



# Balance

"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"

SEPTEMBER

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IN the past three months, four children under the age of 10 years have been murdered. In one case a three-year-old girl was allegedly sexually assaulted and murdered. Three of the four children murdered were females and in all cases the perpetrators were known to the victims. These deaths are extreme examples of the violence that is widespread and tolerated by society daily. Each of the four cases represents a horrific, distressing and tragic event where extreme violence has been perpetrated against children in crimes that defy comprehension.

What is striking is that in the aftermath of these crimes there has been little public outcry. There have been no calls to action from religious or community leaders. As usual it has been organisations such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Save the Children and others who have publicly condemned what has happened. But where is the public outcry and denunciations of what has happened in our country in recent months?

Domestic violence is highly prevalent in Fiji with a recent survey by FWCC reporting 66 percent of women in Fiji reporting being hit by their partners/husbands. Hitting children is largely seen as an acceptable form of punishment and discipline and frequently we hear culture/religion used as arguments to support this practice which is illegal in other jurisdictions. Sexual assault is also at pandemic levels with the national newspapers covering stories almost every day of sexual assault against women and girls by grandfathers, fathers, neighbours, brothers, cousins, friends. But again we blame the victims or simply ignore the issue, because in our culture speaking about such issues is taboo or makes us uncomfortable.

To have a wide-scale impact on these issues there needs to be action from the public at large. Why hasn't the media been flooded with calls from Fiji's leaders for harsher penalties for perpetrators of violence against women and children, or for more community awareness on the issue of violence?

Why are we as a society so immune or



## Suffer the children

By Naeemah Khan

Public silence is deafening in the wake of four child murders

indifferent to such horrific and gross violations of human rights? Where is the public expression of disgust for these crimes?

If one scans the daily newspapers it is not uncommon to come across two to three cases of rape or domestic violence being reported in the media and it also not uncommon to read that alleged rapists or husbands/partners charged with the assault either being let off with a warning, receiving a suspended sentence or a jail-term of less than two years.

Magistrates and judges are inconsistent in sentencing and the police and other law officers always call for parents to be more vigilant with their children, and in some cases some have tried to blame the prevalence of sexual assault on women themselves. For example an interim government minister linked the "urban migration of young women as a factor feeding into men resorting to sexually assaulting girls and children." When will we as a society stop blaming victims, using culture and just come out to say that there is no excuse for violence and that we will not condone violence and that we will have a zero-tolerance on violence? When will we ask for behavioural change from the perpetrators who are committing these crimes?

If we are to eliminate violence against women and children, there needs to be more action by the community, for leaders, men, women and children to publicly call for change in attitudes, changes in laws and for a shift in the mind-set of all. We have to address the root causes of violence whether it means changing cultural and

religious values and norms that condone or assist in creating an environment which allows violence to take place. Leaders, organisations need to work with women's human rights organisations such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre to develop a human rights-based approach to eliminating gender-based violence.

To allow women and children to live in a society free from violence, there needs to be zero tolerance towards any act of violence.

## From the Director's desk

# Greetings from Knolly Street!

THESE past three months have been fraught with tragedy for many families in the Pacific. In July, a boat capsized in Kiribati leaving 15 dead and 18 missing. In August, a ferry in Tonga sunk with the loss of 74 lives – including all the women and children who were on board. And in late September a massive earthquake caused a deadly tsunami that struck the Samoa region claiming more than 150 lives in Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga.

FWRM extends its condolences, support and prayers to women, girls and their families who are struggling to cope with these tragedies and come to grips with their loss and grief.

These past three months have been also been another busy period for the Fiji Women's



'Picture This' project in March (Read more about 'Unveiled' in this issue.)

As you will discover in this issue, FWRM also launched the long-awaited 'Tok Talk – Nourishing the Asia Pacific feminist Movement' DVD inspired by last year's Association of Women in Development conference. The DVD, a collaboration

Rights Movement. FWRM launched 'Unveiled', a journal targeted at girls aged 10-14 years, that showcases artistic pieces from female artists and features articles from this year's graduates of the Emerging Leaders' Forum. The launch at Suva Sangam Secondary School gave FWRM another opportunity to share the journals with female students and to reacquaint ourselves with the students who participated in our

between FWRM and the International Women in Development Agency (IWDA), is a snapshot of the Asia Pacific feminist movement. FWRM will be distributing the DVD regionally in the hope that it will bring in a multitude of voices to enrich this never-ending conversation.

The 'Tok Talk' launch was also the last event organised by our Communications Officer, Tara Chetty who has resigned to take up further studies at Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA, as part of her Fulbright scholarship. In the wake of Tara's departure, we saw the arrival of another graduate of FWRM's Emerging Leaders Forum, Neomai Maravuakula who has joined as the new Human Rights Training Officer. She is the third graduate who is currently part of the FWRM team  
Enjoy this publication!

In solidarity,

Virisila Buadromo

# Good luck Tara ... Welcome ELF's

FORMER Communications Officer Tara Chetty departed the Fiji Women's Rights Movement on July 31 to begin another chapter in her journey as a feminist. Tara was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to undertake a two-year Masters in Gender Studies degree at the Rutgers University in New Jersey, United States.

Tara was one of two students from the Pacific who received the prestigious award this year. FWRM is proud of Tara's achievement and we wish her well in her studies abroad. Tara will be greatly missed at FWRM particularly with the contributions she made as the Communications Officer through which she played an integral role in FWRM's media strategy and advocacy. Prior to joining the office team, Tara was FWRM's first young women's representative on the management board – a term she served for two years beginning in 2002. Good luck with the studies Tara and we look forward to having you back in the Pacific.

As we said our farewells to Tara, we welcomed to the team two graduates from our Emerging Leaders' Forum. The first is Neomai Maravuakula,



Tara Chetty



Neomai Maravuakula



Mamta Sylvia Chand

Neomai is a graduate of the University of the South Pacific's law programme, and obtained her Professional Diploma in Legal Practice from USP in 2008. She also brings the practical experience of working as a lawyer from her time at local law firm, Siwatibau & Sloan Barristers and Solicitors. This feel for the law will be important as Neomai discusses women's human rights and the Family

Law Act with communities around Fiji and the region. Neomai joins Shabina Khan as part of FWRM's human rights training team.

Back at FWRM is the second ELF graduate, Mamta Sylvia Chand who is currently on an internship with the Human Rights Desk. Mamta was a volunteer for FWRM in 2004 and 2005. The vivacious and passionate activist previously worked at the Citizens Constitutional Forum and as a community peer educator at Marie Stopes before this internship.

"I enjoy being back with the team and I look forward to continuing to pursue my passion in women's human rights!"



# Are we becoming a militarised society?

By **Roshika Deo**

LIVING in Fiji during these uncertain political times, gives us the unfortunate opportunity to consider the impacts of militarisation and what it means to human rights, the rule of law and democracy. When one considers militarisation, our first thoughts are that of armed forces dominant in the administration and policy of the State.

The reality is that militarisation is used to force the submission to the powers that be of those people who resist a regime's rule – using force, intimidation, threats and fear to effectively rule a population. For many of us in Fiji and other militarised states – this sounds, and indeed is, so familiar.

So how does this happen? The first step is often through political repression, followed by increased arbitrary arrests, torture, intimidations, threats, deaths. Often this intensifies. This is followed by a saturation of military personnel within the different branches of the government.

Militarisation is about waging war against their own citizens through the incorporation of national security into legal frameworks, such as 'emergency' regulations, anti-terrorism laws or state/public security provisions. These frameworks and regulations leave little room for dissent. The military government often justifies the adoption of these repressive measures as fundamental for economic growth, but in fact is designed to silence dissent and opposition.

It is clear from the Fiji experience that militarization militarisation violates our fundamental human rights to take part in the government of our country, directly or through freely- chosen representatives. The over-throw of a democratically- elected government, removes the will of the people which should be the basis of the authority of the government. Periodic and genuine elections through universal and equal suffrage should either be a secret vote or by an equivalent voting process. Militarization Militarisation violates this right.

Militarisation makes its mark not only on political and legal systems, but also on social behaviour. Its impacts range from the loss of legal protection to the undermining of civilian policing to the lack of respect for women. These impacts are invariably detrimental to the protection and promotion of human rights.

One of the key impacts of militarisation is that it puts rulers and their supporters above the law. Once there is a certain group of people for whom

the law does not apply, the law slowly loses its authority and sacredness. In turn, this leads to more people for whom the law does not apply; more instances where the law is ignored. The regulations and norms, by which a rule of law system functions, are all ignored or perverted. In many instances, existing laws are misinterpreted to the advantage of those in power, while harsh laws are enacted to punish and suppress dissent. The law can therefore no longer be used to protect individual rights.

Also, in a militarised society, the civilian police forces are often called upon to assist the military. Civilian policing habits are gravely undermined. Searching a home under normal criminal law for instance, requires police to obtain a warrant, to use minimum force, and to maintain the necessary records. Military searches on the other hand, are of a different nature. Military operations are often accompanied by impunity, while police actions are controlled by law. When the police begin to work within a military environment, they will also acquire a taste for impunity.

Under a rule of law system, many safeguards to individual rights are built into the legal structure. The practice of arrest and detention for instance, is subject to specific procedures to prevent any abuse of power. To further ensure that these procedures are followed, lawyers are legally entitled to intervene on behalf of the individual. An individual may not be aware of all relevant legal provisions, or may be afraid to assert her rights in the face of state officers with the power to use force. Effective interventions by lawyers are therefore an essential component of protection.

When a society becomes militarised, the lawyer's role is minimised and may even completely disappear. In particular, the increase in militarisation drastically reduces the legal space available for consulting lawyers. Emergency regulations and anti-terrorism laws allow for long periods of detention with limited access to lawyers. Often the possibilities for bail under such laws are also limited, leaving lawyers with little to do in the way of court applications. Moreover, courts themselves do not have the power to adjudicate on the legality of such detentions. The absence of a legal profession capable of effective protection serves to enhance militarisation. Authorities also take extraordinary steps to attack and intimidate lawyers. Many lawyers appearing in cases against

the ruling regimes are threatened, intimidated or suffer attacks. This was the case in Pakistan last year and in Fiji since 2006.

Complaints about corruption within the judiciary are prominent during militarisation. The link between militarisation and the increase in corruption within the judiciary is related to the undermining of the separation of powers. Under militarisation, not only does the power shift to the executive, but the executive itself begins to come under military pressure. This change undermines the judiciary. Even though externally the courts may exist as before, internally there are substantive changes.

When reports of killings/abuses/violations/ threats continue unaddressed over a long period of time, sensitivity is diminished. Therefore instead of society becoming outraged by this inaction, it becomes immune to these violations. The loss of such outrage signifies an extremely negative transformation, both morally and psychologically – creating further space for these violations to continue unabated.

This has serious implications on women's rights as it further reinforces gender norms and sexual stereotyping inhibits feminist movements which often results in an increase in violence against women. This is mainly due to the military being an extremely patriarchal organisation. Militarised environments expose women to serious forms of dehumanisation for example, rape and serious threats to women. It is also compounded through the militarised state's failure to take appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women that reinforces discrimination based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

Once collective consensus on basic social norms and standards has been destroyed over a long period of militarisation, significant damage is caused to society's memory and language. Societies may no longer have a concept of a public officer who will not abuse power. Such development requires enormous effort in any society. It involves the education of generations of people on these notions, as well as the practices required to uphold them. Educating civil servants, intellectuals and the population as a whole is no small matter.

# The ugly truth about Eve teasing

By **Roshika Deo**

It is the same story everyday. You step on the street and jump out of your skin as a taxi hurtles towards you and swerves just before smashing you to a pulp. The driver leers and hoots at you as he passes by and you are still cursing him under your breath when you pass a group of men who call out "URO", "Julum hai". You pretend not to hear and keep on walking the street when you feel someone's hands slide off your body or even worse you feel someone groping you on your buttocks.

## Eve teasing.

Eve teasing is a euphemism used for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. Eve teasing is a common incident and happens almost everywhere within our society, be it on a busy street in Suva, on a street in your own neighbourhood, at the supermarket, at work, at the bank, at schools and universities, in the cinema, and at restaurants.

A lewd stare, a sly whistle, a well-timed clap, an unwarranted bump, a seemingly casual touch, the humming of a suggestive song, cheap comments and gestures are all typical examples of Eve teasing. The way a woman can be subjected to Eve teasing is endless and every girl and women has been subjected to this at least once, at some point in their lifetime.

It is not a victimless crime, in some countries it has even resulted in death. Furthermore it leads to the public humiliation of women in broad day

light; it causes women mental agony and also causes immeasurable damage to a woman's self-esteem. Because of this women sometimes avoid public places when alone, public places in their own neighbourhood, in their own country which they have a right to, like any other citizen.

It is a serious problem in our country. So what does one do to eradicate this problem? Three things that frequently get suggested in order to eradicate Eve teasing are:

Firstly, women should fight back, however when she attempts to defend herself, the perpetrator sometimes responds with ferocious violence that sometimes results in death or the suicide of the woman.

Secondly, women have been told to dress appropriately. Eve teasing has been reported by women dressed in sulu and chambas and salwar kameez, girls and women covered from head to toe in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan are still subjected to eve teasing. Moreover, the fact that 10-year-old girls are subjected to such humiliating acts confirms that it doesn't matter how one dresses.

And lastly it has been suggested that women should report harassment to police. Unfortunately laws are often inadequate to deal appropriately with this problem. Perhaps calling it 'assault' or 'molestation'

would be more honest and might do more to raise public and legal consciousness against it.

So given all that, what does one REALLY do to eradicate the problem of Eve teasing? Sex is not the only motive and usually only men indulge in this form of behaviour. Eve teasing is seen as a result of the manifestation of the inherent patriarchal domination in our society – domination over the female gender. Furthermore gender segregation and a "boys will be boys" attitude also helps advance this behaviour.

It would be reasonable to conclude that Eve teasing is a typical social crime, a social disease where the perpetrators and victims are ordinary people. The only long-lasting solutions to this problem are behavioural changes and changes in societal attitude.

Changing this behaviour and the attitude of our society is easier said than done but if things are left alone it would hardly get better. Young boys need to be taught from an early age that women and girls should be treated with respect and dignity.

A civilised society like ours cannot afford to ignore such an issue. Women and girls' right to privacy, security and space is under siege. Eve teasing deserves to be tackled actively. Eradicating Eve teasing will help women access public places fearlessly, it will also prevent hurt, fear and humiliation of women, help prevent the mental agony that women go through, and will further gender equality in our country.

Team FWRM at the Olympic Day Fun Run



By **Yashna Narayan** and **Ekta Singh**

FWRM staffers got roped in to a "Fun Run" event by Ms CommsWalla (former Communications Officer Tara Chetty) on June 20. What I initially thought would be a dreadful event, turned out to actually be quite inspiring.

On the day, my alarm went off at 5am. I dragged myself out of bed; barely made it to the shower (I considered skipping it though). The cab arrived at about 5.30am and I had to pick up three other people on my way. Thank heavens I live in Nakasi because at least I had time for a nap.

The cold breeze hit me like a shockwave. I am not trying to be creative; it actually did hit me like a shockwave! There weren't many people gathered at the National Stadium starting point when we got there and I thought they wouldn't even show up in great numbers, but I was sadly disappointed.

Ekta and I were part of the FWRM team that

showed up for the event. We started at the National Stadium, walking up Laucala Bay Road past the University of the South Pacific campus. Dragging ourselves up the hill at Fatty's Shop was worse than Mount Everest, I swear (not that I have or will be going up that mountain anytime soon). There were so many thoughts running through my head.

Why didn't it rain? Why didn't the cab driver forget to pick me up? Why didn't I fall sick? What if I faint? What if I don't make it to the finish line? Who are these people? Did that old man just walk past me? When will this end?

By the time we had reached Domain Road, it was getting quite enjoyable and less tricky. I guess it had to do with the flat roads but who knows; maybe I am cut out for long walks. Then it started to drizzle, which made it even more exciting. I was beginning to enjoy this walk.

Then came the long straight walk along the sea walls. I could feel each step that I was taking. Looking at the tide coming in was a bonus. Half way through I came across this boy. He must have been 13 years or so. One look at him and I thought to myself: I have been complaining about this fun run from the time I entered and here was this boy who couldn't walk properly – enjoying it and making every effort to reach the finish line. All sorts of feelings ran through my mind – some for the boy and some for me.

When we got to the final checkpoint, Ms CommsWalla was cheering for us. She congratulated us with some scrumptious chocolates. Thank God the walk was over. However I was glad that I took part. I had learnt a very important lesson – always appreciate life and never to lose hope.

# Lifting the veil on sexual rights



A PUBLICATION which explores young women's issues as well as their sexual reproductive and health rights was launched at Suva Sangam College with more than 100 senior female students in attendance.

The journal titled 'Unveiled' is an outcome of the Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF) - a component of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement's Young Women in Leadership Programme. The programme is aimed at supporting and encouraging young girls and women to reclaim their voice – in their schools, youth groups, churches and communities – and to speak up on issues that concern them.

Launching the publication, 2009 ELF graduate Seema Prasad said: "Women experience changes in their bodies as they grow. It is important that we are aware of this as it affects our health. It is

equally important to dispel myths about women's bodies that have been created by our patriarchal society and strongly embedded in culture over time."

Prasad, who quoted from Eve Ensler's 'Vagina Monologues' got the room giggling when she mentioned vagina several times her speech.

"It is words and phrases like this that we girls have been veiled from: good girls don't speak like this, don't talk about that with boys. It is unsaid, unnamed, but every girl, regardless of caste and creed knows what 'this' and 'that' is. It is like a veil that shadows a woman's right to sexual and reproductive health." It is for this reason that Prasad explained why she and her fellow graduates chose 'Unveiled' as the title of their journal.

'Unveiled' is an avenue for young women to

talk safely and openly about their bodies and the forces that exert power over them. It is about unveiling topics that are considered taboo in society and it is hoped will create a safe space for sharing ideas that enable and empower young women to make informed decisions.

'Unveiled' also showcases Pacific women artists such as Luisa Tora, Margaret Aull, Cresantia France Koya, Sangeeta Singh, Susan Naidu, Erna Tavola, Marita Brodie, Alisa Vavataga and many more.

This journal is a fourth-generation publication following on the heels of Grl Talk, Headstrong and Dau Vosa.

FWRM's Young Women in Leadership Programme has been supported by Oxfam New Zealand since 2003.

# Rotary award for ELF graduate

ROSHIKA DEO, a graduate of FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum and currently a Research Officer at FWRM, was awarded Rotary's highest honour, the Paul Harris Fellowship Award. The award was given by Rotary Club of New Market, Auckland for outstanding achievement in the community on July 10. The award is named after the founder of Rotary, Paul Harris.

Roger Harvey, president of Rotary Club of New Market, Auckland cited Roshika's community spirit as a reason for giving her the award.

"Roshika brought a consistent enthusiasm to making a difference in Fiji. She has worked with her club in assisting squatter camps with food, schools with books and taken on the St Giles Hospital kitchen project," Harvey said.

"She convinced her Suva Rotaract club

colleagues and then our Rotary Club to take on a major refurbishment. This meant trying to design layout and equipment remotely. Roshika raised significant funding from a business and then arranged for her club members and friends to work 13 consecutive weekends to clean, paint and lay a new floor.

"Roshika has displayed a steadfast approach to helping those who can't help themselves. She is not afraid to work with those where there is a stigma: mental health, squatter



camps and young girls who are forced to sell themselves on the streets of Suva."

# Friendship across many miles

## Inspiration from the highlands of Kup

Young Women's Officer, **Michelle Reddy**, and Human Rights Training Officer, **Shabina Khan**, recently returned from their second trip to Kup in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Michelle shares her story of working with young women on their vision of peace in the troubled region.

KUP is known for its long history of tribal fighting, which only came to an end in recent times with the peaceful intervention by Kup Women for Peace (KWP) founding members. Today, the women of KWP continue in their role as peace-makers and community development implementers. However, life in Kup continues to be very challenging for women, particularly young women, who face violence, discrimination and lack of access to many basic services and opportunities.

In order to engage young women in their vision of peace for Kup and the highlands, KWP has been working with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement on a young women's empowerment programme. FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum is designed for young urban and peri-urban Suva women, so we worked with KWP and Oxfam PNG Highlands to develop a programme that suited the lives of women living in the rugged Highlands region. Discussions began in 2006, which led to the first training programme held from September 15-19, 2008. We have just returned from the second successful round of training in Kup, held from June 29-July 3, 2009.

As we prepared for our second visit to Kup, in Simbu province, Shabina and I chatted about our last visit and how we were both looking forward to seeing familiar faces again. Getting to eat kumu (vegetables) and kaikai (root crops) and seeing the enthusiastic young women of Kup was worth catching three flights and the four hour drive to Kup for!

This second training programme was designed to expand on topics we had covered during training last year, such as transformative feminist leadership. We also wanted to focus on women's human rights, as well as on giving the participants an opportunity to practice public speaking, something that they looked at during the first training.

This time, we decided to put the participants into groups of threes, tasked with making a short presentation. The young women chose their own topics and were given scope to present in ways in which they were comfortable.

Some of the topics they picked included bride price, violence against women, the need to give young women an opportunity to attend school. The participants dazzled us with their creative



skits, mock protest marches, and speeches that they used to relay their message.

It was nice to see some of the participants from our first programme at the second training. We asked them about how they had used the information they had gained: Most of the young women said they had used the information with their friends, family members and school mates. One of the most significant changes was that at least four of the first-round participants had taken up leadership roles within their schools or classrooms. For many others, the ability to speak up during class and on breaks was significant.

Two of last year's trainees spoke of how they had made use of the training.

Cathy Lapun said: "Before I use to take things and remain silent. Now when I am treated unfairly like given too many tasks in school, for example cleaning up, I am able to stand up for myself and make teachers see the importance of sharing tasks."

Another trainee, Julie Martin said: "In school I am able to communicate with confidence and as such the girls and boys in school voted me as



a vice president of the student council. Before I didn't have the confidence and used to be ashamed of speaking. After the first training, my self-esteem has improved."

With these little steps, the young women of Kup are slowly making changes for themselves and their community - despite the prevalence of violence, lack of employment and educational opportunities, and transportation difficulties. Apart from empowering these young women, the Young Women in Leadership Programme will also need to address their socio-economic difficulties and share practical skills and strategies.



## YOUNG WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

KWP's Young Women in Leadership Pilot Programme will have two components. One component involves working with girls of Holy Cross Kup Primary School by sharing basic information on leadership and human rights. The second is a livelihood component for young women, which includes knowledge-sharing and empowerment sessions, with a focus on identifying sustainable livelihood projects - a current focus of Kup Women for Peace.

KWP is also hoping to engage both groups of young women and girls in developing educational material such as posters, T-shirts and banners to raise awareness about women's human rights in the Highlands.

KWP's vision for the leadership programme is to create a pool of young women leaders who will continue their peacebuilding and community development work. Strengthening the capacity of these young women will help sustain and invigorate the Kup-based organisation. The partnership on this programme also links the young women of Fiji and PNG, which strengthens our Pacific women's movement by building solidarity amongst Pacific women.

Our trip to Kup would not have been possible without the support of a large, diverse team. We would like to thank Anna Padarath, Daniel Cowley, the awesome team of Oxfam International PNG Highlands Programme, the men and women of Kup Women for Peace who welcomed us into their homes and lives. To Mama Agnes, Mary Kini, Maggie, Elise and Maraia, many thanks for the warm meals, laughter and tears.

Lastly, thank you to the young women who embraced the training and shared their stories with us.

*The Young Women in Leadership Programme of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement is supported by Oxfam New Zealand.*

### Tribal fighting breaks out in PNG Highlands

DURING August and September, negotiation over compensation for land being used to build a road has broken down in Kerowagi and Kup sub-districts in the Simbu Province. The raging tribal warfare has so far claimed two lives while several properties have been destroyed.

In an interview with *The Age*, Yanny Guman of Oxfam PNG Highlands Programme, which works in partnership with the Kup Women for Peace (KWP), said: "The Kup people didn't want to retaliate, they left it to the police to investigate."

Police have set up camp in the district, but more fighting resulted in several houses being burnt down and gardens destroyed.

Despite the troubles, Kup Women for Peace continue with their work in bringing about a peaceful resolution through mediation and support for the community.



Kup is always more beautiful in the mornings. The smell of fresh crisp air and the coldness of the highlands is an epitome to this natural mountain beauty. At this altitude, the fog clears up around mid-morning and this may be ideal for urban dwellers like us to sleep in but this is not the case for many Kup women who are engaged in their morning activities by this time. Maggie Palme is one the many women who walk for two hours battling the cold to come to Kup. Maggie has been part of the community since she was 23.

LIKE most of the women in Kup, Maggie starts her day working in her garden weeding the kumu (leafy vegetables) patch, or planting kaukau (sweet potatoes) and raising pigs. She is also raising her sister's children so she prepares meals for the children to take to school.

Though she is only 35, Maggie has witnessed and endured more tragedy and terror than most people experience in a lifetime. Born in a community ravaged by tribal war and lawlessness, she was robbed of her husband when he was murdered by drunkards. Devastated but determined, she continued to raise her children and work on the farm. She joined Kup Women for Peace in 1995 and now she is the prominent Village Birth Assistant (VBA). She underwent a six-week basic training in 1996 at Kundiawa where she learnt how to deliver babies or assist the women until they are taken to the hospital.

Maggie shared with us a horrifying experience she encountered during her early days as the VBA during the on-going tribal fights in Kup. It was a Sunday morning when one of the village women went into labour and was having a breech birth (baby's legs delivered first). With the nearest health centre three to four hours' walk away, the father-in-law asked the daughter-in-law in labour to hang on to a rope tied down from the roof and deliver the baby by herself. In Kup culture men are not allowed to be

present during delivery and sometimes women deliver the baby without any assistance. While hanging on to the rope from the roof the woman struggled to deliver the baby managing to push out one foot of the baby.

When Maggie arrived, she safely helped the mother to lie on a bamboo stretcher and by this time the baby was half-stuck in the womb and getting pale. The medical centre was too far away so they sought the assistance of the village priest to drive them there. However he was unable to take them straight away because he was in church at the time. Maggie, with no experience in assisting breech births, decided to assist in the delivery of the baby. By now the baby had stopped breathing and Maggie provided artificial resuscitation while waiting for the priest. When the priest arrived, hours later, the mother's condition was deteriorating as the placenta was still inside of her while the baby was having difficulty breathing.

On the way to the hospital, the baby's condition began to worsen and the priest stopped the van to baptise the baby girl. Maggie named the baby Jessica and after two hours of a torturous drive they finally reached the hospital and received medical care. Both the mother and the daughter survived. And Maggie continues to assist women of Kup in all her wonderful ways.

# Women finally get UN agency

AFTER more than three years of political foot-dragging, the 192-member General Assembly adopted a historic resolution on September 14 aimed at creating a new UN agency for women.

The decision to create a separate powerful body to deal exclusively with gender-related activities comes years - or decades - after the United Nations created specialised agencies to deal with specific issues, including children, population, refugees, food, environment, education, health and tourism, among many others.

Currently, there are four existing women's UN entities in the world body: the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues; the UN Division for the Advancement of Women; and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

But none of them is as politically powerful and financially stable as full-fledged UN agencies.

When the new women's agency is created, perhaps by the middle of next year, it will be headed by an under-secretary-general (USG), the

third highest ranking position in the UN system, after the secretary-general and the deputy secretary-general.

The four existing women's entities are not headed by USGs, while all agencies such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are.

The resolution "strongly supports the consolidation" of the four bodies currently dealing with women "into a composite entity, taking into account the existing mandates".

The Assembly also requested Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to produce a comprehensive proposal specifying details of the proposed composite entity; an organisational chart; funding for the new body; and the composition of the executive board to oversee its operational activities.

Charlotte Bunch, executive director of the Centre for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, told IPS: "We are very relieved that the General Assembly has finally taken decisive action

to create the new gender equality entity on the eve of the 15th anniversary of the Beijing women's conference."

"We consider this a great victory for women's rights as well as for the coalition of women's and other civil society organisations that have worked hard for over three years to bring this entity into being," she added.

Daniela Rosche, head of Oxfam's gender campaign, said that while it welcomes the principle on this much-needed women's agency, "The attitude of some member states to weaken its mandate at the last minute is deplorable".

This decision to have a new women's rights entity in place will mean absolutely nothing if member states fail to give it a clear mission, she added.

The good news is that the new agency has the potential to streamline decision-making and programming related to women's rights under one overarching agency, Rosche said in a statement released Monday.

"This body doesn't add another layer to the already heavy UN bureaucracy. The potential to have an impact on women's lives through education, organising and empowerment is very real and exciting," Rosche said.

(Source: *Inter Press Service*)

## Tonga's leaders reject CEDAW

THE Tongan government has refused to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) saying the kingdom is not ready for such a treaty. Tonga's Prime Minister said they had reservations about some of the provisions of the convention.

**MYTH #1: ratification of CEDAW would give too much power to the international community with the provisions of the Convention superseding the Constitution and national laws of Tonga.**

**FACT:** Treaties adopted in Tonga are not "self-executing." This means that legislation to implement any treaty provision would come before the Cabinet in the same way any other bill does. As with many international agreements, countries can express "reservations, understandings and declarations" in cases where there are discrepancies between the international convention or treaty and domestic law. Where differences do exist, the convention calls on states to take appropriate measures to progressively promote the principle of non-discrimination. Such language upholds Tongan sovereignty and grants no enforcement authority to the United Nations.

There has been a legislative comparative analysis undertaken in Tonga regarding CEDAW

however this has been ignored. There are already parts of the Tonga law which generally comply with the requirements of CEDAW and the treaty is compatible with the principles of the Tongan Constitution.

**MYTH #2: ratification of CEDAW supports abortion through its promotion of access to "family planning."**

**FACT:** CEDAW does not address the matter of abortion. The U.S. State Department has officially stated that CEDAW is "abortion neutral." Many countries in which abortion is illegal - such as Ireland, Burkina Faso, and Rwanda - have ratified the Convention.

**MYTH #3: ratification of CEDAW might be used to sanction same-sex marriages.**

**FACT:** There is no provision in the CEDAW Treaty that would compel the Tonga cabinet to pass same-sex marriage laws in order to comply. The CEDAW Treaty makes clear that it is not aimed at all sex-based discrimination, but only at discrimination that is directed specifically against women. A same-sex marriage claim would refer to discrimination against men and women, and be handled under a completely different section of human rights declarations. Many of the countries who have ratified CEDAW do not sanction same sex marriage.

**MYTH #4: many other countries have not ratified CEDAW**

**FACT:** As of 2008, 185 countries have ratified the convention of countries who are members of the United Nations. That means that **95% of UN members have already ratified CEDAW.** Only eight countries have refused to ratify CEDAW: the United States, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, Nauru, Palau and Tonga. The most high profile country not to ratify CEDAW is the US - who is a signatory, but has not yet ratified the convention. CEDAW's provisions are consistent with U.S. law and include rights that many American women take for granted. These rights include as access to education, legal redress against domestic violence, and access to health care.

Lack of U.S. ratification has dampened the country's leadership in promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. During Senate hearings in 2002, Yale Law School Dean Hongju Koh noted, "Lack of U.S. ratification has hindered their role as a human rights leader, damaged their diplomatic relations, and reduced their international standing."

(Source: *Extract of submission by Tonga National Centre for Women and Children to the cabinet*)



# Pregnancy held against netball coach Walker

IN SEPTEMBER, Fiji's national netball coach Melissa Walker was prevented from travelling with the team to the Pacific Mini Games in the Cook Islands because she is pregnant.

Netball Fiji defended its decision to prevent Walker from going on the basis that her health and that of her unborn baby were at risk. However, Walker's own doctor had given her the all-clear to accompany the team.

Despite the controversy hitting the headlines the team went on to win the gold medal without their coach.

This incident highlights the discrimination women still face, especially when it comes to pregnancy and work.

Fiji as a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is obligated to eliminate discrimination through the implementation of corrective actions, programmes, laws, policies and all other appropriate measures.

The State is also responsible for eliminating discrimination by any private actors, whether individuals or groups. These obligations came into effect in 1995 when the State ratified CEDAW.

Under CEDAW, Netball Fiji as a private employer discriminated against Walker because she is pregnant. The Convention prohibits discrimination against women on the grounds of pregnancy and

ensures their effective right to work by providing for special protection to women during pregnancy (if required) in types of work proved to be harmful to them. It is important that the rights of women are promoted and protected especially in employment.

In Walker's case, her doctor stated being part of the team to the games would not affect her pregnancy. However, Netball Fiji claimed that due to her pregnancy, they were not able to guarantee that accommodation at the games village would be suitable for a woman late in her pregnancy. This is a violation of her right to work and Netball Fiji as her employers is obliged to provide protection to its pregnant employees that could prove harmful to her or her baby.

In this case, it should have pressured the Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee to provide alternative accommodation suitable for pregnant women without violating her right to work.

Netball Fiji was also reported in the media stating that Walker needed to take better care of her unborn child. This is a clear example of the protectionist model of equality which views biological difference and social assumptions as a standard for the roles and capacities attached to men and women. By taking this position, Netball Fiji is clearly playing into the notion that women are weak and therefore need protection.

The perception that this creates is that Walker is too weak to make the right decision for her unborn child and herself. It reinforces the perception that women, in this case pregnant women, are weak, subordinate and in need of protection.

Rather than focusing attention on the external, structural or systematic causes of the subordination of women, and in trying to correct them, Netball Fiji's decision is an endorsement of the negative gender values attached to women.

Netball Fiji decision's is regrettable because it carries the implication that it accepts women's subjugation as natural, inherent and unchangeable, rather than challenging the prevalent assumptions about women.

Rather than taking on the Fiji Association of Sports and National Committee to put in place anti-discrimination measures and policies for athletes and officials at national, regional and international meets, Netball Fiji instead has penalised its coach for being pregnant.

This case clearly illustrates the immediate need for the State to progressively work toward the implementation of CEDAW which will result in substantive equality for all women. Under CEDAW, this would mean equality based on outcomes that ensure equality of opportunity (law, policy and programmes), equality of access and equality of benefits.

## Fiji NGOs submit CEDAW report

The Fiji NGO CEDAW Advisory Committee submitted its second, third and fourth parallel reports to the UN CEDAW Committee in July 2009.

The parallel report indicates that general implementation of CEDAW principles is weak in Fiji and even where there is political commitment on the part of government; there are insufficient resources either available or allocated to implement the standards in CEDAW.

It is significant to note, Fiji has only demonstrated marked advancement in the implementation of CEDAW where strategic partnerships between government and women's NGO's have together effectively harnessed the most efficient technical capacities and resources for maximum impact. The Family Law Act 2003 (FLA) is one such example.

It was recognised that periods of political instability, ethnic tensions, low economic growth and increasing poverty, in a period of economic transition have impacted negatively on the State Party's efforts to implement the Convention.

"The Reserve Bank of Fiji has estimated that

violence against women costs the Fijian economy close to FJD300 million a year, 7 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Of this 97 million is in direct cost borne by victims and their families; and government spends a further 200 million annually on welfare, law enforcement and health care for complainants," the reports states.

Gender discrimination in employment occurs in the wider context of the marginalisation of women in the negotiation and implementation of Fiji's trade and economic policy.

The report further highlights, women's access to health services continues to deteriorate. The shortage of qualified doctors and nurses affects the quality and availability of medical services along with poor working conditions and salaries which have forced many qualified medical personnel to emigrate. The shortage of obstetricians, gynaecologists, paediatricians and nurses greatly affects health care of mothers and babies.

The report also gives special attention to the situation of rural women. Rural dwellers make almost half of Fiji's total population, as such; political instability, natural disasters, displacement,

deteriorating economic conditions and market restructuring were mentioned as some of the key factors which increases vulnerability of rural women.

The ultimate predicament which the report brings to light is poverty which is rapidly increasing as a result of negligent decisions made by the military government, as well as the impact of the global economic meltdown.

"Fiji's present economic crisis is mainly self-inflicted, influenced largely by the domestic political events and less by the impact of the global financial crisis which has only started to take effect," says the report.

The report suggests that, until democracy is restored, the country's current economic situation will persist due to lack of investor confidence and the rule of law. It further states that, "advancement in women' rights must be viewed through the prism of a fully fledged military dictatorship in which the rule of law has been suspended, democratic elections are a

*Cont'd on page 12*

# Women's groups launch video on Asia-Pacific movement



WOMEN have always come together over food to discuss their lives and dreams. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), in partnership with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), brought Asian and Pacific feminists together in November 2008 to continue these conversations at the 11th AWID Forum.

At the forum, the Asia-Pacific feminists hosted a session called Tok Talk, an Asia-Pacific talk show complete with guests, cameras and an in-studio audience, to discuss how younger and older feminists can collaborate to address the diverse challenges of our region.

Tok Talk - Nourishing an Asia Pacific Movement DVD is a virtual feast of ideas where feminists from the Pacific and Asia address some of the key questions facing our region.

Questions that were pondered included does the Pacific voice get lost in the huge Asia-Pacific grouping? How can younger and older feminists collaborate to address the diverse challenges of our region? How can we get past old conflicts to build a stronger feminist movement?

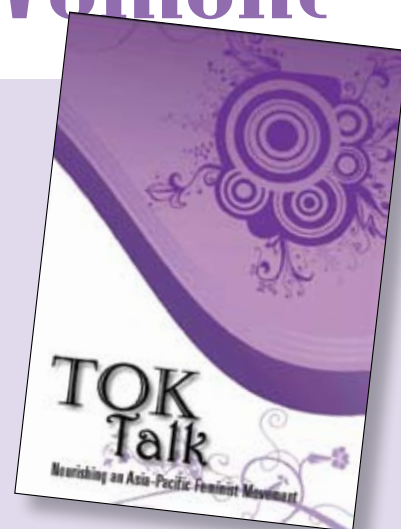
The Tok Talk DVD was launched July 31 by

Claire Rowland, Overseas Program Manager of the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and Imrana Jalal, a founding member of FWRM and APWLD. The launch also featured an exhibition of FWRM and APWLD herstory over the past two decades.

Jalal said: "People and the links they make is what forms movements. Without the human element and the links between individual women, the inspiration and social capital that drives the women's movement will be lacking. The movement will die a natural death for want of passion. One thing is for sure...actions together build movements, and sustain movements."

Jalal noted that the women's movement is a powerful force to be reckoned with as a mass women's movement. She said we need to work together to create regional mechanisms, policies, treaties, conventions and then have those regional mechanisms apply to us locally.

The project was supported and funded by International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and Oxfam New Zealand.



*"Being part of a larger women's movement gives us the opportunity to have our voices heard at the international policy level, where so often Pacific voices, Pacific women's experiences, are not included on the international agenda. In times of conflict, knowing that you have solidarity and the support of people or the women's movement outside of our own country is extremely comforting, particularly when the spaces that we can be part of internally is getting smaller and smaller."*

**Virisila Buadromo, FWRM Executive Director**

*"I see some women's movement from some other parts of the world ... and I feel that I have some of my sisters on the other side. They are on the other side and I'm on this side and we are facing the same problem but we are trying to address the (same) issues."*

**Mary Kini, Kup Women for Peace, PNG**

*"Having been involved in other women's groups in the past ... we didn't ... put in place a succession plan... a plan that when we send delegation to say a committee meeting in government or a summit that there will be young women, that there will always be a pool of young women trained, so that the succession is smooth."*

**Tupou Vere, Pacific Concerns Resource Centre, Fiji**

*"I'm just really encouraged by this whole training that young women are receiving. I've seen how it's changed or how it's transformed people who have been involved in this training. (Young women) are articulating their views about strategies for advocacy and that sort of thing...I think as far as nourishing a stronger Asia Pacific, that exchange is really good."*

**Luisa Tora, AIDS Task Force, Fiji**

# Your Life is in Your Hands

THE Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) published *Your Life is in Your Hands: Women Workers in Fiji's Tax Free Zone – A Rights Approach* in 2008. APWLD's Labour and Migration Task Force has worked with its members to identify and expose discriminatory policies and laws affecting local and migrant women workers in special economic zones in APWLD member countries in the context of globalisation from a feminist perspective.

The research was carried out by Avelina Rokoduru, Labour and Migration Task Force member from Fiji. She took up the challenge to study the conditions of working women in tax-free zones in Fiji.

The tax-free zones were established in the 1970s and 1980s as part of the economic initiatives of the government of that period in response to external economic globalisation pressure from

international financial institutions who dictated economic development to the developing world.

The book identifies the main criticism of the creation of special economic zones such as that it gives businesses, usually foreign corporations, more economic liberty than indigenous companies outside these zones, with special tax concessions granted to these investors upon their fulfillment of certain criteria set by the government.

It further states that these special economic zones have grown in size, localities and functionalities so that the various types of manufacturing and processing activities found in any location have progressively diversified from small-scale to large-scale manufacturing and processing.

The publication presents an analysis of policies and laws related to tax free zones in Fiji in order to pinpoint discriminatory aspects of

these legislations and how they affect the lives and livelihood of women workers. The research identifies and reveals the conditions experienced by women workers in these zones.

The publication suggests Fiji still needs to improve the working conditions of its women workers and the findings of this research will be used as a platform to advocate for better working conditions in tax-free zones and other sectors with special focus on maternity protection and rights.

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is an independent, non government, non profit organization with consultative status at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). It is committed to enabling women in the region to use law as an instrument of social change for their empowerment in the struggle for justice, peace, equality and development.

## Findings

- 91% of women earn \$80 or less per week.
- Garment Wages Council has also contributed to low hourly rates in the industry.
- Women workers sign a single-page annual agreement that is brief in nature and lacks specific provisions on maternity leave, payment of leave and work on public holidays, sexual harassment, addressing grievances, and wages and allowance awards.
- Women are not unionised because of \$1 per week union out of their net pay is too high, coupled with threat of possible victimisation from management for joining a union.
- The majority of women are not aware of their labour, social and civil

rights as workers. This contributes to their exploitation in the garment manufacturing environment.

- Maternity leave provisions discourage women from enjoying their reproductive rights because of low daily rate of \$5 per day for every child compared to \$14.85-\$17.55 per normal working day. Because of this, some women deny themselves their 42 days of post-birth leave in their need to return to earning normal wages.
- Most women cannot vote or campaign in municipal elections because they live outside town/city boundaries. While they can vote at national elections, they prefer not to conduct campaigns during national elections.

# A view of Fiji's sugar industry

THE sugar industry has come a long way in Fiji. *Ganna: Portrait of the Fiji Sugar Industry*, written by Dr. Padma Narsey Lal, which provides a comprehensive assessment of the farming and processing components of Fiji's sugar industry.

It is a portrayal of the realities of the land: the landowners, the farmers, the yields, the industries, the environment and how it fabricates Fiji.

Many important lessons have been learnt or reaffirmed in carrying out this research: for example, the critical importance of secure land title to the farming sector; the need for a cane payment scheme that provides incentives for farmers to maximise the volume and quality of their output; the need for good corporate

governance in the milling sector to overcome the agency problems leading to its poor performance; and the industry rationalisation necessary to adjust to the lower prices received for exports to the EU.

*Ganna* represents an excellent in-depth analysis and understanding of the economics of the sugar industry in Fiji.

*Her deeply creased forehead, calloused hands and well-worn old blue ankle length lahanga (long skirt), a white blouse and tattered orhni signalled that she was a struggling daughter of the soil. Aisha is a rarity in Fiji: she is an Indo-Fijian woman cutting cane. Until recently, cane cutting was an all male, all Indo-Fijian, occupation. But things have been changing in recent*

*years. Now, many indigenous Fijians are working as 'substitute' cutters, often to raise money for community projects back home in the islands or on the mainland.*

*For an Indo-Fijian man, cutting cane now is an occupation of last resort. But an Indo-Fijian woman cutting cane? And that too a woman close to seventy, a time when people retire to savour their heard-earned sunset years enjoying grandchildren, dispensing advice to younger members of the family...the cane cutting gang of which the family had been a member for several decades began to play up, exploiting her vulnerability. Sometimes, for now obvious reason, her crop would be the last to cut. Sometimes her cane would not be cut at all. So both out of sheer desperation and to ensure that her voice was represented in the cane cutting gang that made important decisions, she joined the gang and took up cane cutting herself. Village life has its undoubted virtues, I realised as I listened to Aisha, but it can also be brutally cruel for people who are poor and vulnerable, particularly today in Fiji when people seem to have lost all sense of compassion and appear to have become more selfish, focused exclusively on their own narrow, self serving interests...*

Excerpt from *Ganna: Portrait of the Fiji Sugar Industry*



## About us

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural non-governmental organization committed to removing discrimination against women through institutional reforms and attitudinal changes.

By means of core programmes and innovative approaches, FWRM practices and promotes feminism, democracy, good governance and human rights.

We strive to empower, unite and provide leadership opportunities for women in Fiji, especially for emerging young leaders, indigenous and locally-born women.

The FWRM vision is for the women of Fiji to be free from all forms of discrimination, have equal access to opportunities and to live in a healthy environment where the principles of feminism, democracy, good governance, multiculturalism and human rights prevail.

## Join us

YES! I want to support the  
Fiji Women's Rights Movement

ANNUAL FEE:

Waged - \$10 • Organisation - \$30  
Non-waged/Student - \$5

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ph: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



Fiji Women's Rights Movement  
Ph: (679) 3313156 Fax: 331 3466  
website: [www.fwr.org.fj](http://www.fwr.org.fj)  
Email: [info@fwr.org.fj](mailto:info@fwr.org.fj)  
Mail: GPO Box 14194, Suva, Fiji Is

# LOOKOUT!

## Improve your public speaking

Emerging Leaders' Alumni in partnership with Capital Toastmasters Suva will be holding a workshop on improving communication and public speaking skills on Wednesday, November 4, 2009 at 6pm. The workshop will also be an opportunity for networking. Light refreshments will be provided. Keep an eye out for email updates on the confirmed venue for the event. For more information email the Young Women's Officer [michelle@fwr.org.fj](mailto:michelle@fwr.org.fj)

## 16 Days of Activism

16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women begins on November 25, which is International Day Against Violence against Women and ends on December 10, International Human Rights Day. The start and ends dates symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights. This 16-day period also covers other significant dates including November 29, International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, December 1, World AIDS Day, and December 6, which marks the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre. This year's theme is Commit: We are responsible. Act: We can all make a difference. Demand: We are all accountable. We CAN End Violence against Women! Please visit the official 16 Days website <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html>.

## 30 years of CEDAW

On December 18, 2009 the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) will mark its 30th anniversary. Often described as an international bill of rights for women, CEDAW provides the basis for realising equality between women and men. Ratified by 185 countries that agree to uphold the principles of the Convention, CEDAW is designed to ensure that governments and quasi-governmental agencies work to achieve equality and nondiscrimination for women in their respective countries. This anniversary provides a good opportunity to reflect on the gains made and the long way yet to go in achieving true equality for all women. The recent rejection of CEDAW by the Tongan government is one example that makes this anniversary all the more thought-provoking for the Pacific women's rights movement. Keep a lookout for events to mark CEDAW's 30th year.

## Fiji NGOs submit CEDAW report

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mere chimera, and in the absence of human rights in Fiji."

In preparation towards the submission of the parallel report, a consultative information session was held with the members of the NGO CEDAW Advisory committee as well as significant partners. This event offered a broad prospect to the definitive

parallel report.

The UN CEDAW working group committee met in August to review the State and Parallel reports and prepare a list of issues and questions. Fiji is scheduled to present the reports to the UN CEDAW Committee at the 46th Session in July 2010. An NGO delegation will present the parallel report to the committee at the 46th Session in Geneva.