

# The unfairness of fairness creams

*Continued from page 1*

"We have our own advertising policy where we air advertisements which are mindful of the different religious, cultural and traditional values but there is no common advertising policy which media organizations use," said Mr Herman.

Jackie Underhill, Sales and Marketing Manager of Fiji Television, agreed that some fairness cream advertisements were offensive.

"I don't like some of those commercials that come on air and we've had a few complaints regarding them. However, we have a written advertising policy and those advertisements are within the boundaries of the policy," said Ms Underhill.

She suggested that if those "commercials offend certain women then they shouldn't buy it".

Meanwhile, Vijay Kumar, Makans Drugs General Manager, one distributor of fairness creams, said that they have an advertising policy which covers gender issues.

"People use tanning creams overseas and we use whitening creams here", said Mr Kumar.

"The advertisements are not meant to be offensive. The point the advertisements try to make is that the creams act as a shield against the harmful UV rays which darken the skin," he said.

Mr Kumar also said that the All Fair advertisements were pulled off air because they received so many complaints regarding it.

"We support any move to formulate a common policy regarding advertisements which are gender sensitive," he said.

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## Family Law Bill tabled in parliament after 12 years

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has lobbied long and hard for two forthcoming bills to be tabled in Parliament.

The Industrial Relations Bill and the Family Law Bill have almost spent a decade on the backburners buried under bureaucracy.

Some interesting facts of the Family Law Bill include:

\* Ensuring that all parties have an equal opportunity:

- > Marriage is recognized as an equal partnership
- > Fathers will have a full and equal right to claim custody of children
- > Fathers will have a right to claim maintenance for children from mothers

\* An emphasis on Children - requiring parents to support their children, clears powers to make any order based on needs of the child/children, discriminatory status of ex-nuptial children removed.

\* Requiring adult earning children to care for aged parents who are dependent

# FWRM re-strategises

"We know what we are about and where we are going".

That thought was expressed by the FWRM Coordinator, Virisila Buadromo, after a mentally exhausting two day Strategic Planning weekend.

The discussion, which was held at the Shangri La Fijian Hotel in mid December last year, had the participation of all members of the staff, the Management Board and some Members. Budget constraints meant that numbers were limited.

The weekend affirmed the impact that FWRM wants to achieve through its programme over the next two years in legislative and policy change, awareness raising and attitude change and young women's leadership program.

The weekend also strategised on how FWRM could increase the quality and effectiveness of its work by focusing on strengthening its financial base and working on improving its public image.

Some of the recommendations arising out of the weekend included:

- recruiting a programme manager
- the formulation of objectives for the Movement's Public Relations and Marketing
- strengthening FWRM's financial base.



*Imvana Jalal (left) and FWRM Coordinator Virisila Buadromo (right) explaining their vision for the organisation during the strategic planning weekend.*

## Say what?! Do you find fairness cream advertisements offensive?



**Elaine Taylor, 29**

It's a good thing. Generally speaking, it's good as long it serves the purpose.



**Gina Dutt, 24**

I don't use creams so we just ignore the advertisements. We are what we are.



**Sanjay Kumar, 26**

I believe the beauty of a person lies in not the way she dresses, looks, does her hair but in her eyes because it is the opening to her soul. Therefore, it does not bother me.



**Luisa, 25**

I don't agree with the ads. You don't have to be fair to be pretty. You should thank God for the skin color you are born with.



# Sassy Subhashni!

She's sassy, with it, intelligent plus has an opinion on everything.

She does not drink, do drugs or smoke. But like any other teen, she's fun loving and enjoys hanging out with her friends, playing pool and soccer.

Subhasni Raj was chosen the headgirl of Indian High school this year.

Her academic schedule is balanced by the number of after school activities she's involved in.

She was a participant at the International Children's Day of Broadcasting celebrations in December last year where she co-hosted *Close Up*- a current affairs television programme.

She's also a member of UNICEF's Youth Media Group, Safety Net and is also participating in the Duke of Edinburg Awards scheme as well as having participated in numerous essay and oratory contests.

"I get my confidence from being out there, doing things and making things happen. I try not to be study oriented only", said Ms Raj.

"I believe that these days youths have an excuse for everything that goes wrong in their lives. They are not able to deal with the issue so they blame everyone but themselves."

"I'd say to these youths, stop feeling sorry for yourselves because life's out there for the taking," commented Ms Raj.

Ms Raj said that she gets her inspiration from her uncle who never gave up no matter how difficult things got.

Ms Raj is, at the moment, trying to get a permit from the Suva City Council to keep a horse at her Raiwaqa home.

"I want to own a horse so I can learn to ride because my mother won't let me go to the Pony Club since she's afraid I'll fall and break my neck or something," she chuckles.

Where would she like to be 20 years from now?



"I'll be the Secretary-General of the United Nations," said Ms Raj with utter seriousness.

And why not? If Ms Raj can get Kofi Annan the current Secretary General of the UN to write her a letter of recommendation, than whose to say that she won't achieve her goal?

*Saying it with a smile...Subhashni Raj*

# FWRM, CEDAW and the 'Big Apple'

It was the trip of a lifetime for the FWRM Coordinator, Virisila Buadromo, flying to New York to present the NGO Shadow Report to the UN's CEDAW Panel of Experts.

CEDAW is the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, also known as the International Women's Bill of Rights. As part of its obligations, governments that ratify CEDAW must file a report on the status of women in their country every five years.

FWRM presented the Shadow Report because it is the NGO CEDAW Secretariat in Fiji. FWRM Board Chairperson, Imrana Jalal and RRRF Resource Trainer, Wati Secto-Dubain, accompanied Ms Buadromo.

A Shadow Report is the NGO's version of events when it comes to reporting to the CEDAW Experts. Governments file their reports first and the Shadow Report is meant to fill in the gaps. This ensures that the CEDAW committee hears as many points of view of Fiji women as possible.

A full and proper Shadow Report on each article

was not possible since the NGOs were not made aware until mid-December 2001 that Fiji's first hearing would be in January 2002, which was when the International Women's Rights Action Watch informed FWRM.

It was also significant for the Fiji Government because it was the first Pacific Island Country to submit its initial report to CEDAW - five years after it ratified the United Nations Convention.

The purpose of Fiji NGO Shadow Report was not to aggressively criticise the State's report or to challenge its veracity.

"The Government report was reasonable for the time it was written and filed".

"However, there were important omissions as well as inadequate treatment of certain issues," said Ms Buadromo.

In New York, the NGO delegation met every CEDAW expert personally and hand delivered copies of the Fiji Shadow report.

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## How long did it take to write CEDAW and who wrote it?

CEDAW is a result of more than 20 years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

## What does "equality" mean, and what does CEDAW do to promote it?

There are sexual and physical differences between men and women that we have to accept. Men and women play different roles in society. However, CEDAW says that this difference must not be used to justify subjecting women to unequal treatment and to deprive them of their human rights. The basic definition of equality means treating people the same in all circumstances, but CEDAW goes further to say where men and women are different, laws and policies must be putting place to protect women from further discrimination. One way of achieving this is through affirmative action policies and laws.

## If we sign CEDAW, does that mean we must change our traditions and culture?

No. Our cultures and practices make us who we are in the Pacific. There are many aspects of culture that are good and should be preserved and maintained. To make us forget them or expect governments to change all our customs would be harmful to both the success of the Convention and the advocating for human rights. CEDAW requires countries that have signed it to take action to change only those cultural attitudes that are based on the idea of inferiority or the superiority of men and women or on stereotyped roles of men and women.

*Source: A Basic Information Guide to CEDAW*



# Editorial: Hectic past three months

Welcome to the first issue of Balance for 2002. This has been a hectic three months for the Fiji Women's Rights Movement.



We began our year by taking the lead role in putting together a Shadow Report for CEDAW and which was presented (by FWRM chairperson Imrana Jalal and RRRT Resource Trainer Wati Seeto Dubain and I) in New York in January. Personally I found the experience challenging and educational. It also made me feel proud to be part of the process.

On my return, it was back to business with the appointment of Laisa Bale as our new Programme Manager. We welcome Laisa to the staff, although she is no new face to the Movement. Prior to her appointment, Laisa was on our Management Board.

International Women's Day was a big day on our calendar and this year, instead of our usual breakfast we collaborated with Fiji Associate of Women Graduates and hosted a lunch at the USP Bure. Imrana and I spoke of our CEDAW experience in New York. It was great to meet a number of University students who came to be part of the lunch. It was also heart warming to see the men from the CCF showing their solidarity with us.

I would like to thank the hard working volunteers who have been helping the staff over the last three months. These include Joycelyn Narayan, Sandra F'ong, Mere Vuli, Diane Goodwillie, Imrana Jalal, Shelley Rao, Patricia Sachs Cornish, Shayne Sorby, Gina Houng Lee and Frazine Dutta. On behalf of the staff - I would like to express our appreciation for your contributions.

With regards to this issue, there is something for everyone. Take the time to read about the views expressed about the advertising of "skin lightening creams" and find out how you can support the smooth passage of the Family Law and Industrial Relations Bills.

I hope you enjoy this issue and if you wish to comment on any of these articles published - drop us a line and we will feature your letter in our next issue. Until then - stay safe and take care.

## New year, new board members and new staff

**January 2002:** FWRM was on the move again, this time on to their new premises at 115 Robertson Road, Suva.

Together with new premises comes a new staff member who is actually not new to FWRM at all.

Laisa Bale served on the Management Board for a year before joining as Programme Manager in March this year.

In addition, three new Management Board members were voted in during the Annual General Meeting.

Nehla Basawala, Makareta Waqavonovono and Tara Chetty were voted on the Board - joining Shayne Sorby, Patricia Sachs Cornish, Gina Houng Lee, Imrana Jalal and Shelley Rao who were re-elected for another term.

For the treasurer post, Frazine Dutta was re-elected unopposed.



Laisa Bale - Programme Manager

# Farewell, Diane...

*Diane Goodwillie has been a Management Board member of FWRM for the past three years and has been tirelessly involved with FWRM for more than 20 years. Bubu Diane, as she is fondly known to the younger members and volunteers at FWRM, is leaving Fiji in June with her partner Ruth to retire in Australia. We wish you well Ruth and Diane!*

## What brought you to Fiji?

I was doing work with the YWCA so I worked with the world YWCA, the regional office where there are all sorts of international things done within the South Pacific, helping women's groups. I worked mainly through the YWCA and then other things came along and I did some communications work. There was a newsletter we had called Office P'long Lomary - that was in the early 80's. I was involved in the very early beginnings of the regional work with women's groups.

## How did you come to be involved in the NGO community and work?

In university I was camp counselor with the kids and after that I worked at YWCA and loved it. We had children's programs and we had issues raised and my mother was also very active in YWCA so I think that sort of helped. Yes, I've done a lot of work with NGO's and women's groups.

## How long have you been involved with FWRM?

Well, I wasn't involved with the early formation but we sort of kept membership and kept involved right from when it first started in the late 80's. We lived in Nadi and occasionally we were called in to mediate if there were any problems or whatever. But in those early days we had a very active coordinator and I think we still have some newsletters from those days. It's really in the last couple of years that I've been so involved, because before I had jobs that were really heavy and intensive.

## Tell us some of your memories associated with FWRM that makes you smile when you think about it?

Some of the things that I enjoyed most were some of the things we did with the young women. We had a number of workshops a couple of years ago during Christmas time and it was really good to see the energy of the young people. In the early days, we'd go a collective meeting and there'd be very strong personalities and they'd be clashing. Someone would say one thing and the other would say some-

thing else and they'd be yelling at each other across the room. It was interesting to go to these things because in those days, in the late 80s, lots of women's groups were still virgin and FWRM was really in the forefront, I think. They spoke out a lot about women's issues and women's rights. You had different women's groups in different countries but no one was really doing anything specific about women's issues.

After spending almost 20 years working with women's groups and other NGO's I think that there is certain level of sophistication now that there wasn't before. Before, women's issues were more really with nutrition, family health and contraceptives. Now it's like running little workshops and programs raising people's awareness and the whole CEDAW process have really changed people and there's been a series of United Nations meetings started in 1975 and there was one in 80 and then in 85 and those really helped to politicize women.

I found a book which had interviews of five prime ministers from the Pacific from about 1981 about women's issues. Amazing the sort of changes that has taken place in everyone's heads about women and what their place is and the fact that there needs to be policies and legislations for them specifically.



Busy bee... Diane takes time out from work to pose for Balance



## Lips of a woman

Sangeeta Singh

Is fear on the lips of a woman insignificant  
when she speaks to me of  
an ailing woman, tired and worn out  
her heart and soul shot with M16s and stones  
ripped apart by children, women and men and  
the blood drips, slipping through my fingers  
to that woman with a sad voice  
asking to speak to someone I knew once a long time ago  
and I'm wondering why  
after so many years

Is fear on the lips of a woman insignificant  
when she hushes her foetus into silence  
in case the sound penetrates, screams  
out of the damp forest  
into the ears of rebels, radicals, revolutionaries, racist, rapist, realists  
is fear on the lips of a woman insignificant  
when she kisses me quickly  
wary of homophobia  
breaking us down  
into molecules that  
liquidates lesbians into invisibility

Is fear on my lips insignificant  
when I say I am part of this *vanua*  
I make up the *vanua*  
my blood nourishes the rivers that meander and shape the *vanua*  
and I will flow  
I will flood  
to reclaim  
without fear  
in the *vanua*  
which bore me  
  
at least myself

**Fiji Women's Rights Movement**  
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# balance

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## The unfairness of fairness creams

We may live in the 21st Century, but many people still harbour colonialist views about the paramourcy of fair skin and the inferiority of darker skinned people.

This article focuses on how women are portrayed in these melanin-controlling ointments advertisements.

The majority of local advertising agencies and clients seem to have missed the Gender Sensitivity 101 class the rest of the world attended over recent years.

Women still only appear in kitchen-related, family care oriented advertisements and men appear in car promotion, management roles.

This hasn't changed since television started in 1992 or since newspapers or radio started in Fiji during colonial times.

This perspective doesn't appear to be changing any time soon.

Former Minister for Education in the People's Coalition government, Pratap Chand has tried to address this issue in the Lower House but to no avail.

Discussing the advertisements at a recent Fiji Human Rights Commission gathering, he was told it could be argued that the creams and advertisements discriminate against people based on their personal characteristics (for which dark skinned people are protected by the Bill of Rights).

Fairness cream advertisements are at the forefront of the sexist advertising realm. Their advertisements clog the media on a daily basis.

The focus of these advertisements are women. The advertisements claim that fair skinned women are far more beautiful than those who are dark skinned.

Despite several Letters to the Editor protesting the 'unfairness' of these fairness cream advertisements, nothing much has been done by either advertisers or advertisement producers.

Media management say they don't see this changing soon.

"There's no forum in which the media and the advertisers and the non-government organizations can actually sit down and thrash this out and come to some sort of an agreement," said Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Executive Francis Ileman.

*continued on page 4*

**Production:** Joycelyn Narayan  
**Contributors:** Virisila Buadromo, Joycelyn Narayan, Sandra Fong, Luisa Torā

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