Pacific churches acknowledge AIDS

From the Pacific AIDS Alert Bulletin

Suva (AAP) - With the South Pacific facing a potential AIDS explosion, the region's powerful churches are finally, if slowly, coming to grips with the issue

In a part of the world where discussing sex is often taboo, some influential churches have obstructed the fight against HIV by opposing AIDS education or the advertising of condoms, saying they promote promiscuity.

However, the South Pacific Commission (SPC) warned that an alarming increase in the rate of HIV infection meant Pacific countries may be very much affected by the epidemic in coming years. A long-awaited first regional meeting between religious groups and AIDS educators in Fiji went some way to filling the void left by church neglect of the issue, according to the SPC's AIDS Information Officer, Steven Vete.

> ...It is time for churches to take a wider view of human sexuality.

He said more churches were now seeing the link between AIDS and the growing social problems caused by booming urban development in the Pacific.

Representatives agreed it was time for churches to take a wider view of human sexuality. While abstinence or fidelity were the only safe and certain ways of preventing the spread of HIV, they added: "We however understand and accept the public health rationale for condom use in reducing the risk of HIV transmission."

Secretary-General of the Roman Catholic Church Bishop's Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC), Reverend Arthur Tierney, said the meeting had ended the 'total silence' about AIDS among influential regional churches.

Photo: Fiji Daily Post

Pregnancy-related transmission of HIV to women and infants

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it has HIV. The lack of certainty this causes for 18 months after a baby is born is one of the most difficult issues for women with HIV to cope with.

What are the risk factors?

The following seem to influence the rate of pregnancy-related transmission of HIV to infants, though these are not predictive for individual women or infants:

* The risk may be greater if the mother becomes infected during pregnancy or near the time that the child is born. This would correspond with the fact that the amount of HIV in the mother would be high in the weeks or months after infection occurs and before enough antibodies are produced to fight it.

* The risk may be less in women who are beyond the window period but who have few or no symptoms of HIV-related illness and relatively high T4 cell counts.

Women & Politics

Women need to attain a critical mass within parliament to make a difference.

Suva lawyer and women's rights activist, Imrana Jalal told a seminar for women on *Political Awareness and Political Issues Affecting Women Today* that it was not enough having just a few token women in parliament.

"What if those women are not concerned about other women? We have examples of women politicians in Fiji who have got into parliament but who have not made any differences for women. A critical mass is sufficient numbers of women so that give or take a few women who might not be concerned about women's issues there will still be enough to make a difference for all women.

"The way I see it is that alot of changes are happening which concern women - policy changes are being made that concern our lives so how can we influence the course of history unless we participate in these decisions?" Ms Jalal asked.

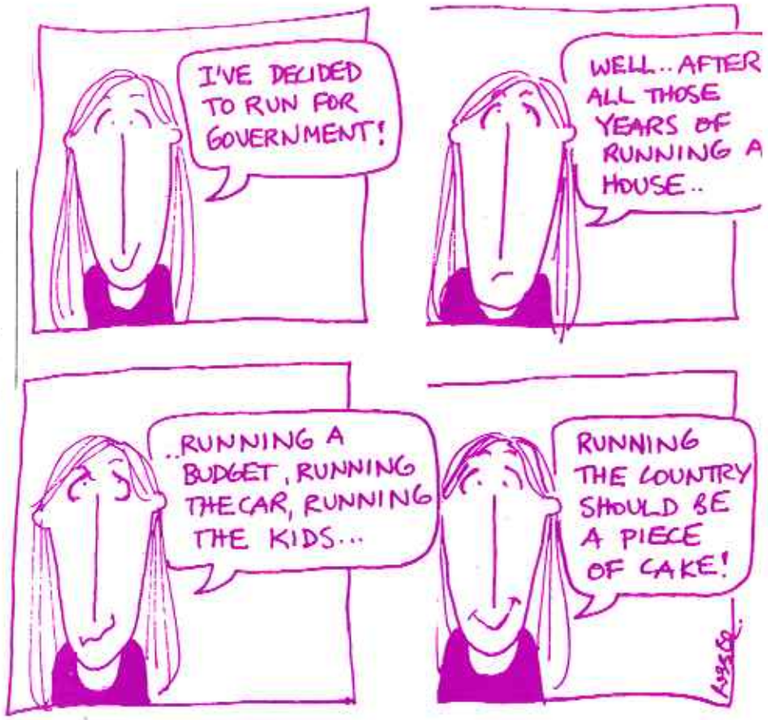
> ***Statistics an ideal way to illustrate women's unequal represenation...***

Ms Jalal spoke on why women were so under-represented in parliaments saying the reasons could be found by analysing the pathways to power. These, she said, were eligibility for office and recruitment policies.

"Women seem to have great difficulty getting political power. There is an idea which has affected women in every aspect of life. This is that women's place is in the private world, that of the home and not in the world of decision making and public affairs."

Recruitment policies, Ms Jalal told the seminar, were affected by the level of development of countries and the socio-economic environment.

"In countries where women's literacy levels are low there are less possibilities for women. At the same time, this is not always true as evidenced by a few developing countries where women have penetrated much higher levels of power than their Western sisters."



Outlining strategies which could be adopted to have more women in politics, Ms Jalal said statistics documenting the participation of men and women in politics were an essential tool.

She said statistics were an ideal way to illustrate women's unequal representation whether in private companies, parliament, trade unions or statutory bodies.

Other strategies Ms Jalal highlighted included:

* Trying to change reality by changing mentality. One way to change mentality is by disseminating information;

* Creating women's networks in business, professions, government, trade unions and women's organisations to share experiences and create solidarity as well as a knowledge base;

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Women urged to breastfeed

Mothers have been urged to consider breastfeeding as a sole means of sustenance for babies during their first four to six months of life.

The call was made at the launching of World Breastfeeding Week (August 1 to 7) in Suva by UNICEF's Assistant Programme Officer in Fiji, Selma Piro Khan.

Ms Khan added the child would be happier and healthier if breastfeeding was continued well into the second year of life. She said breastfeeding could be a pleasurable experience with the help and support of friends and relatives, and with the special guidance of health-care providers. Employers too, Ms Khan added, should work to ensure adequate nursing breaks were made available and that the workplace was a flexible and mother-friendly environment.

"Empowering women to breastfeed requires a new definition of women's work - one that more realistically integrates women's productive and reproductive activities, and which values both equally.

"It (breastfeeding) should be seen in its natural beauty and significance. It provides protection and assistance to babies to develop in accordance with the laws of nature. It is all-encompassing and provides all nutrients needed in exact proportion for optimum growth," she said.

Breastfeeding and reproductive rights

Breastfeeding has been given global recognition for its contribution to child survival at international conferences and in international documents.

Less attention, however, is given to its significant role in empowering women. Breastfeeding empowers a woman by allowing her to control her own fertility and enhance her health as well as that of her children. The knowledge that a breastfeeding mother is less likely to become pregnant is part of the traditional wisdom of many cultures. Breastfeeding is a woman's reproductive right which should be protected, supported and promoted.

Current research confirms that as long as a woman is fully or nearly fully breastfeeding, and has not resumed menstruation, she has a less than two per cent risk of becoming pregnant. Family planners know this method as Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM). A decline in breastfeeding rates contributes to the increase in birthrate where artificial means of family planning are not used.

600 HIV carriers estimated

Adapted from *The Fiji Times*
July 1995

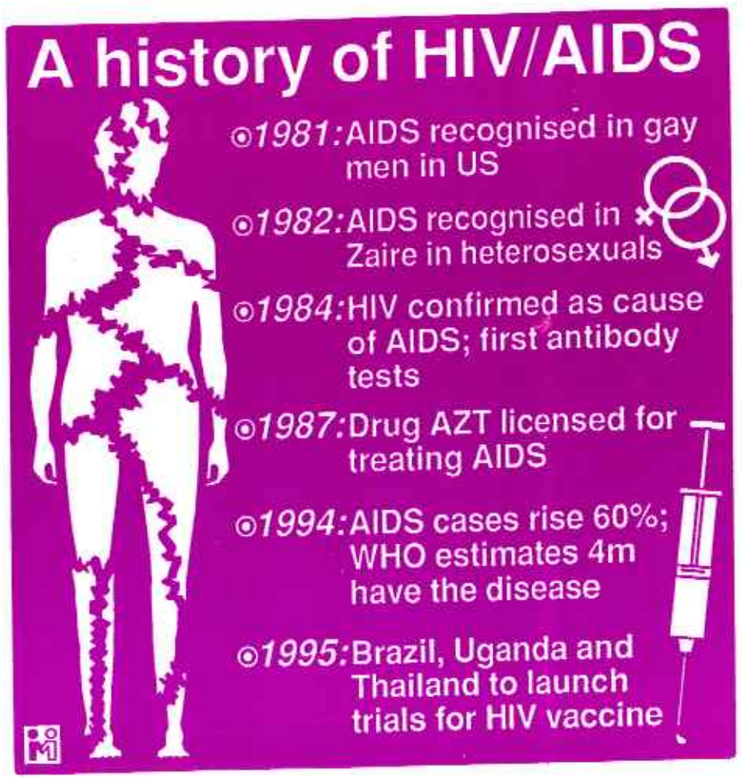
There could be at least 600 carriers of the HIV virus in Fiji, an AIDS expert from Australia said recently.

Speaking at the launching of machines for the testing of AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome), Pacific Region of Abbot Diagnosis Division sales manager Glen Chabot said he worked out the figure based on calculations used overseas.

The AIDS testing machines were installed at Dr Ilaitia Scruvatu's medical clinic in Suva. A total of 30 AIDS/HIV carriers have been reported in Fiji so far. But for every case reported, there could be at least 20 more cases, Mr Chabot said. On STD (sexually transmitted disease) cases, he said that "over 50 per cent of the time there aren't any symptoms - that's why so many people are infected".

"We feel there is a need for high quality diagnosis testing equipment in Fiji," Mr Chabot said. He said there was new equipment on the overseas market capable of detecting the HIV virus in urine samples.

Expressing similar sentiments, Subdivisional Medical Officer Western, Dr Yogendra Narayan said the figures were just the tip of the iceberg. He told nightclub and pub operators based in the Western Division that although the official figures showed there were 30 infected cases in the country, for every known case there were between 12 to 50 cases that were not known.



TALK SEX

'One of the hardest things to get your mouth around can be the words "

TALK SEX gets you Better and Safer Sex

How do you know if you have an STD?

Any disease which is passed from one person to another by sexual contact is called a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Sometimes it's hard to tell if you have one or not. With some infections a lot of people don't get symptoms. They may look and feel healthy but still have an STD.

If you have the following symptoms a check-up is vital:

- Unusual discharge from the vagina or penis, burning pain, stinging or irritation when passing urine;
- A sore, blister(s), ulcer(s), wart(s) or break(s) in the skin, or rash in the genital area;
- A low abdominal pain, pain during intercourse;
- A rash that isn't itchy on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet.

Pregnancy-related transmission of HIV to women and infants

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in the placenta or if HIV in the mother's blood crosses the placenta.

Evidence of infection has been found as early as 13 weeks of pregnancy in the foetuses of HIV-positive women who had second-trimester abortions in several studies though not in all of them. One study found almost no evidence of infection in foetuses aborted in the first and second trimester of pregnancy. Thus, infection may occur or be detectable only later in pregnancy or at birth.

It is thought, though not proved, that infection may happen during childbirth, possibly during the mixing of maternal and infant blood through the umbilical cord, or through ingestion by the infant of maternal vaginal mucus and/or blood during pregnancy.

A recent study is widely interpreted as indicating that infection may occur at birth. This study, of 66 pairs of twins of HIV-positive mothers, found that 50 per cent of the first-born twins with vaginal delivery had HIV, and 38 per cent of the first-born twins with caesarean section had HIV, while 19 per cent of the second-born twins had HIV with both forms of delivery. This difference in the rate of infection in the first and second-born twins has not been fully explained.

It is suggested that if the first-born twins remained longer in the birth canal, they might have ingested more virus-containing fluids, leaving less to affect the second-born. On this theory, it is suggested that some unspecified form of vaginal cleansing prior to delivery might reduce infection. However, this does not explain the difference in the rate of infection in those twins delivered by caesarean. In fact, some of all of these infants may have been infected prior to birth, and any form of vaginal cleansing in childbirth sounds highly problematic.

Is it possible to know in advance whether an infant will be infected?

No one can predict in advance whether an infant will be born with HIV infection or not, and no antenatal screening test for infants exists. Any invasive test during pregnancy might transmit HIV infection from the mother to the foetus. Even if there were a safe antenatal test, and even if it showed the foetus to be HIV-negative at the time it was done, there would be no guarantee that the baby would remain HIV-negative throughout the pregnancy and birth.

Testing for HIV antibodies in the blood of an infant under 12 to 18 moths does not provide a definitive diagnosis of HIV infection in the infant. This is because the mother's antibodies to HIV may remain in the infant's blood for up to 18 months. Only after 18 months do antibodies to HIV in the infant indicate that

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Empowering women

Celebrations for World Breastfeeding Week got underway with a thought provoking play by local women's group, Women's Action for Change. And although the plot was a little far-fetched, the play provided food for thought where breastfeeding is concerned.

The play basically went like this: two women from planet Earth crash their spaceship on another planet where they discover that men breastfeed their babies. Furthermore, they find out they have four months fully paid maternity leave (by the way, the men don't have the babies, their wives do) and they have day care facilities at work. They are also allowed time off from work to go home during working hours to breastfeed. And this time off is fully paid.

The Earth women are told that their planet is primitive. They are told that in the long-run it is cost-saving to provide the best care and facilities for breastfeeding mothers because breast-fed babies grow well and are healthy. This then reduces the risk of diseases which in turn reduces the financial burden on governments and societies.

The Earth women return to their planet where no one believes their incredible story. And it is incredible considering the somewhat archaic deal mothers in Fiji get. Fijian mothers, under the country's Employment Act, are entitled to $5.00 per day for maternity leave allowance, hardly enough to pay for baby essentials. (This figure increased from $1.50 per day in 1991.) The Employment Act further allows women to take 42 days prior to birth and 42 days after birth. The Act classifies this as pre-confinement and post-confinement leave. The 84 days have to be taken as 42 consecutive (one after the other) days before delivery and 42 consecutive days after delivery although some employers allow their employees to take the 84 days in one stretch.

In order to qualify for maternity leave, the woman must have been working for her employer for at least 150 days before delivery, or in other words since she was four months pregnant. The law also says that the woman has to work for him/her during the last four months of pregnancy.

HOW *Breastfeeding Empowers Women*

Breastfeeding confirms women's power to control their bodies, and challenges the bio-medical model and business interests that promote bottle-feeding.

2.
Breastfeeding reduces women's dependence on medical professionals and validates the tried and trusted knowledge that mothers and midwives have about infant care and feeding.

3.
Breastfeeding encourages women's self-reliance by increasing their confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their infants.

4.
Breastfeeding helps child spacing, reduces the risks of anaemia and provides protection against ovarian and breast cancer, osteoporosis and multiple sclerosis.

5.
Breastfeeding requires a new definition of women's work - one that more realistically integrates women's productive and reproductive activities, and which values both equally.

6.
Breastfeeding requires structural changes in society to improve the position and condition of women.

7.
Breastfeeding encourages solidarity and cooperation among women at the household, community, national and international level.

Muslim women reaffirm Islam as religion of equality

Adapted from *The Fiji Times*, August 5, 1995

Women lawmakers from 35 Muslim countries ended a three-day conference in Pakistan reaffirming their belief that Islam preaches equality between the sexes.

Women from secular Turkey and Egypt mingled with their more orthodox Muslim sisters from countries like Sudan and Iran. "Our differences are our blessings," said Dr Horeya Megahed, the leader of the Egyptian delegation.

The final communique of the conference upheld Islam as a religion of tolerance and blamed widespread discrimination against women on archaic traditions and ignorance. The 120 delegates at the conference passed 18 resolutions.

They condemned rape as a weapon of war in a resolution that called on the international community "to spare no effort to alleviate the sufferings of our sisters (who) are being subjected to violence, genocide, occupation and aggression". They also established a secretariat which will present the position of Muslim countries at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

At the end of the day, Janat Mukwaya of Uganda and vice-president of the conference, said she discovered one thing "It is much easier to work through women to unite the Muslim world than through men women have a bottom line on everything."

Poetry

The Firewood Carrier of Daru Town

I get up in the early hours of the morning, before the sun.
The others are still sleeping as I blow life into the fire and prepare food for their breakfast.

Looking out of the door, across the darkness, I can see the red glow and white grey smoke coming from the hut where other women are starting their day.

My husband, who has slept with the other men, comes to join the children for a simple breakfast of sago.

I get my ropes. I gather the firewood.
I make three or four bundles.
I need help to lift my load onto my head.
The rope cuts into my head as I walk.
My daughter drags along my side with a load of her own.

It is just getting light.
I walk along the side of the road.
Speeding trucks frighten me and push me aside.
Dust covers me. I walk from house to house.
People call me "fire truck".

At people's houses I get one Kina or a packet of rice in exchange for the bundle of firewood.
I must continue my work to earn my living even when it rains, and even if my child is sick.

All the time the rope that holds the firewood is biting into my head.

I walk on until the sun is up and over, and going down.
I walk the whole day.
If the load is finished, I go back and re-load again.
When the sun goes down I must go home.

It's dark. I must prepare dinner.
If I have coins I count them. Then I sleep.

When the new day comes, once again, I continue my labour.

Sila Harikan, IDEAS Women's Desk, Daru, Wallum Province, Papua New Guinea.

Pregnancy-related transmission of HIV to women and infants

adapted from Women and HIV/AIDS -Marge Berer with Sunanda Ray

What is pregnancy-related transmission of HIV?

Pregnancy-related transmission of HIV can occur when a woman is trying to get pregnant, during pregnancy and possibly through breast-feeding.

The incidence of pregnancy-related HIV infection in infants directly depends on the number of women with HIV/AIDS. As long as the numbers and proportion of women with HIV keep increasing, so will the numbers of affected infants.

* It is not possible to practise safer sex and try to get pregnant at the same time. An unqualified number of women may have become HIV-infected when they were trying to become pregnant.

A few cases of pregnancy-related transmission of HIV to women have occurred when women have been trying for pregnancy through inseminations from donors who had HIV. In 1985, four of eight Australian women became infected in this way, from one donor. A few other cases have been reported anecdotally.

* Pregnancy-related transmission of HIV from mother to foetus can occur at some point during pregnancy or birth.

Terms for this form of transmission - perinatal, mother-to-infant and vertical transmission - are all inaccurate. Worse, they implicity hold only women responsible. It takes two to get pregnant. Men with HIV are also responsible, and their role must be made visible, both prior to and during pregnancy. Where pregnant and birthing women have become infected through unsafe blood transfusions, possibly also infecting their infants, the public health services are directly implicated too.

Outcome of pregnancy in infants of HIV-positive mothers

HIV infection in mothers may or may not affect their infants. The mother's health status generally affects an infant's vulnerability to illness and may play a major role.

HIV in the mother may have a negative effect on the birth weight of an infant, but not always. In a Zambian study, HIV-positive women were almost four times more likely to have low-birthweight babies than HIV-negative women. In the European collaborative study, however, the difference was not significant. Similarly, some prematurity may be the result of HIV infection, but not always or not significantly.

The most significant adverse outcome of pregnancy in infants of HIV-positive women is HIV infection itself. The risk of transmission during pregnancy found in different groups of women has ranged from as low as 6.4 per cent to almost 60 per cent. The majority of studies have found a rate of between 15 and 40 per cent. In other words, 60 to 85 per cent of infants of women with HIV do not become HIV-infected themselves. A lower risk of transmission has been found more often in groups of women in Europe and North America. A higher risk has been found more often in African women. Many factors appear to affect this risk.

When and how does pregnancy-related transmission occur?

It is extremely difficult to determine when and how this form of transmission occurs. It is thought that most infection happens during pregnancy, possibly via HIV

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AIDS voice

Saying no to nuclear tests

From page 3

Rabuka that Fiji would not take any further action against France. Mr Rabuka said in July that Fiji had to respect the territorial integrity of the French territories "just as much as we want anybody else to respect ours". He was since outvoted in Parliament trying to amend a motion by Opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy to condemn nuclear testing. Mr Reddy's motion, which was later passed by the House, called on Parliament to condemn France's decision to resume testing.

However, Ms Salabula said Senator Bole had agreed to receive a petition signed by 50,000 people. The petition was originally presented to the French ambassador to Fiji at the end of a recent protest march in Suva on Bastille Day.

The centre took full advantage of Environment Week celebrations in June distributing pamphlets and fact sheets on the dangers of nuclear testing. And Ms Salabula is continuing her education drive by targeting students with lectures and by holding competitions for schools in Fiji.

"We even have educational programmes for the grassroots level and have in fact been visiting schools since last May."

France reportedly has remained defiantly impassive amid growing world condemnation - and perhaps more importantly, a mounting threat of economic boycott - in response to its plan to resume the tests. But in a new development, the environmental group Greenpeace filed suit alleging that French President Jacques Chirac exceeded his legal authority in ordering a resumption for nuclear tests in the South Pacific.

Fiji, meanwhile, welcomed the Greenpeace flagship, Rainbow Warrior II, which arrived in Suva on July 29 on a goodwill visit and to gain support for its Mururoa protest.

What you can do and what our goverments must do

* Write or fax (+33 147422465) to French President Chirac and tell him we do not want his nuclear tests.
* Send photos of your children with a letter to the French Embassy, Dominion House, Suva or President Chirac, Elysee Palace, Paris, France reminding them that it is their future that France is ignoring.
* Demand that the South Pacific Forum withdraw France's status as a Post Forum Dialogue Partner until they agree to stop nuclear testing.
* Urge the South Pacific Forum government to push for the re-listing of "French Polynesia" in the UN Decolonisation Committee list.
* Call on the US and the UK to sign the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty now as a sign of their good faith not to test and to send a strong message to France that they disagree with their resumption of nuclear tests.
* Ask our governments to stop any military cooperation with France.
* Urge the Fiji government to re-evaluate its decision not to boycott the South Pacific Games.

From The Fiji Times Letters to the Editor column

Safe test

Sir,

The French ambassador's surprise at the public outcry over his government's decision to resume tests at Mururoa suggests that they may have expected the people of the Pacific Islands to just roll over and play dead like our government and FASANOC (Fiji Amateur Sports Association and National Olympic Committee) are doing.

Ambassador Jacques-Andre Costilhes has also stated several times that if it were not for the population density, they would have conducted the tests in France.

But what, may I ask Mr Ambassador, has population density got to do with it? After all, you insist that the tests are carried out so far underground that there is no harm to anyone "past, present or future."

If your statement about the safety of the tests is to be taken seriously, and not fall "on deaf ears", I suggest you convince your government to conduct the tests in France so you can prove to the world that France has developed the planet Earth's first Environmentally-Friendly Nuclear Bomb.

Mick Beddoes,
Nadi.

Praveen Sharma.

WEER Women, Employment *and* Economic Rights project

Women in the workplace

Despite the advances some women have made in the education, political and economic sphere, it is disappointing that women in Fiji who are in the paid workforce still "earn roughly three fifth of what men are paid even though they work almost as long hours".

Fiji Women's Rights Movement Project Officer, Praveen Sharma told a Rotary meeting in Suva recently that employment laws in Fiji reflected the current persisting views of society regarding the desired gender division (what society considers to be a woman's job/work and what it sees as a man's work) and the low status of women in society.

"The primacy given to women's reproductive roles as mothers, caregivers, teachers etc reflect this. Women's productive roles as subsistence food providers within the family are also given a great deal of importance by society. Although the importance of these roles is realised by society, it is not reflected in the labour laws of Fiji," Ms Sharma said.

She added that the main views about women and the type of work they did had contributed to the limited access women have had to paid employment. She said women made up only 30 per cent of the total wage and salary earners in Fiji adding that only eight per cent of female public servants received incomes of more than $10,000 as compared to nearly 20 per cent of salaried males on the same government payroll. Unions, Ms Sharma said, were not encouraged in most female-dominated occupations (with the exception of nursing and teaching) and due to the fear of losing their jobs, many women workers refused to join the union movement.

"The lack of a collective voice for most women workers means that a lot of discrimination faced by women workers goes without being reported. Because issues facing women workers are rarely brought into the limelight, most of these issues and discriminatory practices tend to be ignored and very rarely get corrected."

Ms Sharma said it was not only in low paid jobs (eg domestic work and garment work) that one found discrimination against women. "Gender based inequalities are visible even in white collar jobs like teaching. If you look at our education system, most of the Class 1 and 2 teachers are women. This has a lot to do with women's roles as mothers being seen to be most appropriate for teaching younger children."

Women & politics

From page 9

* Becoming members of women's organisations, whether or not they are feminist, as this has an effect in raising gender and political consciousness among women;

* Considering planning mechanisms such as quotas or reserved seats as a strategy to hasten the natural but slow evolution of women into power; and

* Knowing the legislation for equality which could be accompanied by sanctions or enacted without sanctions.

The one-day seminar was organised by the Women's Movement of the National Federation Party with the aim of educating women to better understand political issues affecting them. The deputy leader of the party, Harish Sharma spoke on the 1990 Constitution and the Review Process before the participants of the workshop took part in group discussions and a panel discussion.

FWRM urges workers to join FNPF scheme

Domestic workers in Suva have been encouraged to ask their employers to register them with the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) Domestic Employees Scheme.

At a workshop organised by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) last month, FWRM Project Officer Praveen Sharma outlined the advantages of joining the FNPF scheme for domestic workers.

Up until June last year, domestic workers were not eligible to join FNPF. The scheme is a voluntary membership scheme developed for domestic workers who are employed in private households. Voluntary membership entitles domestics workers to the benefits of FNPF.

Ms Sharma told the workers they were not forced to join the scheme and neither was it compulsory for their employers to register them. The scheme is administered with stamp pass books and contribution stamps. The employer purchases $1 or $2 stamps for his/her domestic worker which she then pastes in her stamp book.

Once a page in the book is filled with stamps, the worker can take the book to the FNPF office in Suva or mail it where the value of unmarked stamps will be credited to her account.

The workshop also covered health issues which included topics specifically aimed at women. Ms Sharma said she intended to hold similar workshops but would also target employers. She added that until employers were advised about the scheme, it would not be a success.

In The News - *A round-up of reports in the news media on women*

Judge sorry

Port Moresby, (AAP) - Papua New Guinea's Chief Justice, Sir Arnold Amet has issued a public apology on behalf of the judiciary for a judge's remarks that a man was entitled to rape his wife to satisfy his desire for sex.

Beattie report

Education Minister Taufa Vakatale has welcomed the adoption of the Beattie report saying it would give women who are victims of abuse a chance.

Sex abuse

Nine out of 10 domestic workers in Fiji are sexually harassed by their employers, says a survey by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. The survey revealed every female worker experienced different forms of harassment, including verbal abuse.

Syphilis cases

The six per cent positive diagnosis rate for syphilis in pregnant women was "quite high", the consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Suva's Colonial War Memorial Hospital, Dr Mary Schramm said.

Family planning

Supply of contraceptives to the rural area has been reduced because of a lack of funding to the Family Planning Association of Fiji.

Saying no to nuclear tests

Women can play an effective role protesting France's decision to resume nuclear testing in the Pacific by working in solidarity.

The Assistant Director-Demilitarisation of Pacific Concerns Resource Centre, Losena Salabula, has urged women to protest in solidarity and to support the efforts of non-governmental organisations.

Ms Salabula told Balance that France's decision to resume nuclear testing in the Pacific was not a political issue and should not be treated as such.

"Nuclear testing should be treated as an issue which affects everyone. We are appealing to the public to be open-minded and to realise that if France resumes nuclear testing, the results will affect everyone," she said.

Sitiveni Rabuka

Filipe Bole

France's nuclear test site in the South Pacific is at the coral atolls of Mururoa and Fangataufa in French Polynesia. Forty-four atmospheric tests and 130 underground tests have taken place there since 1966.

Ms Salabula said the centre planned to step up protests and would present Fiji's Foreign Affairs Minister, Senator Filipe Bole with a petition despite a statement by Prime Minister Sitiveni

Cont on page 4

When is something worth protesting about?

by Imrana Jalal Adapted from The Fiji Times

When is an issue worth a protest?

The most astounding thing about the evening protest outside the French residence celebrations for Bastille Day was when a tall, rotund, European gentleman not of French origin, attending the party yelled out to the small group of protestors, "why don't you protest about something that is worth protesting about?"

It got me thinking, what did the gentleman mean? Did he mean that a protest is only worth it when you don't have to sell your principles for a cheap glass of champagne? When is something worth protesting about? Is it only when a country invades ours? Is it only when our lives are directly threatened when we can actually see what is happening to us? Or is it only when we are quite certain that a positive response will come out of the protest?

I don't have to actually see a nuclear bomb being tested to feel the horror of it or to feel responsible for the health consequences of future generations of Pacific Islanders and for our environment.

I can visualise things that are beyond my own little world.

I wondered whether this same gentleman felt responsible for future generations of Pacific Islanders as I did. How can we ever be certain that a positive response will emanate from any protest that is ever made?

One can only learn from the lessons of history. After all when women tied themselves to the gates of Parliament House in order to get the right to vote, they did not know whether their protest would be worth it.

When Gandhi protested against colonial domination for the liberation of India, he did not know whether their protest would be worth it. Perhaps more pertinently, when New Zealanders, Australians, Americans and others outside South Africa protested against apartheid, they did not know whether their protests would be worth it.

But it all mattered. The ordinary people of the United States, Britain and elsewhere demanded the economic sanctions against the South African government which eventually toppled apartheid.

They did not politely ask for it. They demanded and they protested and they took up the struggle in brotherhood and sisterhood with right-thinking South Africans to bring about an end to apartheid. They did not stop to shrug their shoulders to say, "well, it's not our problem. It's an internal problem. It wouldn't be worth protesting anywhere."

It's time that we Fijians and Pacific Islanders learnt to consider ourselves as part of a global community of nations, as citizens of the larger world. In the final analysis, I figure that one can only try. The only sin is in not trying.

My arranged marriage by Benazir Bhutto

Adapted from New Woman August 1989

At the age of 36, Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, has become the first woman to lead an Islamic nation in modern times. How could a liberated woman - political leader, university educated and beautiful to boot - give up the freedom to choose a husband? Here, in her own words, Benazir Bhutto reveals the unusual political and cultural circumstances that caused her to go through with an arranged marriage.

Around July 1985 my mother and Auntie Manna approached me with a proposal from the landowning Zardari family on behalf of their son, Asif.

Auntie Manna, I later learned, had carefully researched the prospective groom before passing on the request to my mother, asking the Zardaris to answer such questions as Asif's academic qualifications (Petaro Cadet College, the London Centre of Economic and Political Studies), his profession (real estate, agriculture and the family construction business), his hobbies (swimming, squash and his own polo team, the Zardari Four), and even whether he liked books!

"Well, he can't compare with Benazir, but he does like reading," said his father, Hakim Ali.

Auntie Manna, an old friend of Asif's family, wanted a personal inspection of the prospective groom as well. Asif was brought to her house where he evidently passed muster, appearing slim and smart in his polo outfit. Satisfied on all counts, Auntie Manna then contacted my mother in England. But tragedy intervened again.

Within a month, my brother Shah Nawaz was murdered. I was shattered, as were we all. I told my mother and my aunt that I didn't want to even think of marriage for at least a year, if not two. I didn't even ask the name of the intended groom from the Zardari clan.

Auntie Manna was determined, however, to pursue her candidate. Without telling me, she arranged for my cousin Fakhri to invite Asif to a dinner party in November 1986, seven months after I'd returned to Pakistan from England. Auntie Manna evidently waited at the dinner until there were only a few people around to introduce him.

When I heard the name Asif, nothing clicked. I had no idea who he was and remember only that we immediately got into an argument. Auntie Manna was more concerned that he was sitting by me for too long and that it would lead to conjecture. She sent someone to take him away, which was a great relief to me. After spending all day listening to arguments within the political party, I hardly wanted to spend the evening arguing as well.

At the same time, I wondered what future husband would be able to tolerate a life as demanding as mine.

To be continued

Tackling violence head-on

From page 1

Australian Office of the Status of Women says that everyone, individually or in a community, can do a number of things to tackle violence against women.

It suggests that everyone learn about violence: how to recognise it; the laws related to it; places of refuge, support and counselling; and how to find help. These are basic issues and it is vital that women familiarise themselves with them.

The kit further recommends that the police be called if there are suspicions of violence or threats to a woman's safety.

It urges you to be prepared to provide support or to recommend services for those victims who may present themselves whether they have suffered physical, emotional, economic or sexual violence.

Beijing finally arrives

From the *Co ordination Unit, India*

...a time when women from all walks of life join in a unique sharing of visions, hopes and aspirations to strategise towards improving the quality of human life...

When the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women meets at Beijing, China from 4-15 September, 1995, it will be time for reviewing and appraising the advancement of women since 1975, and the time to determine priorities and implementation mechanisms to the turn of the century.

The NGO Forum on Women, which is the parallel Non-Governmental Forum, will meet from August 30 to September 8, 1995. It will be time for celebration of two momentous decades of an international movement for women's empowerment, a time when 30,000 women from all walks of life, all over the world will come together in a unique sharing of visions, diverse experiences, hopes and aspirations to strategise towards improving the quality of human life in the next century. Preparations for the event have taken different roads in different countries. It is clear that women's movements all over the world are not only working towards alternatives but are strategising to mainstream women's issues and perspectives within global policy formulation.

UN bars 19 groups

The United Nations has rejected the participation of 19 women's and human rights groups from the Beijing Conference after complaints from several countries, the Associated Press reports.

However, sources said there were no official complaints lodged about the rejected groups so there was no record of what the basis for rejections were nor would Ambassador Ahmad Kamal of Pakistan, President of the UN Economic and Social Council specify what they were.

Global tribunal

In an effort to sustain the pressure for the implementation of women's human rights as promised in the Vienna Declaration and other international agreements, the Centre for Women's Global Leadership has launched a series of actions entitled From Vienna to Beijing: Building Human Rights Accountability to Women.

The series includes hearings, workshops and strategic planning meetings, and a second Global Tribunal on Human Rights Accountability to Women to be held in Beijing.

180 Days/ 180 Ways

Women all over the world created a unique and significant link between the Copenhagen Summit and the Beijing Conference when they launched the 180 Days/ 180 Ways Women's Action Campaign '95 last March 8. The launching coincided with the celebration of International Women's Day.

The 180 Days/ 180 Ways campaign started at the Copenhagen Summit and will run until September 6, 1995 which is the International Day of Action for Women's Equality which many will celebrate during the UN Fourth World Conference and NGO Forum on Women in Beijing.

Women want unbiased constitution

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement made a submission to the Constitutional Review Commission in July. This is the first part of the submission which we will bring to you in full in the forthcoming newsletters.

Chandra Reddy presents her submission to the Constitution Review Commission on behalf of the women's movement of the National Federation Party last month. *Photo: The Fiji Times.*

If Fiji is to progress, then it would be beneficial for us to put forward a truly unbiased constitution that will protect the fundamental rights of all people (men and women) of Fiji. With this in mind, the following submission has been drafted by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement in response to the terms of reference as set by the President.

This submission is made in accordance and support of the submission put forward by our sister organisation, The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. It addresses basic principles of women's rights as human rights and national unity concentrating on the principles of democracy and equality.

The Constitution is the supreme law of the land and we believe it should reflect the aspirations of all the people of Fiji. As Fiji is a multi-racial society the Constitution should therefore unite and bind the people of the nation despite their different race, sex, place of origin, political opinions, colour, religion, creed, age or disability. In addition, the Constitution needs to be accepted by all citizens of Fiji so that long term commitment can be undertaken by citizens of the nation, for women and men to work together, for different communities to work together in nation building, for themselves, for their children and for society in order to meet the challenges of the future.

Fiji is a member of the United Nations and is a party to the UN Declaration of Human Rights. It is therefore important that our constitution reflects, protects and promotes the fundamental principles of human rights, i.e.. "all human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms". Furthermore, we reaffirm in accordance with the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights that women's rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. 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 current constitution fails to acknowledge the existence of women in its language. We can only assume that this constitution applies to the male gender as the text only refers to "He".

We therefore would want the new constitution to be gender neutral and user-friendly in the terminology it uses.

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If your membership fee is due, please call, fax or write to FWRM.

FWRM

Balance

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EDITORIAL *by Fiona Phillips*

Tackling violence head-on

Violence is a common problem shared by women worldwide. It is not unique to any one culture and is not confined to any one place. In fact, Violence against women can be found in the home, in the streets, in the workplace, anywhere.

I was told to introduce myself as the new Communications Officer for the Fiji Women's Rights Movement in this newsletter and I will do so by telling you about an incident which marred an otherwise enjoyable first day at work.

A close friend of mine was punched in the face while at work. The reason is not important because there is not excuse for violence whether it is directed at men or women. My friend was sitting at her desk when her attacker (a man) stormed into her office and slapped and punched her in the face.

Although frightened and in shock, this being the first time (and hopefully the last) she was subjected to this type of assault, my friend took immediate action. She informed the police and received treatment and certification stating the injuries she suffered. And she should be applauded for this. She should be applauded because she is not going to accept being assaulted. She is not going to let him get away with it. She is going to see that the case is brought before the courts and by doing this she is making a stand and saying "no" to violence. Although violence is common, sadly, taking action to punish the offenders, is uncommon and it is for this reason my friend should be commended. Not only is she doing this for herself, but she is sending a message to all women as you may find yourself in a similar situation.

A resource kit prepared by the

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- My Arranged Marriage *by Benazir Bhutto* - A continuation from your last issue on the Pakistani Prime Minister's arranged marriage
- Women's Employment and Economic Rights *by Praveen Sharma*
- Pregnancy-related transmission of HIV to women and infants
- We look at the World Conference on Women in Beijing as it draws closer