



# Balance

"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"

March

2014

## Young Women's Declaration



THE second Fiji Young Women's Forum - a successful follow up of the first ever Fiji Young Women's Forum in November 2013, saw another lively, creative and enabling space engaged by young women participants. The two-day Forum was held at Novotel, Lami on March 14-16, 2014.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement's Young Women in Leadership Programme coordinated the Forum in partnership with four young women led groups: Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA), Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA), Young Women Producers and Broadcasters of Femlink Pacific and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

The Forum space was created for young women by young women.

The second Forum focused on informing, engaging, encouraging and progressing young women's political participation and motivating young women to VOTE in the 2014 Fiji general elections. The programme was formulated to be more inclusive and interactive as well as fun where the young women were able to discuss

### By Mamta Chand

and identify strategies to the challenges they face in political participation. Linking the challenges to rights was critical, as the young women realised when they learnt more about the herstory of women's suffrage and importance of young women claiming the hard fought for right.

The objective of the Forum was:

1. To encourage and influence active political participation of young women to vote in the 2014 Fiji general elections.
2. To empower young women, to lobby political parties and decision makers for better representation and inclusion of young women's issues.

The forum saw the enthusiastic participation of young women between the ages of 18-35 who were already engaged in Fiji's democratisation process. A diverse group of young women

represented their networks, which included young women with disabilities, rural women, transwomen, young women of both religious and non-religious beliefs, young lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer and intersex women, and aspiring young women politicians.

An important outcome of the Forum was the formulation of the Young Women's Declaration, which encapsulated concerns pertinent to young women, to be raised on the national agenda. The Declaration was presented to the members of the news media at the end of the Forum and clearly articulates key advocacy messages that young women will lobby for with political parties/candidates.

A copy of the Declaration can be accessed on [www.fwrm.org.fj](http://www.fwrm.org.fj) under Media Releases – 2014.

A third Forum is planned post-elections for late February/early March 2015 where the young women will come together and evaluate the impact of the Declaration and strategise for the future.



## Greetings from FWRM!

We welcomed 2014, Fiji's election year, with much anticipation. Those following FWRM's work would know that for the last few years, the Movement has been heavily involved in the country's democratisation process. From the constitution-making process to the current electoral process, FWRM has been working in collaboration with the co-convenors of the Fiji Women's Forum in empowering women, especially young women around Fiji, on their citizenship rights. We have been undertaking trainings in the four divisions, a comprehensive advocacy campaign, as well as several publications aimed at the media and women voters to ensure robust discussions and participation in Fiji's first election in eight years.



So it was with great dismay that the FWRM and other CSO's noted the assent of the Electoral Decree 2014 by President Epeli Nailatikau on March 28, 2014.

Section 115 of the Decree restricts those organisations which receive funding from foreign Governments and their employees from engaging in, participating in or conducting any campaign that is

related to the election or any election issue or matter.

Election issue or matter is not defined, but under section 2 of the Decree, "Electoral matter" is defined as "a matter that affects or is intended or likely to affect voting in an election." Campaign is defined as "any act done for or in connection with promoting or opposing, directly or indirectly, a registered political party or the election of a candidate or any act done for the purposes of influencing, directly or indirectly, the voting at an election, through any medium."

In a press release by the NGO Coalition on Human Rights, of which FWRM is a member, the Movement expressed its disappointment with section 115 of the Decree 2014:

*"Section 115 is completely unjustified and is an attack on the integrity and independence of NGOs. Furthermore, section 115 restricts the freedom of expression and the right that NGO employees have to participate fully in the political process. These definitions are extremely wide ranging and have the potential to be interpreted so as to capture a wide range of activities carried out by NGOs. Any public education on elections, including calls for transparency, accountability, the positions that parties and individual candidates hold on issues- all are likely to affect voting. An informed populace will naturally be influenced in its voting by the information it receives. The state of the health system, corruption, the 2013 Constitution, the rising cost of food - all of these issues may affect voting.*

*NGOs have fearlessly and consistently advocated for constitutional government, a return to democracy and adherence by all to the Rule of Law. Given the important role that NGOs play, this attempt to muzzle us is extremely disquieting and disturbing. There is no equivalent to section 115 in any other country, because most democratic Governments welcome independent enquiry and vigorous debate.*

*Furthermore, NGOs such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement provide training and awareness for women and girls on leadership and women's participation in the political process. Such training and awareness raising is part of the core work of these NGOs and the restriction that section 115 arguably imposes has the potential to stop us from performing our day to day community education activities and programs.*

The Movement, and other members of the Coalition are currently in talks with Fijian Electoral Commission to see how it can work best to ensure the full and free participation women in the voting process.

Also in this issue are stories capturing various events acknowledging International Women's Day on March 8th as well as awards acknowledging Fijian women human rights defenders.

Also take some time out to read our Lookout! section (back page) where we give details on a current vacancy closing on May 23, 2014.

These are just some of the stories captured in this edition. As always, if you have any feedback, send it to [info@fwr.org.fj](mailto:info@fwr.org.fj)

Enjoy this edition!

In solidarity,  
Virisila Buadromo

# Transitions

By **Shazia Usman**



L-R Michelle Reddy, Shyana Ali and Mereoni Chung

DURING the first quarter of the year, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement welcomed on board three new staff members.

### Michelle Reddy

We welcomed back former Training and Young Women's Officer Michelle Reddy, as the Movement's new Gender and Transitional Justice Team Leader.

A graduate of FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum, Michelle has a long herstory with the Movement and she shares her reasons for rejoining:

"My commitment is to the democratisation processes, rule of law and the vital role that women and girls play in these spaces. FWRM's reputation and its work in the democratisation processes are recognised and respected locally, regionally and internationally. I wanted to be part of that movement and to contribute towards it. From my initiation as a graduate of the Emerging Leaders' Forum to my professional life, FWRM was crucial in shaping, challenging and mentoring my feminist perspective. So I relish the opportunity of working again at FWRM and being part of the women's movement."

After her four years with FWRM, Michelle had worked for two years as an Executive Officer with Leadership FJI and then two years as the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding's Programme Manager.

"I now look forward to working with an innovative team at FWRM and, learning and sharing in the company of Pacific feminists".

### Shyana Ali

Like Michelle, Shyana is no stranger to the Movement as she is an alumnus of FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum.

Shyana is working towards a degree in journalism and literature and has previously worked and volunteered with organisations such as Go Advertising, Citizens' Constitutional Forum, Fiji Media Watch and FWRM.

Her feminist ideology is what motivated her to join FWRM as its new Administrative Assistant, as well as the "the work the organisation does in terms of eliminating discrimination against women and girls, human rights and the commitment of the organisation towards

young women's participation in the electoral and democratisation process."

### Mereoni Chung

After collaborating with FWRM through her work with Citizens' Constitutional Forum, Mereoni joined the Movement as its new Young Women's Officer in February.

"I love working with young people both professionally and at a personal level. I believe that young people are the sustainable solution for our national challenges. They are the vehicle to our peace and democratic aspirations. I hold a deep enthusiasm for the development and attainment of young people's civil and political rights. Being a young woman myself, I appreciate the potential that young women hold within them to contribute to a vibrant leadership and governance based on human rights principles. The position of Young Women's Officer provided an opportunity to grow this potential and support young women in the political developments of our country."

"I wanted to be part of FWRM because the organisation reverberates the values and principles of leadership, civic participation and democracy that I too believe in and aspire to achieve for all.

While working with her team on young women's voting rights, Mereoni received an Australian Awards Scholarship to pursue a Masters in Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development at the Australian National University.

"Unfortunately, it would be only three months with FWRM when I leave at the end of May. FWRM has definitely been on my list of things to be part of and I am very honoured to have joined such a vibrant team of activists, determined and strong in individual ways! I have learnt so much in my brief time, especially the value of being a feminist, and can only hope that I have shared and contributed something worthwhile since I've been here. The women's movement has consistently been a pillar of strength for many CSO's and Fijians who defend our freedoms, and I wish the FWRM the very best".

We also wish you all the very best in your studies Mereoni!

# Feminism acknowledged

By **Shazia Usman**

*The Movement would like to pay homage to three feminist activists who were acknowledged for their work in the area of women's human rights, locally and internationally*

Women in Business (WIB) Executive Woman of the Year Award

**Virisila Buadromo** Fiji Women's Rights Movement

In March, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement's Executive Director Virisila Buadromo received the Women in Business (WIB) Executive Woman of the Year award. This was a clear recognition of the work crucial development work undertaken by Fijians in the non-profit sector.

Virisila, a recipient of numerous international awards, said of this recognition: "I am honored to be awarded the Women in Business Executive of the year. As someone working in the non-profit sector,

it's an affirmation to our leadership. Employees and executives of the not-for-profit sector are often viewed as volunteers who may not necessarily have a head for business. This award clearly illustrates that when executives of non-profits are measured by the same rigorous standards used to judge my peers in private and the public sector - we too, can hold our own".

At the ceremony WIB President Nur Bano Ali also highlighted the lack of women representation in large

businesses across Fiji and the disparity in the pay structure.

"[In] Fiji, we don't even have statistics as there are only a handful of women at CEO level. So we don't even have the numbers to warrant a statistics test. This is pathetic. Something is terribly wrong. We need to recapture the spirit of equality and re-direct serious attention and intervention to bring about the necessary fairness of women's participation in the commercial world."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fbc.com.fj/fiji/18205/inequality-in-business>

## 2014 International Women of Courage Award **Roshika Deo** Be The Change

Fiji's Roshika Deo, a former staff member of the Movement, was one of the 10 women from around the world, honoured for their "exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment". The United States' Deputy Secretary of State Heather Higginbottom presented the 2014 International Women of Courage Award at a ceremony on Tuesday March 4th at the State Department in Washington, along with First Lady Michelle Obama.

"FWRM notes with great pride that one of the reasons Roshika was honoured is because she is "one of the very first candidates in the country to announce her intention to stand in Fiji's 2014 elections, the first since the 2006 military coup." Her intention stated so early on shows intrepid action and bravery deserving of such an award," said Executive Director, Virisila Buadromo

Other Pacific feminists who have also been honoured with this award include FWRM's Executive Director Virisila Buadromo.



Image courtesy of: <http://fijiivive.com>

## 2013 NGO CSW Woman of Distinction awardee **Sharon Bhagwan Rolls** FemLINKPACIFIC

Fiji's Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, was presented with the 2013 NGO CSW Woman of Distinction award in recognition for her dedication to enable and empower community media production in print, digital storytelling, online/social media and television to increase visibility of women and young women's viewpoints and realities.

Sharon was the keynote speaker at the NGO/CSW/NY Consultation Day (9 March at the Great Hall

of the Cooper Union (7 East 7th Street, NY, NY) along with Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women.

FWRM congratulates Sharon on her achievement and is heartened to see her commitment to peace and security, using information and communication technology (ICT) as tools for empowering women internationally recognised.



Image courtesy of: [www.waccglobal.org](http://www.waccglobal.org)



# Eastern women's citizenship rights awareness

THE Fiji Women's Rights Movement ended Phase 1 of its Women's Citizenship Rights Awareness Training with an outreach of around 218 Indo-Fijian women and young women around Fiji.

FWRM was excited to work with women from Kadavu, Lakeba, Motoriki and Levuka in March and talk about Fiji's current democratisation process.

Beating geographical challenges including terrible weather and sea conditions, women gathered in Lakeba and Levuka to talk about elections and what is the significance of women in this whole process. To many this was the first time to be part of any such training. From underpaid employment to lack of access to proper health care facilities, women related these injustices to FWRM and discussed the importance of selecting a visionary and effective leader – one who takes into account women's lived realities when making national decisions.

By **Shabina Khan** and **Alanieta Velulu**

Hearing Indo-Fijian women and young women in the communities actively discuss their role as voters in Fiji's elections, was exhilarating. The most common reaction of Indo-Fijian women in the past has been "I have always been voting based on who my family/husband has been telling me to vote for". For the young women particularly those who will be first time voters, it was "why was it important that we vote". Women were particularly thrilled to learn about analysing manifestoes and reclaim voting as a personal choice.

The end of Phase 1 trainings also meant the beginning of the interesting work of following-up with women to gauge the level of information sharing with other women within their local network. From the 218 women FWRM has worked with, its expected that the women will be sharing information with a further 1245 Indo-Fijian women

in the Central and Northern divisions only (Western and Eastern still being assessed) - there is a general excitement amongst these women to vote after so many years.

Concerns however, still exists on who are the people standing for elections, when will the manifestoes be made public, what is the voting method, and how will people with disabilities be assisted to vote. Keeping this in mind, the planning for Phase 2 of the Citizenship Rights Awareness has begun for the Movement - we aim to provide this relevant information to the women in collaboration with the Fiji Elections Office.



*Supported by the European Union*

## Capacity Building and Mentoring of Women Candidates

WITH the State's announcement of September 17th as the date of national elections, it is critical for women to start mobilising and implementing strategies to ensure their substantive participation in politics and national decision-making.

As such the Fiji Women's Forum<sup>1</sup> proposed to facilitate a two-phase strategy aimed at increasing the effective participation of women and advocating for gender equality and women rights in the legislature and executive arms of Government.

The first phase of the strategy concentrates on a *Women in Politics* training for prospective women candidates standing for elections in 2014. The second phase focuses on Women on Boards and will be designed for women interested in being part of the boards of government institutions and statutory bodies.

The objectives further articulated:

- To identify women interested in standing for

By **Losana Tuiraviravi**

the national elections and are committed to advancing gender equality and women's rights in Fiji;

- To consult prospective candidates and past female members of parliament on the skills and knowledge they will need to run a successful campaign pre and post elections; and
- To identify women interested in joining boards of government institutions and statutory bodies.

Phase 1 includes a mentoring element and will culminate in a mock parliament where the women candidates will apply the skills/knowledge and receive feedback.

The modules for this phase will be developed through a one-day consultation that was

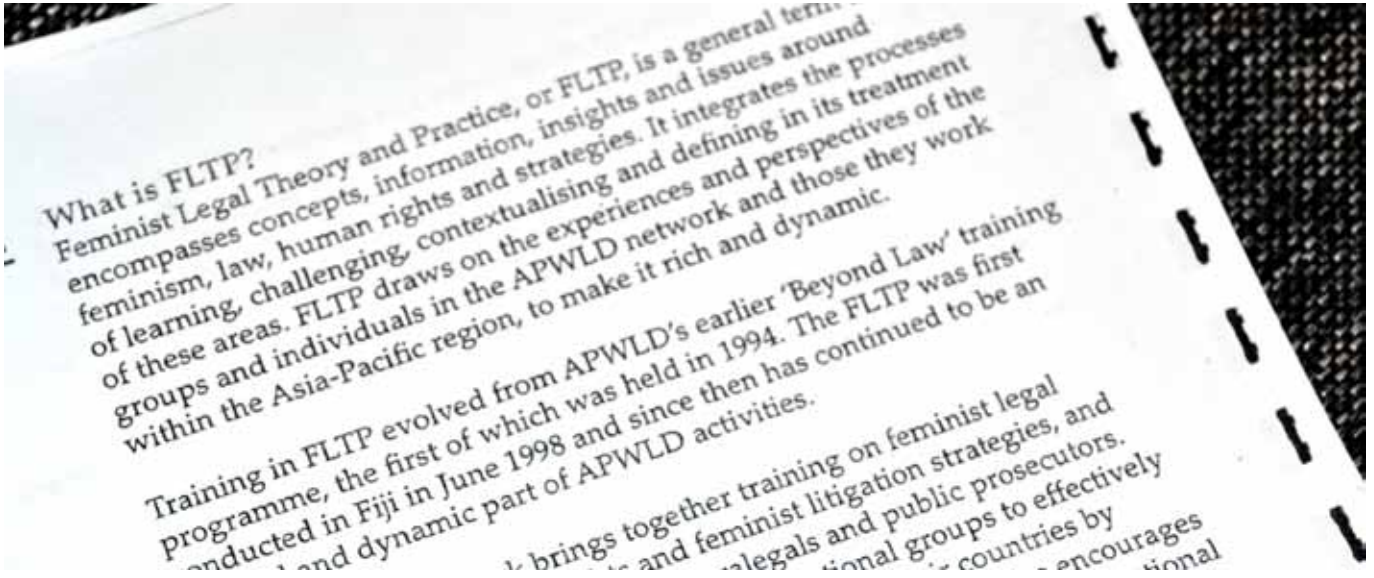
conducted in November 2013 with aspiring women politicians and past female members of parliament. The module will also include the development of a communication strategy and strategies on how to better engage with the media. The mock parliament may be undertaken in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme's Pacific Centre.

The participants for both the phases will be selected through a call for Expressions of Interest advertised in the local newspapers. The Fiji Women's Forum membership and affiliates will also be included in this process as this will allow a wider selection of aspiring women politicians and transparency in selecting the participants for the trainings. A Memorandum of Understanding will be negotiated with the participants to ensure that they represent the values and observe the standards of the Fiji Women's' Forum.

<sup>1</sup> Co-conveners of the Fiji Women's Forum are the National Council of Women, Soqosoqo Vakamarama i Taukei, Fiji Women's Rights Movement and FemLINKPacific



# Feminist Legal Theory and Practice



THE Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Regional Rights Resource Team (SPC/RRRT), in collaboration with Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) held a **Feminist Legal Theory and Practice (FLTP)** training in Suva from February 3th to 7th this quarter.

The five-day training brought together 26 Pacific lawyers, human rights activists, feminist and women's rights advocates from the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu to strategise on collective ways to challenge the traditional notions of law and address the social and cultural contexts that shape the legal system and to develop a feminist perspective into legal practice.

Specific objectives of the training was to:

1. Challenge the traditional notion that law is a neutral, objective, rational set of rules, unaffected by the perspective of those who possess the power inherent in legal institutions;
2. Seek to address the social, cultural and political contexts that shape the legal system and try to develop a feminist perspective into legal practice;
3. Allow for a greater understanding of gender, discrimination, law and human rights which are crucial when identifying and discussing issues and dilemmas encountered by rights/legal advocates in their use of legal strategies to address gender issues; and
4. Provide a venue for people from around the region to share experiences in using the law when advocating for women's human rights.

Trainers shared knowledge on feminist discourses and practical skills to effective feminist approaches on lobbying and advocating for gender

## By **Maraia Tabunakawai**

and women's rights. And in understanding the dynamics of gender inequality existing in the laws of Pacific island countries, participants were empowered and encouraged to develop advocacy strategies aimed at promoting women's rights, interests and issues.

Pacific island communities, legal practitioners, human rights and women's human rights activists responded to practical solutions to champion their cause through robust lobbying and advocacy by using women's experiences and realities from their home countries. The participants were coached in all aspects of the FLTP framework and to explore and adopt multi-disciplinary approaches using the FLTP checklist to address the issues of gender inequality and discrimination in policy and law reform dialogue.

### **Brief background on FLTP**

Training in FLTP evolved from APWLD's earlier 'Beyond Law' training programme, the first of which was held in 1994. The FLTP was first conducted in Fiji in June 1998 and since then has continued to be an integral and dynamic part of APWLD activities.

The training is designed to strengthen and empower human rights activities and practitioners to effectively challenge discriminatory laws and practices in their countries by applying international conventions and precedents, as well as using feminist litigation strategies.

The FLTP framework has feminism as its core and human rights as its foundation:

- Recognises the intersecting oppressions of women because of their sex, ethnicity, caste,

class, religion, sexual orientation and other status;

- Evolving feminist theories and principles and human rights standards are used in the analyses of women's situations;
- Law at the national and international level is examined for its role in women's oppression and given the plurality of legal systems in many Asian and Pacific countries, customary and religious laws are also part of this examination;
- Theories, concepts and issues around feminism, human rights and laws are considered in framing, planning and implementing strategies.

All FLTP facilitators are accredited trainers and are experts in human rights, advancing women's human rights and the law in the Asia and Pacific region. The facilitators for this training were former FWRM board chairperson and SPC/RRRT trainer Gina HOUNG LEE, FWRM Executive Director VIRISILA BUADROMO, Suva-based lawyer BARBARA MALIMALI and former SPC/RRRT trainer SEEMA NAIDU.

The participants at the training were from the Citizens' Constitutional Forum, Department of Women Affairs (Tuvalu), Department of Women Affairs (Vanuatu), Drodrolagi Movement, femLINKPACIFIC, Fiji Disabled Peoples' Federation, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Haus of Khomein (Fiji), Ministry of Internal Affairs & Women Affairs Division (Tonga), Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs (Kiribati), Samoa Law Reform (Samoa), Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Northern Pacific Office (Federated States of Micronesia) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Regional Rights Resource Team.

# International



## GIRLS celebrate IWD

FOR the past few years, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been commemorating International Women's Day with members of our GIRLS project, and this year was no exception.

Grow Inspire Relate Lead Succeed is an empowerment project for 10-12 year olds where they learn how to undertake theatre productions and other fun activities.

FWRM launched the project this year with a sports day for the girls at the My Suva Picnic Park where they learnt the basics of touch rugby. Like last year, where the focus was on learning soccer, the girls enjoyed themselves immensely and learnt the importance of being part of physical activities and that sports is not just for boys.

### By Lillian Delana

The event also offered a space for the GIRLS to gather together to reflect on the many achievements that girls and women have made in Fiji's sporting history. They, along with FWRM's staff, enjoyed listening to keynote speaker and national representative for women's volleyball and soccer Titilia Waqalaveni share her love for sports and how it can also be used as an avenue to advocate on women's rights. She emphasised the need to have more young girls in local outdoor sports such as soccer and rugby.

Aside from sports, the GIRLS also took part in a fun human rights-related treasure hunt, which linked to the theme for International Women's Day - Equality for Women is Progress for All.

The GIRLS Theatre Project is a component of FWRM's Young Women in Leadership Programme. For the rest of the year, the FWRM will be working in collaboration with Informal Education and Theatre Consultants (formerly Women's Action for Change) in scripting, rehearsing and producing a play based on the theme of political awareness and participation, which will be performed by the 28 young girls.

The production will be used to empower girls to understand related concepts on civic responsibility, democracy and leadership accountability.

# Women's Day

## Inspiring Change - Equality for Women is Progress for All



AS is the custom, International Women's Day (March 8th) in Fiji is met with activities such as hosted morning teas/lunches, sports for young girls, and other forms of activism culminating in the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre-led (FWCC) Reclaim the Night march (permit pending).

This year was no different as feminists and women's rights supporters in Suva had the opportunity to participate in two activities open to the public. The National Council of Women (NCW) unveiled a photo exhibition of Women in Fiji Politics on display at the Fiji Museum and the aforementioned Reclaim the Night march.

Launching the exhibition was none other than former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Taufa Vakatale.

In her address Vakatale said IWD should be a public holiday in Fiji because women have contributed so much to the development of the country and need to be acknowledged. She came out in support of using Temporary Special Measures to increase the number of women in national decision-making stating that the playing field is not level for women and men, where women have to excel at everything to have a shot at parliament.

The photo exhibition is on display at the museum till October, after which it will be compiled into a publication by NCW. The photographs accompanied by biographies shows the extensive research undertaken into the key lifetime achievements of Fiji's women politicians.

After the exhibition, a diverse group of people wearing activism t-shirts assembled at the Suva Flea Market with banners, placards and candles. Hundreds of people energetically sang, chanted and marched, calling for an end to violence against women and girls and demanding for safe streets and an end to militarism and patriarchy.

### By **Angelyn Singh**

FWCC's Shamima Ali invited us to take the time to go to the court and witness the reality that women go through when accessing justice, how they themselves are often charged with giving false information.

NCW's Fay Volatabu reminded us that we can only have a safer Fiji if we voted wisely in the September elections. She urged everyone to vote for

women candidates.

To inspire change we must all take responsibility in making equality for women a reality. This means that we must constantly ask ourselves similar questions. That if women are half the population, why do I not see them in the news? Why do I not see women in leadership roles? Why do I only see women in caregiving and domestic roles? Are men physically unable to star in dish washing paste advertisements? Hopefully asking these questions will set in motion changes that bring about a more fairer and safer Fiji for us all.

## Nadi women celebrate IWD

### By **Shabina Khan**

WHEN Indo-Fijian women began talking about violence against women in Fiji during the Western Division citizenship rights training (see p.4 for background), the sentiment expressed at these atrocities was beyond anger. Women began talking about actively raising awareness – which they do each year – but this year they wanted to do something different. And this is how they did it.

The women gathered at the Nadi Civic Centre on the International Women's Day all dressed in pink, to highlight violence against women in the

Gulabi Gang style – minus the *laathi* of course. This also coincided with the release of the Bollywood's Gulab Gang, which is loosely based on the work of the original Gulabi Gang.<sup>1</sup>

The event was organised by the Nadi Women's Council and few of the Indo-Fijian run women's clubs. Dressed in pink, they used the day to talk about voting, manifestoes and how to select good leaders, and also learn a bit more on the work of Gulabi Gang.

This is an extraordinary accomplishment for the Indo-Fijian women from these communities as its rare for them to step out of their homes, leave their daily chores of looking after their families and mobilise into group activism. Activism such as this has really strengthened their solidarity.

<sup>1</sup> The Gulabi Gang (gulabi is Hindi for "pink") is a group of Indian women vigilantes and activists originally from Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh but reported to be active across North India as of 2010. The Gulabi Gang was founded by Sampat Pal Devi, a mother of five and former government health worker (as well as a former child bride), as a response to widespread domestic abuse and other violence against women. Gulabis visit abusive husbands and threaten to beat them with *laathis*(sticks) unless they stop abusing their wives. The Gulabi gang is the subject of the 2010 movie *Pink Saris* by Kim Longinotto as is the 2012 documentary *Gulabi Gang* by Nishtha Jain.

Initially, it was reported that the Bollywood film, *Gulaab Gang*, starring Madhuri Dixit and JuhiChawla as leads, is based on Sampat Pal's life, but the director denied this, saying that he is obliged to her work but the movie is not based on her life. On March 7, 2014 Sampat Pal Devi suffered a huge blow when the movie *Gulaab Gang* was allowed to release by the Delhi High Court.



## YOUNG WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



# Tahere represents Pacific young women at CSW

TAHERE Siisialafia from Samoa was the youth representative identified by the Pacific Youth Council (PYC) to attend the 58th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 2014.

The award was a collaboration of Pacific related organisations that work for the development of women within our region. PYC, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), UN Women Fiji and Cambodia, the US Embassy Fiji, and the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance (PYWLA) collaborated to ensure the participation of Pacific young women in the global conference.

In sponsoring Tahere, PYWLA hoped to facilitate the development of her advocacy skills for lobbying Pacific young women's priorities, and build key networks that will assist the Pacific young women's movement to ensure inclusive developments in our region.

Tahere's adventure included an intensive two-week programme. The first week involved an internship that looked to develop a Young Women Caucus that promoted the inclusion of young women's priorities in the outcome document of CSW. The caucus focused on three thematic areas - sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), violence against women (VAW), and girls & female genital

By **Tahere Siisialafia** and **Mereoni Chung**

mutilation. The second week transferred the learning of week one into action, with young women joining the excitement of CSW's negotiations and outcome document development.

"I spent the last week in the hub being mentored by DAWN, observing and learning about the negotiations process," Tahere shared.

The second week also gave our Pacific young woman representative an opportunity to present on a panel about Care and Sustainable Economy in Post 2015 Development Agenda, organised by DAWN. Tahere focused on Care Work in the Pacific. She shared "at first I lacked the confidence in presenting on this topic; however after researching and trying to understand the topic, I have learnt so much about care work and have developed an interest in the area".

The overall CSW experience allowed Tahere an opportunity to develop her personal and professional skills as a Pacific young woman leader advocating for young women's priorities as well as boost the Pacific voice at international negotiations.

According to Tahere her advocacy skills and her confidence has been greatly strengthened as she learnt the importance of asking tough questions

of other representatives and to respond appropriately to questioning.

Networking with people from across the globe on issues that affect women and girls built upon her contacts for future collaborations and also presented opportunities to share best practices and Pacific focused solutions.

Tahere described the negotiation process at CSW as the most significant part of the event.

"It was high level lobbying and advocacy that needs a lot of skills and training. [It was] interesting to see how people lobby so hard to try and push their issues into the agenda and I saw that it was a very tiring and emotional process especially when you have oppositions to certain issues."

Tahere however, noted the under representation of young women from the Asia Pacific region at global platforms like CSW. Tahere hopes to pursue the further development and endorsement of an Asia-Pacific Young Women Caucus in the lead up to the next CSW with PYC. She also recommends PYWLA to continue to commit to sending Pacific young women to international conferences like CSW to learn about lobbying, and also identify opportunities to influence global documents that embody policies, which are expected to protect and address the rights of women and girls.





# The UN: Is the world ready to work for women?

Siva Thanenthiran 6 May 2014

WOMEN'S NGOs turned up in full force at the 47th Commission on Population and Development in April only to find a genuine discussion and debate on the critical issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights sidelined.

In the lead-up to 2015, every single international event is perceived as a critical battleground calling upon women's NGOs to actively participate in these events, sometimes even at our own cost. The organisation I work for – the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women is a regional organisation which works at national, regional and global levels. Because our work traverses many different arenas, we are familiar with but torn by the tensions between local and global needs especially when these imply an investment of resources and time.

At the beginning of 2014, we met with all our partners across the region to discuss a common strategy of participation in key global meetings in the coming two years. Although many partners felt very strongly that global players often call on their local counterparts for support at these international meetings, this support is not reciprocated when and where the frontline battles take place. But in the interest of defending the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda, our partners agreed to engage. Thus is with anticipation as well as trepidation that we entered into the battleground of the 47th Commission on Population and Development (CPD). Asian governments are known for their reticence, but this time our partners were able to strategically place themselves in key national delegations – Nepal, Mongolia, the Philippines and Fiji. We were also able to forge good working relationships with the Cambodia, Vietnam and Lao PDR delegations.

This year's Commission on Population and Development had a key reference document produced by the comprehensive ICPD Beyond 2014 review process called the 'Framework of Actions.' This is an evidence-driven report of the gaps in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. It was mandated by the General Assembly resolution. For those advocating and working for a comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights agenda, these gaps have become familiar over the years. Hence it was deeply satisfying to witness that these issues were finally being discussed and recommendations being made in a seminal UN report. This presented a platform

for discussion and action for member states – something many of us have long been waiting for. But these are not new battles: they already existed at the time of previous conferences in Cairo in 1994 and Beijing in 1995 – access to safe and legal abortion, non-discrimination on the basis of sexuality, young people's access to comprehensive sex education, information and services – and they persist because member states continue to frame sexual and reproductive health and rights agendas within ideological and religious parameters rather than health, rights and equity parameters.

However CPD 47 was mired in its own difficulties and controversies, beyond the perennial issues that needed urgent attention and discussion. The lack of agreement in the bureau of the Commission (every year a bureau is elected from among the members of the commission including a Chair and two co-chairs) on whether there would be a procedural outcome or a substantive outcome was turned into an opportunity by the opposition to make it look like the Uruguay Chair was forcing text onto the bureau representatives and onto the work of the Commission. Only a week prior to the CPD the Chair insisted on a resolution in the bureau despite the disagreement of the Africa Group. The selection of the facilitators – one from Denmark and the other from Georgia, added fuel to the fire, as an indication of having a Northern agenda imposed upon the South. More careful thought being given to this selection might have helped. However, the Chair was probably ill-advised. And in the end, though he started off boldly enough he was unable to defend his actions, and each consequent step made the process veer further off the tracks.

In addition the logistics left much to be desired. For the first time in the course of the previous six CPDs I have attended, NGOs were allocated a small number of tickets issued on a first come first serve basis; and the others were carted off into an NGO 'overflow' room. All of us who have participated in these events know that the full participation and presence of NGOs is essential. In the regional population conferences by ESCAP in Bangkok and ECLAC in Montevideo, our right to space, to attend, participate and speak were successfully defended and the strong regional outcomes testify to that. I fully expected

the same would be true in New York but was severely disappointed. Even worse was the failure to allocate a room large enough for negotiations, and one whole day of negotiations was therefore lost. These are all critical factors which enable the facilitation of negotiations around crucial issues that spell life and death for women and girls.

In the course of the week we witnessed a process that unravelled very quickly. The discussions and negotiations on the text were poorly facilitated – allowing all present have their say but without any resolution or consensus. On the last day, the Chair carried out separate and secret negotiations with selected 'regional' representatives consisting of individual member states such as Oman and Pakistan (a non-member of the commission, much to the consternation of the Philippines and the Pacific island countries.) Hence at the end of the week, the process revealed itself as flawed and indefensible. This was reiterated in the comments of the member states at 7.00 am on Saturday morning when the meeting finally ended. The Philippines delegation in their comments to the Chair said "Consensus despite poor process, no meaningful engagement and inclusion is not the way to move forward. Our obligations start with ourselves and with our governments. Our governments will not be pushed backward."

Yet though the Africa group was led by a small number of aggressive member states (Kenya, Cameroon, and Egypt) who dominated the discussions, there was still much support in the room for SRHR from other African member states (Mozambique, Liberia, Ghana, Zambia and South Africa.) It was difficult for progressive states to break with the group on the actual content of the SRHR issues because the problems of process and procedure mentioned above undermined discussions on SRHR. In such situations ensuring the integrity of the process is crucial to ensuring strategic discussions and negotiations. The 47th CPD failed to provide this opportunity.

However member states should not be let off the hook. Admittedly, many participate in the spirit of consensus decision-making, but a few, vocal member states – Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Nigeria, return to the scene, time and again, misusing the process and misrepresenting even the sexual and reproductive health policies which

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# The UN: Is the world ready to work for women?

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are in force in their own countries – for example HIV/AIDS policies which would specifically mention vulnerable groups such as sex-workers, transgender people and men having sex with men, non-discrimination on the basis of SOGI and their rights to services. These are un-elected bureaucrats who use critical spaces such as the CPD and the CSW to further an agenda which is not true to the ground realities and does not reflect the needs and preoccupations of citizens in their own countries.

## Who then holds them accountable for their actions?

The disconnect between the delegations from the capitals of member states and the Permanent Missions of their countries was blatantly evident during that week. Government delegations from Africa were reading out statements in support of SRHR in the plenary session while the negotiators were singing a completely different tune in a different room.

On the other hand we also need to recognise that some member states were working genuinely in order to advance the SRHR agenda, wanted an honest discussion about the issues on the table and a process which would enable negotiations to take place. These member states were trying their very best to utilise this space to set standards and move ahead and support women and girls. It was rewarding to see member states from the Asia-Pacific region – the Philippines, Nepal and Mongolia and all of the Pacific island countries trying to raise the bar in the room on the inclusion of the language sexual and reproductive health and rights (all), access to comprehensive sexuality education (Philippines), access to safe and legal abortion (Nepal), non-discrimination on the basis of SOGI. I have never been more proud to be from the region. But at the same time to see Egypt where the Cairo consensus was formulated, and Bangladesh which was influential in Cairo twenty years ago, adopt positions not to push the agenda, is a signifier that progress does not always travel a linear path.

It is especially infuriating that UN member states lost a critical opportunity, yet again, to achieve consensus about standards and to send a very important message to those member states who reserve the right to harass, report on, imprison, even execute members of targeted population groups.

We can easily infer from this that if international processes and negotiations continue along this path, the world is only going to see 'sub-par standards' emerge from this process. The Cambodia representative remarked that the standards being discussed were lower than existing national standards in his country. What level of programmatic and policy direction would be set by these so-called 'standards'? A number of member states are currently using this space

irresponsibly and hypocritically to push their own diplomatic and geopolitical objectives rather than engaging in a serious discussion of the issues on the CPD agenda which have a direct bearing on gender equality and women's rights.

Are member states ready and willing to work with and for women and girls? If they are, they need to demonstrate this more clearly than they have done in the past few years. If the UN absolves itself of its responsibility to uphold the rights of the world's citizens, it will not be able to enable the transformation the world so desperately needs.

*About the author: Siva Thanenthiran is the Executive Director of ARROW, a regional NGO working on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights across 15 countries in Asia-Pacific and across the Global South. ARROW is one of FWRM's partner organisations.*

*Excerpted from <http://www.opendemocracy.net>. Originally published May 6, 2014.*

## Paulini Turagabeci's reflections on CPD 47

CPD 47 would have to be one of the apexes of my feminist journey, although feminism was only one of the many movements and ideologies in this melting pot of world diversity, known as the Conference of Population and Development.

When contacted about my interest in joining the Fiji Delegation to CPD, I obliged without fully realizing the scope of influence this opportunity presented.

As an 'Expert' on the delegation my role was to advise the Government Delegates and Permanent Representative to the UN on SRHR and young people; to suggest language that would form the text of our proposals at negotiations; and to keep them up to date on the alliances and negotiations happening outside of the negotiation room.

The Pacific delegation worked well together in strategising, building alliances and making the Pacific visible in a space, if not well worked, can drown you out. I was proud and honoured to share this CPD journey with a fellow Pacific sister, Milikini Failautusi, who is a member of the Pacific Youth Council and attended CPD as a Tuvalu delegation representative. Mili played a major role through her delegation to bring the issue of climate change to the table, which was supported by all the Pacific countries, including Maldives, Philippines, Cuba and members of the CariCom group. As young Pacific women in the Big Apple for the first time, with its many attractions and possibilities, [the place] was

a great incubator for the CPD process and not a distraction at all. We are thankful to all the people who played a role in giving us the opportunity to sit on our country delegations.

The final negotiated document however was not as progressive as we would have liked it to be, yet in a way it is a close and maybe the truest reflection of the world's position on the development agenda 20 years after Cairo.

There remains persistent conservative ideologies and movements but there is beauty in knowing that as human rights defenders we uphold the right of every diverse thought, personality, world view and identity to contribute at the decision making table.

I would like to acknowledge the great support from home and outside the US from Juli Dugdale, Avisake Veitata and Sharon Bhagwan Rolls of the YWCA family, Virisila Buadromo, Tara Chetty, Noelene Nabulivou and Tarusila Bradburgh of FWRM, DAWN and Pacific Youth Council and Pacific SRHR Network. And a big Vinaka Vakalevu to ARROW women for their continued support and partnership in this journey of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for all.

*Paulini is an alumna of FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum and a former Young Women's Representative on the FWRM's Board.*

## Americanah

Author: **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**  
 Review by: **Mike Peed**

WHAT'S the difference between an African-American and an American-African? From such a distinction springs a deep-seated discussion of race in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's third novel, "Americanah." Adichie, born in Nigeria but now living both in her homeland and in the United States, is an extraordinarily self-aware thinker and writer, possessing the ability to lambaste society without sneering or patronizing or polemicizing. For her, it seems no great feat to balance high-literary intentions with broad social critique. "Americanah" examines blackness in America, Nigeria and Britain, but it's also a steady-handed dissection of the universal human experience — a platitude made fresh by the accuracy of Adichie's observations.

So an African-American is a black person with long generational lines in the United States, most likely with slave ancestors. She might write poetry about "Mother Africa," but she's pleased to be from a country that gives international aid rather than from one that receives it. An American-African is an African newly emigrated to the United States. In her native country, she didn't realize

she was black — she fit that description only after

she landed in America. In college, the African-American joins the Black Student Union, while the American-African signs up with the African Students Association.

Adichie understands that such fine-grained differentiations don't penetrate the minds of many Americans. This is why a lot of people here, when thinking of race and class, instinctively speak of "blacks and poor whites," not "poor blacks and poor whites." Many of Adichie's best observations regard nuances of language. When people are reluctant to say "racist," they say "racially charged." The phrase "beautiful woman," when enunciated in certain tones by certain haughty white

women, undoubtedly means "ordinary-looking black woman." Adichie's characters aren't, in fact, black. They're "sable" or "gingerbread" or "caramel." Sometimes their skin is so dark it has "an undertone of blueberries."

"Americanah" tells the story of a smart, strong-willed Nigerian woman named Ifemelu who, after she leaves Africa for America, endures several harrowing years of near destitution before graduating from college, starting a blog entitled "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" and winning a fellowship at Princeton (as Adichie once did; she has acknowledged that many of Ifemelu's experiences are her own). Ever hovering in Ifemelu's thoughts is her high school boyfriend, Obinze, an equally intelligent if gentler, more self-effacing Nigerian, who outstays his visa and takes illegal jobs in London. (When Obinze trips and falls to the ground, a co-worker shouts, "His knee is bad because he's a knee-grow!")

Ifemelu and Obinze represent a new kind of immigrant, "raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction." They aren't fleeing war or starvation but "the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness." Where Obinze fails — soon enough, he is deported — Ifemelu thrives, in part because she seeks authenticity. Never has Ifemelu felt as free as the day she stops hiding her Nigerian accent under an American one, the accent that convinces telemarketers she is white. She refuses to straighten her hair (a favorite Web site is HappilyKinkyNappy.com), even if she must endure muttered disparagements from African-Americans when out with a white man — "You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?"

Early on, a horrific event leaves Ifemelu reeling, and years later, when she returns to Nigeria, she's still haunted by it. Meantime, back in Lagos, Obinze has found wealth as a property developer. Though the book threatens to morph into a simple story of their reunion, it stretches into a scalding assessment of Nigeria, a country too proud to have patience for "Americanahs" — big shots who return from abroad to belittle their countrymen — and yet one that, sometimes unwittingly, endorses foreign values. (Of the winter scenery in a school's Christmas pageant, a parent asks, "Are they teaching children that a Christmas is not a real Christmas unless snow falls like it does abroad?")

"Americanah" is witheringly trenchant and hugely empathetic, both worldly and geographically precise, a novel that holds the discomfiting realities of our times fearlessly before us. It never feels false.

Excerpted from <http://www.nytimes.com/> where it was published under the headline Realities of Race



## Gulaab Gang

Review by **Anupama Chopra**



IN Gulaab Gang, writer-director Soumik Sen brings together a slew of talented women — Madhuri Dixit-Nene, Juhi Chawla, Divya Jagdale, Tannishtha Chatterjee.

He lifts liberally from the inspiring story of Sampat Pal, an illiterate villager who formed a group of women vigilantes called Gulabi Gang in Bundelkhand. But Sen is unable to embed the actresses into his fictionalised version in a coherent way. The result is an ineffectual and messy ode to women empowerment in which women, with nicely styled hair and handloom saris, maim, kill, fight elections and in between find the time to sing and dance.

It's fun to see the saccharine sweet Juhi turn venomous. She plays Sumitra Devi, a deliciously despicable politician. Her perverse wickedness is the best part of the film. But it's such a one-note character that it soon becomes predictable. Meanwhile, Madhuri as Rajjo is the avenging angel who channels her inner Durga and even gets to wield an axe. It's also nice to see women kicking ass onscreen but it would be nicer if the narrative had some logic. Even the accents in their fictional village are inconsistent.

For a real dose of women empowerment, watch Gulabi Gang, a terrific documentary on Sampat Pal. Gulaab Gang is the masala remix.

Excerpted from <http://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/reviews>

# About us

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is a multiethnic and multicultural non-governmental organisation 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 in Fiji, 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:

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# LOOKOUT!

## Communications Officer Vacancy

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is accepting applications for the above post.

### Specific objectives of the job:

The Communications Officer is responsible for the planning, development and implementation of communications initiatives and strategies for FWRM to strengthen advocacy and the dissemination of rights-related materials.

### Key qualifications/competencies:

- A Degree in Communications/Journalism/Media.
- At least two to three years communications experience.
- Good organisational, management and communications skills.
- Able to develop communications strategies, and negotiate and collaborate with vendors and outside teams such as printer, web team, film makers. etc.
- Experience in maintaining and contributing to the development of a website is also required.

Applicants must submit a CV with contact details for three referees and a statement of interest no later than the close of business **Friday May 30th, 2014.**

Only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.

Fiji Women's Rights Movement,  
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