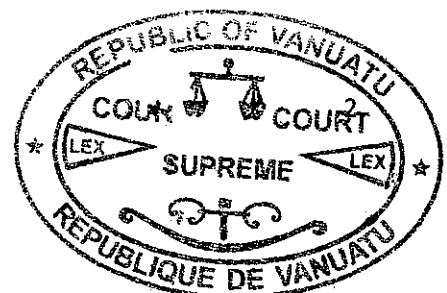
Date: 17 April 2026
Before: Justice V.M. Trief
Counsel: Public Prosecutor – Mr D. Liu
Defendant – Ms B. Taleo

SENTENCE

1. Mr Richly Bule, also known as Richly Bule Tabi, you appear for sentence today having been found guilty after trial and convicted of arson contrary to subs. 134(1) of the *Penal Code* [CAP. 135]. You committed the offending on 31 July 2025 at Lovunvili village on Ambae island when you set fire to Pastor Samuel Vusi's house.
2. You are 36 years old. You were residing on Ambae at the time of the offending.
3. On 30 July 2025 in the early morning, lunchtime and at 7pm, you asked your mother Mrs Edwige Tabi for benzene to burn a house. Mrs Tabi asked Mr Chris Tari, an older cousin of yours, to come over to your house and keep watch because Mr Bule you had repeatedly asked her for benzene and she and you father were scared about what you might do.
4. In the early morning of 31 July 2025, you stood outside a window of Pastor Vusi's house, struck one match and set fire to a curtain inside that house. You saw that the



- curtain started burning and you left. After that, other items within that room caught fire until the whole room was ablaze.
5. You lit the fire knowing that the house belongs to Pastor Vusi.
 6. You therefore set fire to Pastor Vusi's house at Lovunvili village, Ambae wilfully and unlawfully and you did so knowing that the building belongs to another person namely Pastor Samuel Vusi.
 7. The complainant Rachel Steven resides at Ambae island and looks after the residence of Pastor Samuel Vusi whose house was burnt in the offending.
 8. Mrs Rachel Steven heard a loud noise outside at 4am on 31 July 2025 and got up to find that the room in Pastor Vusi's house was ablaze. Mr Chris Tari also was awoken in the early morning of 31 July 2025 because of the fire in Pastor Vusi's house.
 9. She called her husband and people in the community to help extinguish the fire.
 10. More people arrived and they helped stop the fire from spreading.
 11. The room contents including clothes, books, mattress, shelves and Bibles as well as the timber within the structure of the house (including ceiling and window) were burnt.
 12. The sentence start point is assessed having regard to the maximum sentence available, and the mitigating and aggravating factors of the offending.
 13. The maximum penalty for this offence is 10 years imprisonment.
 14. There are no mitigating factors of the offending but it is aggravated by the following:
 - a) There is an element of planning and premeditation;
 - b) The timing of the offending in the early morning increased the risk to any occupants in the house at the time;
 - c) The scale of the property loss to the complainant – many household goods were lost in the offending and the insides and structure of the building were destroyed in the room in which the fire burned ;
 - d) The offending was unprovoked;
 - e) The deliberate burning of a building connected to religious life and the unity of the community;



- f) The defendant left when the complainant's house had caught fire; and
- g) The effect on the community including fear.
15. I adopt a sentence start point of 4 years imprisonment as appropriate for this offending and for your criminal culpability.
16. There is no deduction available for a guilty plea.
17. You are 36 years old from Lovunvili village, East Ambae. You are separated from your wife and currently in the process of divorce. You have three children. You are a law graduate. You are stated to have practised law in Port Vila until you returned to Ambae and then committed the offending. You have no prior convictions. You have paid compensation to Pastor Vusi's son who is here on Ambae and this was accepted namely an *Ala* custom pig, mats and VT7,000 cash. I deduct a further 8 months from the sentence start point for your personal factors.
18. The end sentence imposed is 3 years 4 months imprisonment. The sentence is back-dated to commence from 31 July 2025 when you were first taken into custody.
19. This sentence is to denounce such criminal conduct, to protect the community, to deter you and others from such offending, and to hold you accountable for your offending.
20. The Court has a discretion under s. 57 of the *Penal Code* to suspend all or part of the sentence where it is not appropriate to make an offender suffer immediate imprisonment "... (i) in view of the circumstances; and (ii) in particular the nature of the crime; and (iii) the character of the offender."
21. The circumstances and seriousness of the offending count against suspension of the sentence. I consider that there are no exceptional circumstances warranting suspension of the sentence. Accordingly, you are to remain in custody to complete serving your sentence of imprisonment.
22. You have 14 days to appeal the sentence.

DATED at Saratamata, Ambae this 17th day of April, 2026
BY THE COURT


Justice Viran Molisa Trief

