FWRM

FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Herstory

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF
BALANCING THE SCALES

1986~2011

How does change happen?

(For Jully Makini)*

By TERESIA TEAIWA

Some feminists make it happen
Some feminists let it happen
Some feminists make other feminists
give them what they want
Some feminists give other feminists
what they ask for
Some feminists are selfish
Some feminists are selfless
Some feminists will never change
Some feminists are always changing
How does change happen?
Oh, ever so easily!
Ah, ever so slowly!

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25

YEARS OF BALANCING THE SCALES

A brief herstory of how the Fiji Women's Rights Movement has gone from a small but strong-willed women's rights advocacy collective, through the fire of growth and ruptures, to a legitimate voice for human rights in Fiji and the Pacific

FWRM

FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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 as well as innovative approaches, the Movement practices and promotes feminism, democracy, the rule of law, good governance and human rights. It strives to empower, unite and provide leadership opportunities for women in Fiji, especially for emerging young leaders.

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In the beginning …

Taking on patriarchy

On April 10, 1986 a group of 56 women gathered for a three-hour meeting at Des Voeux Road in Suva.[1] The women from various backgrounds were determined that their group would seek to change laws and policies which discriminated against women or that failed to adequately address their concerns. In the period leading up to that meeting, there had been discussions, especially among those who had founded the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre the year before, many of whom were also part of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), about the need for a separate, multiethnic organisation providing a distinct and outspoken voice for crosscutting women's rights issues.[2] The 56 women were part of those who had taken up the challenge of correcting the imbalances of women's socio-economic and political status – they had begun to "balance the scales". The group did not yet have a name but from the very beginning the founding members knew they had their work cut out for them. Several weeks later, the women met again and this time they had a name for their fledgling organisation – the Fiji Women's Rights Movement.

A quarter century later, the FWRM has come a long way from that gathering in the accountants' association office in Suva. Today, the Movement can be described as a feminist human rights organisation that combines local concerns with a global perspective.[3] The FWRM is one of the leading organisations dedicated to public political and feminist lobbying as well as education about legal and economic rights for women. Today, the FWRM name is familiar to Fijians and it is considered a legitimate voice for women. It is one of the two leading feminist organisations in Fiji, respected regionally and internationally for the stand it has taken, not just on women's rights, but on human rights in general. From its beginnings as a collective in which decisions were made by consensus by all members, it has evolved into a more traditional governance structure in which the organisation's work is overseen and directed by a board. Once the organisation became larger and had multiple projects, the feminist collective governance structure was no longer effective.

Many of the founding members of the FWRM had also been involved in setting up the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre a year and a half earlier. The need for a separate organisation was also recognised by members of the YWCA's Public Affairs Committee. Members of the FWCC were also realising that while they were dealing with the consequences of violence against women, they were facing an uphill battle when it came to the patriarchal structures of national governance. Changing attitudes to women was one thing; dealing with a legal and judicial system that was blind to the realities and experiences of women was another.

1 Chand, Praneeta, '56 out to fight for women's rights', The Fiji Times, Thursday, April 17, 1986, p19 (tucked away in the 'Women and Family') section.
2 Ali, Shamima, 2012, personal communication
3 Poussard, Wendy, Canadian International Development Agency, quoted in Herstory, FWRM, 2000, p8

"Around 18 months into attending to women (and this included accompanying them to court and medical clinics), we realised that things were not right for women at the policy and legislative level," recalls Shamima Ali, the Coordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and one of the FWRM's founding organisers.[4]

"With this disparity in mind, we decided that there was an immediate need for another group, a more academically inclined group, to draft policies and advocate for legislative reform."

Apart from Shamima Ali, other organisers included the then 26-year-old lawyer with the Crown Law Office, Patricia Imrana Jalal, who to this day has remained a key driving force behind FWRM. Jalal had represented many of the FWCC's clients as a legal aid lawyer and was so angered by the treatment of women in the legal system she felt something needed to be done about this at a structural level.

Jalal recalls: "Representing individual women was not going to change anything for the majority of women, nor was it sustainable. Better to fix things up for the majority through legal and structural changes, even if it takes longer."

Some of the other significant founding members included the late Adi Kuini Bavadra, Alefina Vuki, Helen Sutherland, 'Atu Emberson-Bain and Penelope Moore (who would become the Movement's first paid Coordinator).

Along with the FWCC, the FWRM was the only other organisation overtly working within a rights-based approach to women's issues. Prior to the public Des Voeux Road meeting, the founding members had been meeting in each other's homes before finally deciding to take the plunge with a new organisation. Two months after the April meeting, the FWRM was registered as a charitable organisation.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement came into being in a milieu of social transformation in Fiji[5], following at least two decades – from the 1960s – when Fiji's women had started taking to public spaces to demand equal status and respect across all aspects of society.[6] The previous 10 years before its founding – from 1976 to 1985 – had been declared the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace.[7] The FWCC had been formed less than two years before and the policy shortfalls were shown to be stark, so the stage was set for a feminist organisation founded on fundamental human rights and focussed on advocating for policy and legal changes.

On the political front, the yearning for a third force in Fiji politics (with disarray in the National Federation Party and the right wing policies of the ruling Alliance Party) led to the formation of the Fiji Labour Party in July 1985, with the backing of the country's largest trade union, the Fiji Public Service Association. In the month of the Movement's founding, the newspapers were filled with national debates on a common name for Fijians, the words of the national anthem, television being introduced to Fiji among other burning issues.

4 Usman, Shazia, 'A quarter century of collaboration', *Balance*, July 2011, p7

5 The early pioneers in advocacy and services for women in Fiji were the YWCA and the Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA)

6 Goodwillie, Diane, and Kaloumaira, Joy, *Campaign for Equal Citizenship Rights, May-August 1996: A Case Study*, FWRM, 2000

7 Chandra, Rajesh, 'Urbanisation in Fiji, 1976–1986', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, Vol.19, 1996, pp23-45

The early years ... Some of the founders of the FWRM preparing for the first major anti-rape campaign in 1986, including Alefina Vuki (left), Shamima Ali (second from left), Patricia Imrana Jalal (second from right) and FWRM's first Coordinator Penelope Moore (right).

The FWRM's members wasted no time in organising themselves. One of their first activities was a detailed submission to the newly-formed Garment Industry Tribunal that was inquiring into the conditions of women workers in the industry. The maximum wage at the time was 90 cents an hour, and the inquiry heard claims that some women garment workers had been forced to have sex with their superiors for favours. The Movement outlined the plight of non-unionised women workers and demanded minimum wages and improved working conditions. Although the Tribunal did set a minimum wage, it was what the Movement considered far from adequate.

In February 1987, with the political atmosphere heating up, the FWRM organised a petition against discriminatory rape laws and the harsh treatment of rape victims. Some 5000 signatures were collected and after a historic march for women's rights through the streets of Suva, the petition was presented to the Minister for Justice.

Before the parliamentary elections in April 1987, FWRM sent questionnaires to all 150 candidates inviting their responses to policies and attitudes on women's issues and discriminatory laws. Only a handful of candidates from the three political parties responded and the results were published in the national newspapers. The analysis and publication of the responses, effectively "grading" candidates on their attitudes to women (with its concomitant implication that those who had not answered did not think women were important enough), caused widespread consternation and quickly forced all political parties to include women's issues on the national agenda for the first time in Fiji's political history.

FWRM COORDINATORS

IN 25 YEARS OF EXISTENCE, FIVE WOMEN HAVE BEEN THE FACE OF THE FWRM

Penelope Moore
1987-1993

Vani Dulaki
1994-1995

Praveen Sharma
(acting)
1995-1997

Gaylene Osborne
(acting)
1997

Gina Houng Lee
1997-2001

Raijeli Nicole
(acting)
2001

Virisila Buadromo
(titled changed to Executive Director)
2001-present

The new multi-ethnic Fiji Labour Party which won the general election, only to be ousted in Fiji's first military coup a month into office on 14 May 1987, had promised a department of women's affairs, an anti-sex discrimination bill, equal pay legislation, minimum wage regulations for garment and domestic workers and funding for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. Due to the short-lived term of the FLP government, which was headed by the husband of one of the FWRM's founders Adi Kuini Bavadra, their promises were not able to be test. However, the exercise proved that women's issues could take centre stage in politics.

The coups of 1987 were an early test for the organisation, challenging its multiracial foundations. The euphoria of the Movement's many new accomplishments and its success in influencing political parties to address women's issues dissipated but brought with it a resolve to build a stronger organisation based on the broader principles of democracy and human rights.

The FWRM took a stand not to work with the coup regime of Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka (later promoted to full colonel and then major-general). During and after the 1987 coups many FWRM members were involved in pro-democracy activities and some were arrested, imprisoned and convicted for these activities.

Mobilising around any issue, across ethnic lines in racially charged Fiji is always a challenge. The regime's racial policies also had a destructive effect on the Movement's potential ability to mobilise women on the basis of gender rather than ethnicity, which was possible prior to the coups. Diane Goodwillie and Joy Kaloumaira described this early tribulation in a paper they wrote in 2000[8]: "At the time of the 1987 coups, FWRM membership polarized along racial lines. FWRM was committed to women's rights within the framework of democracy so restoration of democracy was promoted. Indigenous Fijian women thought FWRM should focus on gender and leave democracy to other Civil Service Organisations. FWRM indigenous women members were seen to be 'disloyal to the

8 Goodwillie, Diane, and Kaloumaira, Joy, *Campaign for Equal Citizenship Rights, May-August 1996: A Case Study*, FWRM, 2000

Participants of the FWRM's first paralegal workshop for women held in March 1993.

Fijians' and although many hours were spent discussing the issue and encouraging them to remain as members, many resigned. To their credit most returned within two years and continued the good fight."

The FWRM recovered from that initial racial polarisation that had occurred after the coups, but was confronted again with similar polarising issues – although to a lesser extent and with an altogether stronger organisation – during the 2000 George Speight coup.

From its inception, the organisation had a very public monitoring role commenting on media attitudes towards women and using the media to highlight government and judicial attitudes. The FWRM was directly responsible for the progressive rape sentencing guidelines promulgated by the Chief Justice, Sir Timoci Tuivaga, in February 1988 commanding longer sentences for rape and an improvement in judicial attitude.

Buoyed by the success of it first march in February 1987 and the visible, if somewhat marginal, changes in judicial attitudes towards rape, the FWRM officially launched its Anti-Rape Campaign in the latter part of 1988. Its aims were to educate the public and associated state agencies about the social and cultural aspects of rape and to push for law reforms.

The project included researching the socio-cultural and legal aspects of violence – a nationwide outreach programme, including workshops in outer islands such as Kadavu, the publishing of articles in newspapers and appearances on radio in the three major languages, the production of pamphlets and posters, the production of a video titled *Forceline* (a local term implying rape is an acceptable cultural practice), street drama and education workshops with schools, medical personnel, police officers and judicial personnel.

The FWRM also conducted workshops and seminars for rural women's groups in an attempt to educate women about rape and to obtain their support for its law reform. The video *Forceline*

was aired publicly for the first time in 1992, at a time when national television was in its infancy in Fiji.

In hindsight, 1986, the year of FWRM's birth, could be considered the lull before the storm of the intervening years which have been filled with political drama, internal issues and setbacks but also many gains – though not nearly enough – for women's rights, thanks to the persistence of those women and some men who have worked with FWRM over the past 25 years.

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Freedom of expression – especially through art - has always been a central value of the FWRM as Jacque Koroi shows.

A typical monthly Collective Meeting during the late 1990s when work decisions were still being made by member consensus.

Gaining ground…
Ruptures and successes

By the 1990s, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement had grown beyond any of the founders' imaginations. Penelope Moore was appointed in 1987 as the organisation's first Coordinator and until 1994, that position was the only full-time paid position in the FWRM.

The organisation had chosen not to deal with the post-1987 coup government until the first quasi-democratic government was elected in 1992 under the 1990 Constitution. As a result of this hiatus, the various rape and anti-violence law reforms that the FWRM was working on from 1987 did not get presented to government until 1992.

Indeed, prior to the promulgation of the 1990 Constitution, the head of the military government reportedly offered to eliminate discrimination in citizenship rights, an issue the FWRM had been pushing for, by decree. In other words, the legal basis for citizenship rights discrimination could be eliminated at a stroke without public participation and without the need for a media and lobbying campaign. For some women's groups, faced with limited and uncertain resources, victory-by-decree was undoubtedly a tempting prospect.

However, after the offer was debated within the FWRM and other organisations, it was decided not to accept it. The majority view was that if citizenship rights and women's rights in general are to be genuine and lasting, they must be won democratically. Going through the parliamentary process, rather than using a decree meant that the decision was entrenched needing a 75 per cent vote in both Houses of Parliament (rather than a decree penned by one person). Ethically it was thought human rights could not be built on anything but a democracy.[9]

FWRM's approach then and ever since, says Jalal, was "minimal engagement, avoid giving any illegal regime any legitimacy, take our cue from experienced and respected human rights NGOs outside Fiji who have gone through similar experiences elsewhere. Do enough to survive and to move towards democracy but never to legitimise military dictatorships that violate human rights".

However, during the post-1987 period, FWRM did make substantial submissions to the Constitutional Review Committees set up by the military regime to elicit the public's views on a new constitution. Although it was not successful in getting discriminatory provisions on citizenship and other rights removed from the draft Constitution, it was partly responsible for forcing the government to outlaw gender discrimination in Article 16 of the 1990 Constitution.

In 1991, the long push by the FWRM for the reform of the family law began. It was a campaign that would last 12 years before the Family Law Act was enacted in 2003. In 1992, with the government elected under the 1990 Constitution in place, the FWRM presented its rape law

9 Goodwillie, Diane, and Kaloumaira, Joy, Campaign for Equal Citizenship Rights, May-August 1996: A Case Study, FWRM, 2000

reform package to the government. At its first presentation to government, the FWRM was told to obtain the support of the majority of the population, in effect to obtain a referendum for its law reforms. The FWRM refused to comply, justifiably pointing out that no other law reforms require a referendum. Despite this the Movement did garner the support of women's organisations and other human rights groups in Fiji for such reforms.

The Movement began to expand its scope in the early 1990s and in March 1993, the first training for women paralegals took place. A mainstay project of the FWRM was established titled Women's Employment and Economic Rights - (WEER) (in 2000, the title was changed to Gender, Employment and Economic Rights). The FWRM was also taking advantage of the power of the media with newspaper and magazine columns on women's rights featuring regularly. But with the expanding breadth of the FWRM's work and its growing profile, ruptures began forming in the organisation that soon needed to be dealt with.

By 1992, heated discussions were taking place within the FWRM about the wisdom of having a perceived "expatriate" as the organisation's public face. Some within the Movement argued that the messenger was as important as the message when attempting to sell an unpopular idea, such as women's rights was at the time. In 1993, this issue came to a head and Moore left the Coordinator's post.[10]

After the polarisation of the membership on ethnic grounds in 1987, the episode with the Coordinator's position and the internal problems the growing organisation faced proved to be the second great test for the Movement. Moore's departure coincided with the realisation that the Movement had outgrown itself and was being limited by its Constitution which had led to administrative problems. The previous organisational structure, set up by the first Constitution of the FWRM, did not adequately cater for the size and breadth of its projects, so the organisation had to restructure itself, although this would take some years to fully mature. The founders had not envisaged how effective the FWRM would become nor the amount of funding it would have access to,

In this clipping from a 2000 edition of the '*Fiji Sun*', Imrana Jalal and Senator and FWRM member Dr 'Atu Emberson-Bain are seen talking with then Minister for Women Lavenia Padarath as part of their lobbying for the passage of the Family Law Bill.

MILESTONES **Family Law Act**

The Family Law Campaign was active during three different governments from 1993 to 2003. It focused on the discriminating aspects of legislation, common law and legal practices when it came to women. The proposed law suffered many setbacks either by the interruption to the rule of law or ideological opposition. The Family Law Act was finally enacted in October 2003 and came into force in late 2005.

10 Emde, Sina, 2000, From the world wide web to village rumours - Forms of (mis)information and propaganda during the Fiji coup 2000. Unpublished dissertation. Department of Anthropology, Australian National University.

Imrana Jalal and Gina Houng Lee address women in Suva's Ratu Sukuna Park during the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women in 1996.

nor the size of the projects it would conduct. The initial administrative structure envisaged a small group of women doing primarily voluntary activities and the FWRM Constitution provided little accountability insofar as its paid staff were concerned.

In August 1993, a management committee was set up to more closely coordinate the activities of paid staff and monitor project activities but while the restructure was under way, the FWRM's projects had to come to a temporary halt. It was to be almost a decade before the restructure was finally completed, with the new management system coming into force in 2002.

During this time, the FWRM staff took to the airwaves in the three languages discussing family law issues. Upon returning to the office, it was not uncommon to find women waiting to be assisted or wanting more information after hearing the broadcast.

By 1994, concern about the Movement's survival was firmly laid to rest and a work plan for the year was presented to members by the management committee. Vani Dulaki was appointed as the Movement's second Coordinator. The change saw a strengthening of FWRM's relationship with other women's organisations like the Soqosoqo Vakamarama (iTaukei women's group), the Women's Wing of the Fiji Muslim League, the Catholic Women's League and the TISI Sangam (Women's Wing). This was a strategic move that showed FWRM's position as the leading women's advocacy group when working to get CEDAW ratified. Dulaki left in 1995 to join Jalal and Kim Standford-Smith in setting up the Regional Rights Resource Team.

In January 1994, a three-month Family Law Project funded by UNESCAP and The Asia

Foundation was launched. A series of 12 articles was published on family law in the three main languages and widely published in the print media and on radio. A series of pamphlets on how to use the legal system was also printed in three languages and a radio play on some aspects of family law was produced by Larry Thomas.

A Regional Roundtable Meeting on Women and Politics was hosted by the FWRM in February, and in April the Movement co-hosted with the International Commission of Jurists (Geneva), the first major regional seminar on Women and the Law in the South Pacific, coordinated by the FWCC's Shamima Ali.

Apart from these major projects, the FWRM was kept busy throughout 1994 with various workshops on legal literacy, writing project proposals to funders and preparing for the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. In August 1994, Dulaki attended a two-week workshop in Vanuatu for the Pacific Women's Documentation Project titled *Beneath Paradise*, which aimed to collect the experiences of women from across the Pacific to take to the NGO Forum on Women that coincided with the Beijing conference. She was one of five women representing the Pacific Women's NGO group to Beijing.

After a period of uncertainty, the FWRM emerged to host the first Pacific Regional Roundtable on Women and Politics in Febuary 1994.

In 1994, the battle to change attitudes toward rape had mixed results. In a rare comment for a judicial officer at the time, one judge called on men to play a bigger role in eliminating rape, saying there was a "need to reassess their whole attitude to women in general and female sexuality in particular".

But such positive judicial attitude did not extend across the judiciary and one magistrate was shockingly reported as saying a rape survivor – who was asleep amongst people she knew – was the "author of her own vulnerability".

Another judicial officer commented in court that "there was no evidence that the girl will suffer any adverse effects from that experience" and that "the victim had known different men sexually before the incident".[11]

In the same year, after the snap election which saw Rabuka leading the SVT party into power, he gave an interview regarding the Sunday ban (a literal day of rest for Christians with a ban on all economic trading for everyone). He likened kicking a ball around with kicking your

11 Balance, December 1994

Talking the talk ...

walking the walk ...

MILESTONES **Emerging Leaders Forum**

Through the Movement's long-running Women, Employment and Economic Rights (WEER) project, the FWRM had been working closely with young women in secondary schools and the work force. In 1998, it launched a campaign around two themes – '*Girls Can Do Anything*' and '*Jobs Have No Gender*'. The overwhelming response resulted in the development of the Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF), which began being formulated in early 2000 and finally got off the ground in 2004 after the political instability of 2000 had passed. ELF is a year-long leadership programme in which young women learn about feminism, human rights, leadership qualities and gain a broad-based understanding of topical issues. As at November 2011, 79 young women have graduated from the training.

wife as something one can do that does not matter to him as the Prime Minister. FWRM was contacted for a comment by the media and also sent letters to the editor of the two print media at the time. Before sending the letter to the media, it was first sent to Rabuka who wanted to apologise to the FWRM. The Movement, however, stood its ground and told him that he needed to apologise publicly as the comment had now become public. On the same day, the national radio broadcast was interrupted just before the 6pm news for his apology to the women of Fiji.

When Vani Dulaki left in 1995, Praveen Sharma was appointed as acting Coordinator. Since the year before she had been Project Officer for the Women, Employment and Economic Rights (WEER) project.

The Movement placed sexual harassment in the workplace on the national agenda and was involved in advocating for domestic workers' rights which led to the wages orders for domestic workers. Around the same time, the FWRM had a weekly presence on the radio, broadcasting in the three main languages on family law and employment rights, and was being recognised as a legitimate player in the arena of legal advocacy. (See Milestones: Employment Relations Bill, page 13)

A major project of the FWRM in the 1990s was the Women's Employment and Economic Rights (WEER) project which was established in 1993. Its goal was to redress the situation of women's social and economic disadvantage in the wake of labour reforms, which further marginalised the rights of women. The first two phases of the project involved research and education and awareness-raising. Two other phases of the project were implemented including advocacy and labour law reforms complemented by education activities.

Of the many achievements of the WEER, one was that FWRM was the only NGO to be part of the International Labour Organisation Working Group on Women Workers in the formal employment sector. Another was the invitation, on two occasions, to address the Fiji Employers

Federation Human Resources Council on women and work issues. The FWRM was the first women's organisation to address the federation, and was chosen ahead of the major trade unions.

In 1994, the WEER project successfully resolved a case involving the non-payment of superannuation benefits of some 200 workers. Despite a litany of complaints from the workers to the Fiji National Provident Fund about employers, nothing eventuated. A frustrated garment worker then approached the FWRM to step in and after its involvement, an investigation was carried out by the FNPF and payments were finally made.

Workshops were run on employment rights, family law and the Movement was recognised as an alternative to the trade union movement with regards to women workers' rights. In the same vein, the FWRM partnered with the Asia Pacific Resource Centre in Hong Kong on global workers' rights issues.

The FWRM was the most vocal organisation in the push for equal pay for work of equal value at a time when the divisions in the trade union movement meant the rights of women workers were being further marginalised in Fiji's quest to maintain economic growth. As the leading advocate for the rights of women workers, the FWRM ran workshops on CV writing for school leavers which ultimately led to the '*Girls Can Do Anything*' campaign.

In 1999, the Minister for Labour Ratu Tevita Momoedonu opened a two-day workshop organised by the FWRM to discuss the Industrial Relations Bill, the first comprehensive review of the Employment Act since 1971. The coup the next year set back the Bill until 2006 when it was again delayed by a coup.

MILESTONES **Employment Relations Bill**

The Employment Relations Campaign ran from 1994 to 2007 and focused on reforming outdated and sexist labour legislation. The Employment Relations Bill introduced in Parliament in 2006 incorporated maternity protection, equal employment opportunities, equal pay for work of equal value and penalising sexual harassment in the workplace. It was in its last reading in Parliament in late 2006 when the military seized power. In 2007, the military regime brought into force the Employment Relations Promulgation, but while women's organisations had long pushed for this change, the FWRM believes that legal reform should go through a democratically elected government.

Imrana Jalal's long-running weekly column on women's rights in the *Fiji Times* drew the ire of a Senator who in March 1995 said her writings drove men to commit rape. Such utterances in the Upper House of Parliament illustrated quite well the uphill battle facing the FWRM.

In September 1995, the WEER project under Praveen Sharma held a series of debates for secondary schools in Suva. It was the first time such a debate was held. The first debate was on the topic 'Unpaid work deserves the same recognition as paid work'. Mahatma Ghandi

Memorial School argued for the affirmative while Suva Grammar School argued for the negative. MGM came out winners.

In the second debate, Ratu Kadavulevu School and Adi Cakobau School debated the topic 'Women workers should be paid the same as men for the same type of work done'. Interestingly, ACS took the negative stand and argued that women should be paid more than men. ACS won the debate and went on to meet the winners of the first debate, MGM, in the final.

The two schools debated the topic 'Minimum wage guidelines should be based on the poverty line and not the employer's ability to pay'. The affirmative was argued by Adi Cakobau School and the negative by Mahatma Ghandi Memorial School. While both arguments were convincing and well presented, Mahatma Ghandi edged ACS to come out the winners.

During 1995, the FWRM stepped up its campaign, ongoing since 1993, to persuade the Rabuka government to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The campaign was carried out in part through Jalal's weekly columns as well as through direct lobbying of Members of Parliament and public meetings. The government eventually ratified CEDAW in 1995.

At the same time, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre was working on a draft domestic violence bill that would recognise intimate partner violence as a criminal act and not merely as a "domestic" issue which the law and the courts had tended to view it as. The Domestic Violence Decree 2009

MILESTONES **Sexual Offences Legislation**

Since the FWRM's founding in 1986, one of its main remits has been the reform of outdated sexual offences law. After much lobbying, the Fiji Law Reform Commission had in the years 1998-1999 heard from stakeholders and returned a report recommending radical changes. The draft bill had been completed and was to have been sent to parliament in 2000 when the George Speight coup set back this work. In 2006, work had been moving forward on this when, yet again, a coup put paid to it. However, the military regime brought into force in 2009 a Crimes Decree which broadened the definition of rape. While the FWRM believes the decree contains some improvements over the Penal Code, it has failed to update the language to incorporate a human rights approach. However, judicially the rule of corroboration in rape cases was abolished in a 2004 Court of Appeal judgment, and this has been confirmed in the Crimes Decree.

promulgated by the current military-led regime goes some way to addressing the issues raised.

Another important focus for the Movement in 1995, was contributing to the Constitutional Review Commission that would recommend changes to the ethnically and gender-biased 1990 Constitution. In its submission the FWRM said if Fiji was to progress, it needed a truly unbiased constitution that would protect the fundamental rights of all people. The Movement's submission to the CRC in July 1995 called for a constitution that would unite Fiji's multi-cultural society despite ethnicity, sex, place of origin, political opinions, colour, religion, creed, age or disability. The FWRM also called for a constitution that would promote nation-building and was gender neutral and user-friendly and included an attempt to provide improved citizenship rights for women.

"Fiji, through our Constitution, should recognise that the partnership between men and women based on the principle of equality is necessary for a peaceful nation," the submission said. The FWRM also supported the submission put forward by its sister organisation, the FWCC.

A big focus during this time was the reform of citizenship laws to remove the discrimination against women. In May 1996, an intensive, and ultimately successful, campaign advocating constitutional changes to guarantee equal citizenship rights for women in Fiji was conducted by the Women's Coalition for Women's Citizenship Rights (WCFWCR). The FWRM provided coordination. The WCFWCR lobbied for reforms to Sections 25 and 26 of the 1990 Constitution during its review to allow equal choice for foreign spouses – both women and men – to reside in Fiji.

Married women citizens were restricted from passing on the rights of Fiji citizenship to their children, though such a right was constitutionally guaranteed to men (whether married or not). The legislation also created restrictions for Fiji women wanting to live in Fiji with their foreign spouses, though no such restriction applied to Fiji men. Foreign husbands of women citizens were not guaranteed the right to enter and reside in Fiji and female Fiji citizens were often forced to live abroad with their husbands who found employment overseas when unable to get a Fiji work permit.

The "brain drain" created by these patriarchal laws were both costly and unfair as Fiji lost many highly educated professional women of all ethnicities. Many indigenous Fijian

Balance
Fiji Women's Rights Movement
Police to play their part

Police Commissioner Isikia Savua's no-drop pledge on the cover of the Jan-Feb 1996 issue of '*Balance*'.

MILESTONES

No-drop policy

Along with the FWCC, the FWRM had long pushed for a change in attitudes with the police force and judiciary in regards to domestic violence and sexual offences. In 1995, then Police Commissioner Isikia Savua publically declared the force had adopted a no-drop policy when it came to domestic violence. One of the first persons prosecuted under the policy was a police officer. The same year, a Sexual Offences Unit had been set up by the police.

men feared the common Indian practice of importing spouses from India through arranged marriages and thought changes to the Citizenship Act would encourage a greater influx of Indian nationals. Through the Citizenship Coalition campaign, indigenous Fiji women saw they had much in common with women of all races. Particularly after the 1987 coups, indigenous Fijian women joined with their Indian sisters in fighting the inequity in the Citizenship Act since they recognised that gender, not race, was the common discriminatory dividing line.

Women analysed the situation, provided support and decided on their united strategy. The groups included councils of women, women activists, some predominantly Indo-Fijian women's groups and political wings of parties. Trade unions, church and traditional indigenous women's groups did not join but supportive individuals used involvement in other NGOs to help with lobbying.

In 1997, Fiji adopted a new Constitution that contained, among other things, provisions which for the first time established the citizenship status of women equal to that of men in the country. This hard-won victory capped 30 years of work by women and signalled an awakening of legal literacy and gender policy advocacy to promote women's advancement in Fiji.

The achievement of constitutional change was thought to prove the successful use of the coalition tactics and strategy. Certainly the campaign's short-term goal of drawing attention to the issues was reached. However, the euphoria in attaining Constitutional change was tempered by the sobering thought that, in effect, a compromise had been reached leaving more work to be done in the foreign citizenship area. Spouse equity for the right to live in Fiji, took away the ability for foreign female spouses to provide income for their family's self sufficiency and placed them on an equal footing with foreign male spouses, and for that matter, any other foreigner applying for jobs in Fiji. Children affected by the earlier Constitution were the real winners within the 1997 Constitution whereas other issues still needed tackling.

Eighteen months of work by the Constitutional Review Commission headed by the late former Governor-General of New Zealand Sir Paul Reeves along with the late speaker Tomasi Vakatora and academic Dr Brij Lal, culminated in a report titled *Towards A United Future* which the FWRM hailed as a well-written document. The FWRM called on the parliamentary select committee that was examining the report to adopt the progressive recommendations in it.

Apart from the women's rights issues, in the mid-1990s, the FWRM's *Balance* newsletters were focused on the emerging cases of HIV/AIDS in Fiji and environmental awareness including protests against French nuclear testing at Moruroa Atoll.

By the Movement's tenth anniversary in 1996, the achievements were beginning to show. With the success of the constitutional review exercise behind it, the FWRM and the FWCC found an ally in the then Police Commissioner Isikia Savua who was the first commissioner to treat violence against women with the urgency it deserved and address the police force's handling of rape and domestic violence complaints.

Savua announced the police force had adopted a no-drop policy on domestic violence, complementing the establishment of the Sexual Offences Unit in 1995. One of the first people to be prosecuted under the no-drop policy was one of Savua's own officers. (See Milestones: No-drop police, page 15)

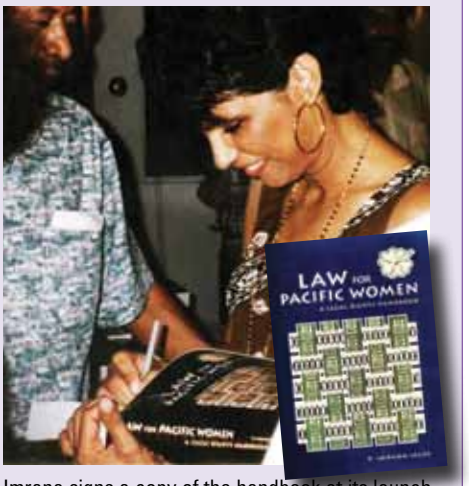
The Sexual Offences Unit (now broadened to include child sexual abuse), was headed by a female officer and a sensitisation training was extended to police officers across the force.

Savua was quoted in the January-February 1996 issue of *Balance* as saying: "Most of the men in Fiji, including myself, have witnessed domestic violence in our homes. I believe it is up to us now, my generation, as we owe it to our mothers, our wives, and I think more importantly our children, that the cycle is broken. If we do not break it now, then it's going to continue. I'm in a position now to do something about it, so I'm doing something about it."

In mid-1996, the official ban on night work for women was lifted, an achievement for the FWRM which was opposed to such a regulation on the grounds that protectionist arguments against women working at night would not eliminate violence against women, but would further their subjugation.

Around the same time, a high chief's wife was quoted in the *Fiji Times* as saying women and young people should not be allowed to work at night and that a woman's place was in the home to look after her family.

Ro Sainimili Takiveikata said to legalise women's work at night would increase the crime rate since unsupervised children would "turn to mischief and later on in their lives to crime and violence". She continued that women who worked at night would expose themselves to violence and crime while travelling to and from work.



Imrana signs a copy of the handbook at its launch in 1998.

MILESTONES **Law for Pacific Women**

'Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook' is a seminal volume written by P. Imrana Jalal and published by the FWRM in March 1998. It was the result of six and half years of study, research and writing covering the legal status of women in nine Pacific Island countries, including Fiji. The book sold out several years ago and a second updated volume is being produced by the FWRM and Regional Rights Resource Team. Proceeds from the sales of the book belong to FWRM in the form of a trust Jalal created. As long as FWRM stays firmly committed to the rule of law, democracy and human rights, the sales of the book belong to the Movement. The funds are in a fixed deposit as FWRM's "rainy day money". Jalal has the sole right to revoke that trust should FWRM change its Constitution and strays far from women's rights or human rights, something she says is not likely to happen in her lifetime.

The FWRM's acting Coordinator, Praveen Sharma, articulated the Movement's stand on the issue in a letter to the editor responding to Ro Sainimili's comments: "The argument that by not having mothers around to discipline children and educate them will lead to increasing crime is quite discriminatory to those of our men who are fathers. We appreciate that women are more likely to be subject to violence but this is where the need for proper legislative and policy safeguards arises. Keeping women locked in the house will not eradicate violence against women."

In January 1997, an advertisement for a vehicle in the *Fiji Times* illustrated prevailing sexist attitudes and the media's complicity in furthering such attitudes. The FWRM took on the newspaper and the company Palas over its publication of an advertisement that featured the backsides of women in underwear. The tagline on the advertisement read: "Of course there's much more to the new Proton Wira than just a great rear end."

With trademark wit, the FWRM responded to the "offensive and vulgar advertisement in such a reputable paper" by firing off a letter to the editor: "The FWRM fails to understand the correlation between the rear end of a Proton Wira and that of a human being. 'Rear ends' mark good advertising for undergarments but they certainly do not work with cars (unless of course the only good aspect of the car is how it looks from behind ... driving away)."

This incident gave rise to discussion on the objectification of women and the media's role in perpetuating stereotypes, although it was not a new issue seeing that the FWRM had in the early years lobbied the committee looking into the formation of Fiji Television in the late 1980s to ensure women were portrayed in a positive manner. In the same vein, the FWRM had early on lobbied the country's film board to seriously consider removing segments of imported films that objectified women.

In April, the *Fiji Times* published the result of a survey on male rape in which the majority of the respondents viewed male rape as a bigger problem than female rape and that sentences for male rape should be harsher. The FWRM was appalled by the results, at a time when male rape had yet to even be recognised in the country's Penal Code (male rape fell under the offence of indecent assault). The FWRM reiterated the need to reform the legislation relating to sexual offences to protect women, men and children and to broaden the definition of rape.

During 1997, the FWRM also expressed concern at the increasing cases of reported child abuse at a time when the infamous Mark Mutch paedophilia case was dominating the news media. Along with this, the debate on sex work was catapulted to national attention when a Suva motel alleged to be operating as a brothel was raided by police. While charges were laid on the women commercial sex workers caught in the night raid, the male clients were allowed to walk free causing consternation among women's rights groups including the FWRM and the FWCC about the disparate treatment of women.

In 1997, acting Coordinator Praveen Sharma left the organisation to join UNFPA. She was replaced by Collective member Gaylene Osborne who acted in the position before Gina Houng Lee was appointed Coordinator in late 1997.

In early 1998, the FWRM's Legal Rights Training Officer, Ema Tagicakibau resumed the Movement's radio campaign this time on Viti FM where she spent half-an-hour discussing family law issues every other Monday.

The long-running drive to reform laws relating to sexual offences also continued during the year with a raft of reforms being drafted in the hope of presenting it to a parliamentary committee for consideration. In the years from 1998-1999, the FWRM was active in the work to rewrite the discriminatory laws relating to sexual offences, especially that of rape. A Commissioner for the reform of sexual offences legislation had been appointed and public forums were held to discuss and debate issues arising out of the draft sexual offences legislation. The Fiji Law Reform Commission (FLRC) published its report on the reform of sexual offences in 1999 and it was on the legislative agenda for 2000 when the George Speight coup in May undid all the hard work and lobbying that had gone into this critical area.

Fine Ditoka makes a point during a 'Girls Can Do Anything' workshop in the 1990s.

Some of the key recommendations in the FLRC's report had included many of FWRM's lobbying points, included insisting on the broadening of the definition of rape to include non-penile acts and penetration of anus and mouth; increasing sentences for the various sexual offences to reflect the severity of the crime. In a separate report prepared by Judge Scott on Criminal Evidence there was a recommendation that the Rule of Corroboration be removed from rape cases. This suggestion was welcomed by the women's movement which had called for the removal of this rule for many years. A Fiji Court of Appeal Judgement in 2004 (Balelala v State) also called for the removal of the Rule of Corroboration, as the judge recognised the discriminatory nature of the rule as applied in rape cases. The 2006 FLRC review of the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code also acknowledged submissions which called for the removal of the Corroboration Rule from legislation and called for the use of the sexual history of rape victims in court trials to be prohibited. Many of these provisions have decreed into law in the years since 2006 when the military-regime took power. (See Milestones: Sexual Offences Legislations, page 14)

In February 1995, the FWRM's first major research project was published under the auspices of its Women's Employment and Economic Rights project. Labouring Under the Law, written by Claire Slatter and Dr 'Atu Emberson-Bain was a critique of employment legislation in Fiji and how it adversely affected women. The paper highlighted how gender-based cultural values placed limits on women's occupational mobility, in particular their promotion to positions of authority. It found that women hold jobs which more often than not were low-waged.

Through all the struggle, ther

e was still fun to be had

The long-awaited 1997 Constitution finally came into force on 29 July 1998. Consultation and dialogue was critical in the preparation of the 1997 Constitution. The FWRM lobby in the review of the Constitution was shown to be effective and, while some of its recommendations were not included in the final document, the country was given a Constitution that was hailed globally for its progressive provisions and strong Bill of Rights.

The new Constitution provided for the setting up of a Human Rights Commission and the resulting organisation was considered a milestone in the Pacific. One of the FWRM's founding members Imrana Jalal, was appointed as one of the first three Commissioners. However, following the 2006 military takeover, the Commission lost its way – lending support to the overthrow of the Laisenia Qarase government and today is a shadow of its former self having had most of its powers taken away.

A major victory was the right for foreign men married to local women to become citizens of Fiji. Previously only foreign women married to Fijian men had automatic rights to Fijian citizenship. This meant that Fiji's reservations on the issue of citizenship in CEDAW could be lifted. However, despite the celebratory mood, Coordinator Gina Houng Lee was aware of the need to remain vigilant and keep the issue of rape law reform on the agenda.

1999 saw the Fiji's first woman judge appointed to the Bench in Justice Nazhat Shameem. She is so far the only Indo-Fijian woman to have sat on the High Court Bench.

It was the year of a general election and an unprecedented number of women candidates – 27 – contested the first general election to be held under the Alternative Vote system. FRWM produced and distributed CEDAW posters on voting during the electoral campaign and at polling stations in Suva, Lami, Nausori and Nadi. Most parties were receptive to the posters, although a minority opposed the idea of having FWRM material and others were hostile to any material that dealt with women. The posters encouraged women to think wisely about who they voted for rather than voting for candidates their husbands told them to vote for.

The coalition led by the Fiji Labour Party (with the Fijian Association Party and the Party of National Unity) swept in to power ending 12 years of Rabuka's rule and FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry became the country's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister. Eight women were elected to the House of Representatives from the 71 seats available.

The Women in Politics project, which the FWRM helped set up, was cited as one reason for the prominence of women in the 1999 elections. The project assisted with training women in campaign management, fundraising and issue-based training. It created a sense of solidarity among women who realised that if they took the issue on as a group, more women in Parliament was a real possibility.

A second factor for the prominence of women and their issues was that political parties actively sought out women to stand under party banners. Apart from one woman candidate, all others stood under a party banner.

But the euphoria surrounding the FLP-led coalition's win and the unprecedented number of women in legislative positions were to be short-lived. Exactly a year after the Chaudhry government was sworn in, George Speight put an end to his rule espousing ethno-nationalist ideals that would throw Fiji yet again into the deep end and set back the gains made in women's rights.

Reckoning and reconciliation …

The Movement matures

The dawn of the new millennium helped contribute to the upbeat outlook the FWRM had at the beginning of 2000. However it was to be short-lived. The framework of the Emerging Leaders Forum was being put together, the Legal Literacy Project was expanding its reach across the country and in January a dinner hosted by FWRM to celebrate women's achievements was attended by more than 50 women including the Prime Minister's wife Vir Mati Chaudhry, women Members of Parliament, the judiciary, academics, and representatives from the UN and other organisations.

One of Virisila Buadromo's first travel duties as Coordinator was accompanying FWRM chair Patricia Imrana Jalal, right, and Wati Seeto to present the CEDAW shadow report at the UN in New York.

Ironically, in the year of Fiji's third coup, the FWRM had begun to consider the challenges for civil society in the 21st century and noted the need to develop young women into leaders who could help drive forward the Movement. The challenge of developing women to continue with the activism and to counter gender discrimination in society was paramount. One of those approaches was the development of the Emerging Leaders Forum which the coup set back until 2003.

On 19 May 2000, Chaudhry's government marked one year in office but celebrations were short-lived with the seizure of the parliamentary complex in Suva that morning. Speight and his ragtag group held Chaudhry and those members of his government who were in a session of the Lower House that morning. The siege that followed lasted 56 days. Compared to the 1987 coups, this one was led by civilians and disgruntled special unit soldiers and coincided with the looting and burning of businesses in Suva. Far from being bloodless, the 2000 putsch was a bloody affair with several deaths of both coup supporters and law enforcers.

FWRM was thrown in at the deep end yet again in its history with the May 2000 crisis. FWRM worked with the NGO Coalition on Human Rights and Democracy and with the Fiji

Blue Democracy Campaign[12] while at the same time trying to hold its membership, staff and organisation together. The majority of its work on gender was put on hold to allow the Movement to focus its intellectual and other resources on the broader democracy issue.

Some members of the staff could not understand that democracy is a pre-condition for the attainment of women's rights and that the Movement had little choice but to engage in the political arena to aggressively push for the return to constitutional rule. Partly because of this lack of understanding of the inextricable links between gender and democracy, the FWRM lost one staff member who struggled with the notions of feminism and democracy and her belief in indigenous rights and found it impossible to reconcile what she regarded as opposing views. In addition, the Movement lost two long-standing key members – an Indo-Fijian and an indigenous Fijian – who both emigrated because of what Jalal describes as "despair" at the loss of democracy yet again in Fiji.

The period from 2000 to 2002 was filled with turmoil for the FWRM with staff and resource issues and it seemed the organisation had again reached its lowest ebb.

As ever, the FWRM maintained its pro-democracy stand condemning the actions of the George Speight team. Imrana Jalal, who was the FWRM board chairwoman at the time, says while the issue of ethnicity came up again during the 2000 coup crisis, this time the FWRM was better prepared to counter the pressure.

"FWRM members have also matured politically learning from the coups of 1987 that our salvation lay in staying united, showing that women of all races can work together despite all the odds being stacked against them," says Jalal.

At this point in its history, the FWRM had gone from a small but strong player in the gender scene and women's rights arena in Fiji to a significant NGO in the broader spectrum of human rights. Gina Houng Lee, who was Coordinator during that traumatic period, has been credited with holding the organisation together despite the enormous pressures and for providing the Movement with leadership during a crucial time.

In contrast to 1987, the proliferation of non-governmental organisations since then made a difference when George Speight and his rebel soldiers took over the parliamentary complex in Suva. While political parties were dominant in calling for a return to democracy in 1987, in 2000 it was mainly NGOs alongside unions and the Fiji Labour Party[13]. By 2000, NGOs such as the FWRM were crucial in defending the constitution and pushing for a return to democratic rule.

A landmark case in 2000 was that of farmer Chandrika Prasad who in July asked the High Court to declare that his rights under the 1997 Constitution had been violated. The constitutional case

12 The Fiji Blue Ribbon campaign was an initiative of the National Council of Women, which sponsored a daily multiracial peace and prayer vigil during the parliamentary hostage crisis in 2000. Anti-coup supporters wore a blue ribbon to call for the immediate release of hostages and the return to democracy in Fiji. This fairly innocuous peace initiative grew into the Fiji Blue Ribbon Campaign, which grew into the Fiji Blue Democracy Campaign. The brains behind the democracy campaign were the Coalition on Human Rights and Democracy, an NGO made up of mostly women's NGOs and the Citizens' Constitutional Forum. At the Beijing +5 meeting in New York in 2000, FWRM Coordinator Gina Houng Lee and Diane Goodwillie distributed Fiji Blue ribbons to bring the attention of the international community to Fiji's crisis.

13 Emde, Sina, 2000, From the world wide web to village rumours - Forms of. (mis)information and propaganda during the Fiji coup 2000. Unpublished dissertation. Department of Anthropology, Australian National University.

involved deciding whether the 1997 Constitution the military had purported to abrogate the month before, was in fact still intact. In August 2000, the High Court at Lautoka heard the case.

In the days just before the High Court decision was handed down in November, the country was thrown into chaos yet again with an attempted mutiny at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks at Nabua in Suva. The mutiny on 2 November involved disgruntled soldiers from the disbanded 1st Meridian Squadron (also known as the Counter Revolutionary Warfare unit), some of whom had participated in the May overthrow. When the mutiny attempt was crushed some six hours later, three loyalist soldiers were dead. Some of the five rebel soldiers were killed in the counterattack and others were killed later after they were arrested. The incident would leave a lasting legacy on Fiji and play a part in Fiji's military commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama seizing power six years later.

On 15 November 2000, Justice Anthony Gates handed down his ruling in which he upheld Prasad's case and declared the 1997 Constitution was still in force and that the People's Coalition government had not been properly dismissed. The interim government indicated it would appeal the case.

FWRM played no small part in the final outcome of the Prasad case. In January 2001, the Movement – along with others – filed an affidavit in support of Prasad's case which was heard in February 2001. On 1 March the Court of Appeal in a unanimous judgment dismissed the interim government's appeal. While the appeals court rejected the lower court's reasoning on the continuing validity of the Constitution, its reasoning achieved an equivalent outcome in which it declared the 1997 Constitution remained the supreme law of Fiji.

During elections, the FWRM organised a 'Women in Politics' appeal, as former Coordinator Gina Houng Lee and Virisila Buadromo are seen doing here for the 2006 election. Funds raised were shared equally among all women candidates.

In 2001, with the country picking up the pieces from the trauma of the year before, it was also a time of transition, consolidation and restructuring for the FWRM. The Movement began reactivating the projects it had put on hold the year before and the long planned restructure of the organisation was reaching a climax in the drafting of a new Constitution. Some changes had been made to the Constitution in July 1997, but this one finally turned the organisation into the dynamic one it is today.

The Constitution was approved at a special general meeting on 30 September 2001 after months of work put in by members and staff including Board Chair Imrana Jalal, board lawyer Shayne Sorby and long-time member Diane Goodwillie.

The 2001 Constitution streamlined the functioning of the Movement, giving powers to a Management Board to delegate and direct work through the Executive Director. Since its founding, much of the Movement's work was carried out through monthly Collective meetings where decisions were made by consensus. While effective in earlier years when the Movement was a much smaller organisation, it had become an unwieldy mechanism.

During 2001, work on the '*Girls Can Do Anything*' project was being expanded and the beginnings of the Emerging Leaders Forum were coming together. The Movement was also analysing the Employment Relations Bill, which it long had an interest in, to see that women's rights were firmly embedded in any resulting law. The Legal Literacy workshops had also resumed.

After the Court of Appeal decision in March 2001 upholding the Constitution, a general election to restore democracy was scheduled for September 2001. Of the candidates, 31 were women and of this number five were elected to the House of Representatives.

In August, Gina Houng Lee resigned as Coordinator. During the period after Houng Lee's resignation and Virisila Buadromo taking up her appointment, Raijeli Nicole – who had been the WEER Project Officer from 1997 to 2000 – held the fort. Buadromo took over the helm of the FWRM in November 2001 and has been the longest-serving head of the Movement (10 years at this writing). She had the task of resurrecting projects that had gone moribund because of the political crisis of the year before and reorienting some of the Movement's work after a strategy meeting held in December 2001.

The FWRM began 2002 by taking the lead role in putting together a shadow report on CEDAW after the Fiji government filed its first state report to the UN on its implementation of the convention. Despite the extremely short period to prepare a shadow report the FWRM, as the CEDAW Secretariat for NGOs, managed to put a report together. The CEDAW shadow report team to New York in February included board chairwoman Imrana Jalal, RRRT Resource Trainer Wati Seeto and newly-appointed Executive Director Virisila Buadromo.

The trip was significant because the Fiji government was one of the first Pacific Island countries to submit its first report on CEDAW - five years after it ratified the convention. In New York, the NGO delegation met every CEDAW expert personally and hand-delivered copies of the Fiji shadow report.

For new Executive Director Virisila Buadromo it was a steep learning curve. Writing of the New York trip after her return, Buadromo said: "I found the experience challenging and educational. It also made me feel proud to be part of the process." In this first engagement with the UN CEDAW Committee, the FWRM was supported and guided by the International Women's Rights Action Watch-Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP), which was the beginning of a now long-term partnership around CEDAW advocacy.

In June 2002, Exploring Women's Employment Rights: A Fiji Resource Kit by Diana Goodwillie with Reijeli Drodrolagi and Sandra Fong was published. The manual built on earlier research by Drodrolagi and the WEER project. The sexual harassment training used some of the exercises in this manual and while later decrees changed the employment laws, this document was important as a step towards understanding the issues.

In the same year, 2002, the FWRM commissioned Tebbutt Research to carry out a survey on sexual harassment. A surprising discovering was the multiplicity of sexual harassment in the workplace. The survey found women who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace also experienced verbal and physical harassment – on average 2.17 different types of harassment. Of the women surveyed, 20 per cent said they had been harassed countless times – that it had occurred for so long they could not count it.

PROTEST AND ARREST

In April 2008, while staging a silent demonstration in support of the people of Tibet in front of the Chinese embassy at Nasese in Suva, 17 activists from the FWRM, FWCC with other human rights defenders were detained by police and taken for questioning. All were released later that evening without charge.

The survey revealed that threats and promises were not prevalent with 89 per cent saying these were not a factor in harassment. Of the respondents, only 23 per cent reported the harassment and of that number 30 per cent said no action was taken. When asked what happened to the offender, the main response (39%) was "nothing". Seventy per cent of those who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace discussed it with their colleagues, signifying that even women who had not experienced harassment would have at least heard of it.

Much of the research that emerged in Law for Pacific Women was put to use in the lengthy and momentous project to pass the Family Law Act, which radically reformed the laws relating to women and family relationships. From 1995, the FWRM had stepped up its efforts and began approaching the SVT government urging that they make family law reform a formal part of the legislative agenda. Florence Fenton, who was then the Director of the Fiji Law Reform Commission (FLRC) was receptive to the need for urgent change and jointly the FWRM and the FLRC lobbied the government. The Attorney-General Ratu Etuate Tavai eventually agreed to take it on. In 1996, Imrana Jalal was appointed Family Law Commissioner on the FLRC and work began in earnest to examine the existing laws and consult the community and stakeholders on the changes required.

From 1996 to 1998 the reform process involved the drafting and circulation of discussion papers, reporting back on the discussion papers and working on a final report. Some 161 organisations were consulted and the resulting report Making a difference to families in Fiji 1998 formed the basis for the drafting of the Family Law Bill. In 1999, Justice Allan Bartlett,

a former Chief Judge of the Family Court of Australia, led the drafting of the Bill and by 2000 it was ready to be introduced to Parliament. But this was not to be with the George Speight takeover in May that year.

Finally, three years after it was ready to be introduced, the Family Law Act was passed by Parliament on 24 October 2003, and assented to by the President on 6 November 2003. The Act established the Family Law Court and counselling facilities to accommodate the shift from litigation centred disputes to that of settlement and mediation. The Act came into force on 1 November 2005. The Family Law Act's passing was a momentous occasion for the FWRM; all the sweat and tears, and the sheer tenacity of Jalal and the Movement as a whole had finally paid off. (See Milestones: Family Law Act, page 8)

Writing about the enactment in a news release, Virisila Buadromo applauded parliamentarians for making a stand for social justice. She described it as "a victory for the families of Fiji, especially its women and children". The statement added the reform in family law legislation had been a long time coming and it was been worth the wait. "FWRM believes that the debate generated in and outside Parliament, although at times misguided, was needed to ensure that the views of the majority were considered."

Due to lack of funding, a major element of the FWRM's communication output, its newsletter *Balance*, was not published during 2003 and 2004. However during this time – following the passing of the Family Law Act – work had started on *Changing Laws: A Legislative Lobbying Toolkit*. The toolkit was another lengthy project that was finally launched at the Pacific's 11th Triennial Conference in Noumea in 2010.

The publication came out of the United Nations Global Lessons Learnt project in which, in collaboration with RRRT/SPC, the FWRM examined the application of a human rights-based approach to law reform using the example of the Fiji Family Law Act. The toolkit is aimed at assisting civil society in the rest of the Pacific in how legislative reform could take place. It was a milestone in that it documented the involvement of Pacific Island citizens, especially human rights NGOs, in law-making. Many of the examples drew upon legislation derived from a "ground upwards" approach that was adopted by members of civil society. In launching the toolkit, Buadromo said it drove home the point that the law belonged to everyone and by participating in law-making, citizens became vested in sustaining and progressing the rule of law.

In June 2003, the Young Women in Leadership Programme (YWLP) funded by Oxfam New Zealand was launched. This programme ran until the end of May 2005 and during the two-year period, a Young Women's Officer was appointed to be in charge of the programme. The goal of the programme was "for young women in Fiji to be aware of their rights and responsibilities and to speak up for those rights". Its objectives were two-fold: the first to increase the number of young women entering non-traditional areas of study and decision making positions e.g. on student councils, in employment, NGOs, politics, churches and in the community; and the second objective was to increase membership and participation of young women in the FWRM activities such as in the Management Board, issues collective, working groups and campaigns.[14]

14 Billy, Afu, 2006, Report of the Review of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement 'Young Women in Leadership Project'

An independent reviewer, Afu Billy, was appointed to examine the first two years of the programme and report back on the successes and challenges faced by the project. Billy found that the Healthy Choices component was difficult to review since it was targeted at rural girls, sessions were sporadic, selection was random and no assessments of the component were sought from participants, making follow-up difficult. However, the ELF component scored high marks and the publications programme was also found to be well regarded by the participants. Billy recommended that assessments of the components of the programme carried out in rural areas should involve rural stakeholders.

While some concern was expressed that the participants involved in the first two ELF sessions were already from 'privileged' backgrounds, it was noted that a good first crop of graduates was essential to provide a "springboard" to "help move young women forward." The reviewer encouraged the FWRM to select more participants from less advantaged backgrounds in successive years of the ELF.

The review of the YWLP's first two years found several positive outcomes from the ELF component. Young women were more aware of their economic rights and social responsibilities, becoming leaders in community work, setting up their own businesses, lobbying for political and environmental change and negotiating with employers to give women more opportunities at work.

This positive review led to a second phase of YWLP, carried out over three years from July 2008 to July 2011. The second phase of the YWLP again included the Emerging Leaders Forum, and included two new components in developing a programme for girls between the ages of 10 and 14 years, and building regional partnerships.

In 2008, FWRM Coordinator Virisila Buadromo was summoned by a judges of the Court of Appeal along with the editor of the '*Fiji Sun*' for the opinions expressed in a press statement on that court. She is seen here in discussion with Movement lawyer Richard Naidu.

As in the previous review, it was found by consultant Bronwyn Tilbury that perhaps the largest impact of the ELF component of the YWLP was on the personal and professional lives of the ELF graduates. "The fact that young women were graduating from the programme and then going on to secure jobs in a range of different civil society organisations as well as positions in the private sector and bringing a feminist lens to that work was seen as a significant strength of the programme," Tilbury noted.

It was also found that the ability of the ELF project to attract around twenty 18-25 year olds each year and the contribution that that large cadre of young women has made to FWRM is testament to the strength of the ELF project. However, yet again, it was found that ELF was carried out solely in the urban context of Suva and that it was attracting a privileged group

ADVOCACY FOR DEMOCRACY

1987
When Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka seized power in a coup in May 1987, the FWRM criticised him and the army and spoke up for democracy and the rule of law because it is the foundation for good governance and underlies any rights for women. This resulted in activists being threatened, intimidated, and assaulted. Some members of the women's movement were arrested and charged for protest activities.

1995-97
The FWRM made submissions regarding women's rights in the constitution and to ensure the implementation of a strong Bill of Rights. This was a very unpopular move with some but eventually women's rights were enshrined in the 1997 Constitution, which was hailed globally for having one of the most progressive Bills of Rights.

2000
After the George Speight coup attempt, the FWRM along with other human-rights based organisation strongly condemned the action. The Movement did not support or engage with the interim administration that was set up to lead the country out of the crisis, and especially opposed its so-called Blueprint for Affirmative Action for indigenous Fijians. Some of the FWRM's staff were threatened in phone calls and one staff member and three management board members left as a result of the coup.

2001
The Movement filed an affidavit in support of the Naitasiri farmer Chandrika Prasad who sought a declaration from the courts that the 1997 Constitution was still in force despite the purported actions of the military to abrogate it following George Speights seizure of Parliament. The affidavits showed the opposition to the interim adiministration did not emerge in public because dissent was suppresed by force. During this period the FWRM focused on violations of human rights such as freedom of expression and movement.

2006
Following Fiji's fourth coup in December 2006, the FWRM maintained its call for a return to democracy. As a result, the Movement's Executive Director Virisila Buadromo and other human rights activists were detained by soldiers on Christmas Eve, and physically and verbally abused, in an action that drew outrage.

of young women who needed little capacity building, although the ELF management were commended for including more marginalised groups into the project. One of the weaknesses noted in the ELF project overall, was the gap in monitoring and evaluation to accurately gauge the project's impact. (See Milestone: Emerging Leaders Forum, page 20)

In the 10-14 years project, one of the major strength indicators was the enthusiastic involvement of parents, suggesting that working with children in a fun and engaging way, encouraged parents to see the FWRM in a new, more positive, light. But again, a lack of monitoring and evaluation of the project was highlighted as a major weakness. It was pointed out that the fact that FWRM does not know how the girls are using their new found knowledge was seen as a threat to the sustainability of the project.

On the regional partnerships front, the work done by FWRM to develop a Pacific Women's Movement was seen by respondents as a valuable way to leverage international support for women living in the Pacific. A major weakness identified, however, is the unsustainable project design, depending heavily on the capacity of the regional partner organisation as to whether they were able to adapt the training given by FWRM and develop a YWLP for themselves.

In the mid-2000s, under Virisila Buadromo's leadership the FWRM started expanding in earnest its work with other countries in the Pacific. A significant event in 2005 was the first Feminist Advocacy and Analysis Training held in February. Organised by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and the FWRM, the training was aimed at developing the advocacy and critical analysis skills of young women activists in the Pacific.

With a general election due in mid-2006 – and the Movement marking its 20th year of existence – the FWRM ramped up its efforts to 'keep gender on the agenda'. As in previous years, the FWRM launched a Women in Politics appeal in which the funds raised were distributed equally to all women candidates to help their campaign. A total of $11,000 was raised in a short period and distributed to all women candidates equally. A long-time FWRM member and current (2012) vice-chair of the management board Priscilla Singh stood in the 2006 elections.

Despite the invisibility of women and women's issues during campaigning, women made minor gains at the polls – although exactly the same number elected in 1999 were elected in 2006. Of the 27 candidates (also the same number as in 1999), eight were elected to the House of Representatives – 11 per cent of the lower house. Five women out of a total 32 members of the Senate were appointed – 15 per cent. Laisenia Qarase's extended cabinet of 36 included five women ministers – 13.8 per cent. However, as the FWRM pointed out at the time, the representative figures for women fell far short of the 30 per cent of women in decision-making goal set by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

The FWRM appealed to those women in Cabinet to think of the implications of any bills that would be proposed, on their fellow sisters. They were urged to use their positions to help improve women's rights in Fiji.

However, their term in office was brief. No sooner had Laisenia Qarase returned to office, when military commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama resumed his long-running argument with the government, condemning Qarase's insistence on trying to push through controversial bills such as the Truth and Reconciliation Bill.

The power of protest ...

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FWRM

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is a feminist organisation registered as a charitable trust with a growing membership of both women and men. There are currently 300 members, the majority of whom are women from Fiji and some supporters from abroad.

Any female who accepts the ethos of the organisation and pays a subscription is eligible for membership while groups, organisations and men can join as "friends of the Movement".

The Movement has three Trustees who are entrusted with ensuring that the policies, finances and property of the Movement are being reasonably applied for the furtherance of the Movement's purpose.

A Management Board (MB) consisting of 9-10 members (including the Executive Director) directs the functioning of the organisation, while the ED directs the day-to-day work of the staff. The MB members are nominated by the Board Search Committee (BSC) and elected at the AGM. A Chair is elected by the MB, while a Treasurer is nominated by the BSC and elected at the AGM.

On 5 December 2006, Bainimarama finally made good on his threats to overthrow the government and Fiji – for the fourth time – had a government removed through the barrel of a gun. Yet again, the FWRM was at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement. And yet again there were ramifications of this stand for the members of the organisation.

Late on Christmas Eve 2006, Executive Director Virisila Buadromo was rounded up with other pro-democracy activists and taken to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks where they were subjected to sadistic physical, verbal and psychological abuse into Christmas morning.

Board Director Imrana Jalal was threatened in a phone call with rape and the FWRM office was broken into and ransacked. It was clear that a security and emergency policy needed to be developed to help prepare for and counter such threats.

Despite this, Buadromo pushed the FWRM team forward. As in other political crises, resources were focused on advocating for a return to democratic rule. But this time, the Movement was also conscious of the need to continue developing the capacity of young women. It was important, Buadromo said, to engage and support young women in those difficult times.

Two of the FWRM's successful and popular projects were revived – the Emerging Leaders Forum was based in Suva and the photography project '*Picture This*' went to Nadi.

Young women were well and truly manoeuvring themselves to take over the reins from the maturing leaders of the women's movement in the Pacific. At the 10th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women in Noumea in May 2007, attended by the FWRM's Virisila Buadromo and Anna Padarath, a statement written by the FWRM's Tara Chetty for an intergenerational dialogue at

the AWID Forum in 2005 was repeated. In her statement which in effect called for the passing of the torch, Chetty said: "When the women's movement is analysing power structures, it needs to also be looking at the power within the movement. We also need to share power and this is central to the engagement of young women. And it's something that many young women feel the movement is not doing very well at the moment".

At the conference, the FWRM with partners Kup Women for Peace from the PNG highlands and Tonga Women's Action for Change, held a workshop to discuss why leaders should work with young women. In the workshop, an eight-minute video produced by the FWRM titled *Be The Change* was shown. The video is an example of young women's energies, creativity and technology being put to use. In the video young women filmmakers examined issues around leadership, including the barriers and opportunities for young women in accessing leadership roles.

In 2008, the status of women's human rights defenders in Fiji was brought to the fore. In February, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement was summoned to the Court of Appeal for statements made about the legality of appointments to that court as well as on public statements by a judge. The editor of the *Fiji Sun* was also summoned for printing the contents of the Movement's press release. The representatives of both organisations received a dressing down for what the court said was a legally and factually incorrect point of view, however the FWRM stood by its statement viewing the whole exercises as a form of intimidation.

In April, five FWRM staff members were among 17 people arrested for unlawful assembly following a peaceful vigil supporting the Tibetan people's call for independence from China. They were taken from public space opposite the Chinese embassy on Queen Elizabeth Drive in Suva where they had been standing silently holding placards.

As Tara Chetty and Virisila Buadromo wrote at the time, "feminist activists are dealing with new vulnerabilities, while struggling to find a new way forward."

In June 2008, the FWRM hosted landmark Transitional Justice roundtable which had a regional focus with representatives from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. The roundtable was co-hosted by Rome-based NGO, No Peace Without Justice. The roundtable was a learning experience for the FWRM and all involved, and also an opportunity for the FWRM to try and resolve some of the ideological conflicts which developed following the military takeover of 2006. It was the beginning of moving toward participative parliamentary democracy.

The speakers included prominent British human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson QC who spoke on the importance, indivisibility and interrelationship of democracy, rule of law and human rights. The Roundtable had been anticipated to lead to recommendations for addressing specific problems related to democracy, the rule of law and human rights. From these recommendations FWRM is carrying out activities under its Transitional Justice Programme.

In November, three FWRM staff members and an ELF graduate went to Cape Town for the Association of Women's Rights in Development's (AWID) 11th Forum. Of the 2000 women and men from around the globe that attended, the Pacific delegation consisting of around 50 women made a big impact. The FWRM collaborated with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) in hosting a session entitled '*Tok-Talk: Nourishing an Asia Pacific Feminist Movement*'. The session was a success. The Pacific's delegation was the largest that has ever attended an AWID Forum – and it was described as the "loudest and most visible 3 per cent".

Coming back energised from AWID, the FWRM went straight into hosting a three-and-a-half day consultation for women human rights defenders as its contribution to the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The consultation was the first of its kind for local WHRDs and an opportunity for about 20 defenders to talk about their work and the challenges they face professionally and personally.

Another significant project was the production of eight brochures simplifying the Family Law Act that was launched in January 2009

In March 2009, the FWRM aired a radio campaign advocating for human rights, the rule of law and democracy. Titled '*I want a Fiji...*', the radio campaign ran over a period of two weeks in English, iTaukei and Fiji-Hindi, reaching hundreds of thousands of people across the country. The campaign was carried out under the FWRM's Transitional Justice programme, which encompasses much of the Movement's work towards peace and security in Fiji, and ending the conflict cycle of the past two decades.

The 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was held at the United Nations in New York in March 2009. Three of the women on the Pacific delegation had been trained previously by FWRM. Nani Samuela of the Cook Islands and 'Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki of Tonga are graduates of the FWRM/DAWN Regional Feminist Advocacy Training and Veena Singh-Bryar who was with femLINKPACIFIC, is a graduate of the Emerging Leaders Forum.

In April, the Court of Appeal ruled on the legality of the military-led regime that was in power saying it was illegal. The next day, Good Friday, the military through the then President Ratu Josefa Iloilo purported to abrogate the 1997 Constitution and impose a 'new legal order'. With the new legal order, the Public Emergency Regulations were activated (and rolled over month after month until January 2012) and official censorship became a daily affair in newsrooms.

Despite this drastic setback, the FWRM's Transitional Justice for Fiji programme was kept busy, developing a new partnership with the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding to further transitional justice work in the community.

As part of its transitional justice mandate, FWRM has been involved in the formation and oversight of Dialogue Fiji, a movement of NGOs and individuals committed to peace-building. Dialogue Fiji was formed following a pan-Pacific UN-organised workshop on conflict resolution in Port Vila in May 2008, at a time when NGO and government stakeholders were barely seeing eye-to-eye on national issues and the military-led administration in Fiji. After the workshop this

group, with FWRM's Virisila Buadromo as a founding member, determined to take an active role in resolving Fiji's problems, continued to meet periodically.

FWRM has played a crucial role in the formation and continuation of Dialogue Fiji. It is a movement of NGOs, and individuals committed to peace-building and welcomes others to join the process through the Citizens' Assembly. Dialogue Fiji is directed by a committee – of which Buadromo is a member – receiving its mandate from an assembly of wider civil society, and managed through a secretariat.

In July 2009, the Fiji NGO CEDAW advisory committee submitted its second, third and fourth shadow reports to the UN CEDAW committee. The shadow reports indicated that general implementation of CEDAW principles was weak in Fiji and even where there was political commitment on the part of the government, there was insufficient resources available or allocated to implement CEDAW standards. CEDAW is one of the most ratified of UN conventions and the least implemented.

A globally significant event was the historic resolution adopted on 14 September 2009 – after three years of political manoeuvring – that sanctioned the creation of a new UN agency for women to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General.

In November 2009, the military-led regime enforced its Crimes Decree without consultation; of the laws – specifically the definition of rape – had long been advocated for by the FWRM. The decree broadened the definition of the offence of rape, which now includes the various forms of sexual violence.

The decree has made the offence of rape gender-neutral – rightly recognising that boys and men can also be victims of sexual assault. The decree has also confirmed the judicial abandonment in 2004 of discriminatory provisions of common law such as corroboration laws and the use of past sexual history of a victim as a means of discrediting the victims' testimony.

However, the decree retained the archaic language of the Penal Code that it replaced and did not move away from the moralistic basis of offences. By failing to update the language to incorporate a human rights-based approach to sexual offences the decree failed to take the opportunity to provide adequate protection for women and girls or replace myths about rape and sexual assault.

With the enforcement of the Media Industry Development Decree in late June 2009, the production of *Balance* was suspended because of the wide interpretation of the decree which meant technically any material produced for dissemination must be officially censored. The military regime eventually amended the decree to exempt organisations and businesses.

At the beginning of 2010, a central figure in the founding and development of the FWRM, Imrana Jalal was charged by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption for operating a restaurant without a licence from the Suva City Council. An administrative law matter was being pursued by an anti-corruption body in an apparent campaign against her because of her public stand on issues of human rights and democracy. The case dragged on but was eventually thrown out by the High Court. However, it had a damaging effect financially and psychologically on Jalal, her husband and family. She relinquished her position as chairperson

Movement building ...

and community connection ...

of the FWRM board and took up a post in Manila with the Asian Development Bank, although she still remains on the board.

Even as the FWRM marked its 25th year anniversary in 2011, it found itself yet again the target of authorities. On 1 July as the staff gathered at a Pacific Harbour hotel for a birthday retreat and planning, a police officer from the Criminal Investigations Department inquired with the hotel whether the FWRM had a permit to meet.

When Buadromo said the meeting was an internal one and therefore did not need a permit, the officer insisted she be taken for questioning at the police post across the road over an alleged breach of the Public Emergency Regulations (PER) that had been in force since April 2009. When Buadromo agreed to accompany him with a lawyer, he insisted that a lawyer's presence would not be needed. She however, insisted that it was within her rights.

At the police station Buadromo and FWRM staff member and lawyer Roshika Deo were told to wait while the officer "consulted his superiors". During that time, Virisila called several women human rights defenders as well as a human rights lawyer to inform them of the situation. She was advised by the lawyer to request that her statement be given in Suva, in his presence. This request was denied by the police (however, later in the afternoon she was requested to come to the police station in Suva the next morning).

After half an hour of phone calls between the police officer and someone at the Suva CID headquarters, Buadromo and Deo were informed that charges would not be pressed but the meeting had to be dispersed and that this should be viewed as a "warning". While waiting at the station, a police officer told Deo: "It's because you are an activist that is why they have brought you in ... to check!"

Both women returned to the resort with the police officer to confirm that the planning was shut down. No charges were pressed against FWRM.

Looking ahead …
Beyond 25 years

In 25 years, the FWRM has grown from an organisation dedicated mainly to women's issues to one which is regarded as a legitimate social and political commentator and actor on a variety of legal, political, social, cultural and economic issues.

More recently, in April 2012, the FWRM co-convened along with the National Council of Women Fiji, Soqosoqo Vakamarama i Taukei and fem'LINKPACIFIC an inaugural Fiji Women's Forum aimed at increasing women's participation in national processes including the reform of governance structures and the drafting of a new constitution.

The Forum is a collective process bringing together diverse experiences and perspectives with a commitment to the following four priority areas agreed upon by the participants of the inaugural Forum:

1. Respect for human rights.
2. Defining the role of the security forces.
3. Promotion of women's participation in decision-making and democratisation processes including Temporary Special Measures.
4. A rights-based, respectful, open and participatory constitution making process.

An outcomes statement released at the end of the inaugural Forum in April stated that any new or reformed Constitution must entrench a strong Bill of Rights which builds on the benchmark of freedoms and rights included in the 1997 Constitution of Fiji and integrates international human rights treaties and norms.

The Fiji Women's Forum reiterated concerns raised in dialogue with the representatives of the State regarding the lack of opportunity to inform the terms of reference of the Constitution Commission and also inform the development of civic education.

A follow-up Women's Forum was held in June. This second Women's Forum set strategies on how the participants would work collectively to address four priority areas including:

1. Civic education strategies such as the development of a rights-based civic education curriculum and the use of a multimedia and information sharing strategy;
2. Addressing security sector governance including through enhancing and promoting a human security approach through collaborative research, policy advocacy and campaigns;
3. Enhancing women's participation in decision-making and democratisation processes including Temporary Special Measures; and,
4. A rights-based, respectful, open and participatory constitution-making process. In particular, women leaders will be making submissions on a strengthened Bill of Rights that includes a definition of substantive equality and the full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Honouring Women Human Rights Defenders

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'Atu Emberson-Bain

Dr Wame Baravilala

Angeline Chand

Vani Dulaki

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

Ruth Lechte & Diane Goodwille

Jacque Koroi

Edwina Kotoiswa

Kuini Latua

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi

Noelene Nabulivou

Richard Naidu

Wardan Narsey

Rajeh Drodrobogi Nicole

Susan Parkinson

Sharda Segran

Praveen Sharma

Niru Singh

Claire Slatter

Adi Kuini Vuikaba-Speed

Helen Tavola

Luisa Tora

Arietta Tuitoga

HONOURING WOMEN
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The second Fiji Women's Forum reaffirmed women's rightful role as equal participants in the democratisation processes and continues the process for women to claim their rightful place in national decision-making. The national Women's Forum will continue to ensure that the process to elections and beyond will be genuinely democratic for all the people of Fiji.

As the Fiji Women's Rights Movement has begun to mature, several issues have emerged that need consideration, including the perception that the FWRM has become too law and policy oriented, losing sight of the issues facing everyday women who they claim to represent.

In a 2004 paper, Nicole George analysed the functioning of women's rights groups in Fiji today against that of the YWCA's Public Affairs Committee of the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike the radical approach of the YWCA, which she said went far beyond the conventional framing of 'women's issues', the current crop of NGOs lean more towards "advocacy" rather than "activism" and in the process reduce the scope of NGO activity and limit their critical potential.

George stated: "While the FWRM and the RRRT claim to speak for Fiji's 'poor women' as their constituency, these groups often tend to overlook the fact that poverty-levels may function as an obstacle which denies the poor access to the much-touted laws designed to improve economic status."[15]

Another issue confronting the Movement is sustaining of membership to ensure the organisation develops positively into the future. Shamima Ali, a founding member, says to keep its momentum, the Movement requires people of all ages to become involved:

"There is a place for everyone in the family – whether you are 100 or 10 years old. And for those of us who have gone before, it's our duty to create those spaces. When people come in with the josh, the enthusiasm, you need to encourage that and you need to have space for that to flourish".

"People need to understand that having a degree does not make a worker automatically gender-sensitised. You need to train people. While ELF is a great programme, I believe there is room for improvement."

As with any organisation, with time directions and focus may change. But founding member and former management board chair, Imrana Jalal, a significant force in the life of the FWRM, hopes that the principles on which the Movement was founded and developed do not change.

"Being a co-founder of FWRM, means that FWRM is part of my psyche, part of who I am. It is like something I have partly given birth to, my baby. I am one of that baby's parents. But like a baby, it grows and becomes an adult; it finds its own feet. It carries something of the dreams of its parents, but it has its own dreams too. It therefore defines its own future. The future of FWRM lies in the hands of the Board and its young, dedicated staff. Every movement has its theorists, its philosophers, its thinkers and its activists, the doers who take the ideologies and turn them into action – all are critical".

15 George, Nicole, 2004, Advocacy or activism: gender politics in Fiji, working paper 2004/4, Department of International Relations, The Australian National University

"But every action ought to be examined. Does it meet the goals of the ideology? If the ideology is lost the dream is also lost. The gains are fleeting. My only concern – and this is my message to those who may or may not wish to carry on the dream of FWRM's founders – is that, with the passing of time and lessening of resources, FWRM may soften its ideological stance; its feminist and human rights foundations may weaken due to pragmatism, a lack of time for intellectual scrutiny and rigour (for this it needs to bring in a more diverse membership e.g. from the academia), given the difficult circumstances under which it survives".

"And it may take a practical direction, the easier road, the one more travelled. Then we will become part of the mainstream. If that is the case, we will lose not only our cutting edge, but the very reason why we came into existence. However, having said all of that, I trust and hope that this will not happen".

"I have faith in the current leadership of FWRM, and will stand by it and them, regardless. They are my 'sisthas', and they also have their own dreams for FWRM. As I said they shape the future, not only for FWRM, but also for Fiji. It is a huge burden."

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