Women welcome New Year with hopes of better things to come

Mavis Toganivalu

Mavis Toganivalu, Young Women's Christian Association Area Co-ordinator, Suva

I hope that 1996 sees women becoming more assertive, especially some of our local women who are always behind the scenes. This is so they can speak up for their rights and involves all races. Women need to say what they feel is right and not be told to `shut-up' because they are women and have to listen to men. They need to come out strongly and they need to be assertive for this.

Sofaia Raiwalui

Sofaia Raiwalui, Insurance Consultant

For me personally, I would like to save money to further my education this year. For women in general, my hopes for this year are that government looks into women's issues, for example FWRM's rape law reform and that gender equality is achieved. However, women cannot just wait for things to happen. They must co-operate and fight for gender equality.

Tupou Vere

Tupou Vere, Department of Women and National Vice-President of YWCA

For 1996, I would like to encourage more young people to support the fundraising activities at the YWCA. I am excited about plans towards doing this and doing it well and coming up with what Fiji women believe to be important for them. I think there will be some exciting discussion on the role of women's organisations and the media and so on.

Susan O'Neil

Susan O'Neil, Project Officer for the National Office of the YWCA

My hope for 1996 is enlightenment towards issues such as peace, life enhancing attitudes and behaviour for our personal goals which in turn affect all around us.

Praveen Sharma

Praveen Sharma, Acting Co-ordinator, Fiji Women's Rights Movement

I hope our rape legislation is tabled and passed. On a personal level, I'd like to do better both professionally and personally.

Vani Dulaki

Vani Dulaki, Regional Rights Resource Team

This year I hope true equality is achieved and that women will be able to take advantage of documents like CEDAW.

Edwina Kotoisuva

Edwina Kotoisuva, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

Looking back at 1995, the rape cases have increased and we've had some horrific murders. I would like to see 1996 without such incidents. I don't think it will stop altogether but at least last year, people spoke out in protest of the increase in rapes and murders. I will be committing myself this year to working towards eradicating violence or at least decreasing violence against women and children.

Vika Vuiyanuca

Vika Vuiyanuca, Fiji Women's Rights Movement

First and foremost, on a personal level I intend to be a better mother and wife this year. For women in general, it is my hope that they become involved with women's organisations and take up the fight against the different types of discrimination that women face. I hope the information that we, FWRM, is disseminating is useful for women in Fiji.

Shamima Ali

Shamima Ali, Co-ordinator, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

This year I would like to see more involvement from men and the community to eliminate violence against women. I would like government and non-governmental organisations get together, put their cards on the table and work on their common concerns rather than fighting and bickering. We should work towards bettering the status of women in society.

Gina Houng Lee

Gina Houng Lee, FWRM

My hope for 1996 is that a lot more women will take on the challenge to continue in this very important work of advancing women's status in Fiji and striving for a world with no gender discrimination and a greater equality.

Imrana Jalal

Imrana Jalal, Regional Rights Resource Team

My hope for this year is that women gain autonomy over their lives and the rights to control what they think and do. Personally, I would like to be healthy.

Dr Mridula Sainath

Dr Mridula Sainath, FWRM

My New Year's resolution is to attempt to make every woman aware of the risks of HIV/AIDS. For 1996, I would like women to be proud of being women.

AIDS VOICE

The HIV antibody test

Adapted from ***Talking AIDS*** *by Gill Gordon & Tony Klouda*

For many people, AIDS is particularly frightening and difficult to cope with because HIV infection is invisible. People do not know whether they themselves are infected or who in their circle of contacts is infected with HIV. Often people believe that the test for HIV antibodies can be used to identify infected people and prevent them from infecting others, so solving the problem of AIDS for everyone.

It is important to explain to people what the test can and cannot do, and what having the test means for individuals and their families. Then they won't focus on the test as a solution and postpone making necessary changes in their behaviour now.

How does the test work?

When HIV enters the body, the person starts to make antibodies to fight the infection. It seems that most people take about three months to make antibodies to HIV after infection, but some people take much longer, even years. We still do not know what proportion of people take a long time to make antibodies.

The ELISA and Western Blot blood tests detect antibodies to HIV, they do not detect the virus itself. The ELISA test is done first and if the result is positive, this should be repeated and then confirmed by the Western Blot test.

This means that a person should wait at least three months after being exposed to risk before taking the test. Otherwise a negative result may mean that he or she has not yet made antibodies. To be more certain, a person with a negative result should have another test after six months without being exposed to any risk.

The test only tells people whether they had antibodies on the day that they took the test. If they were exposed to risk during the three months before taking the test, or after taking the test, or if they have not yet made antibodies, a negative test result tells them nothing.

Counselling before the test

People need to understand before taking the test what a positive and a negative result may mean for their lives, and to explore whether it will help them to take it. They also need to understand that several tests are needed to confirm a positive result and that this does not tell them whether they will develop AIDS. A negative result means nothing if a person has been exposed to risk since the test or during the three months before the test.

Will the person be able to cope emotionally with a positive result? How will the person change his or her behaviour if the test result is positive or if it is negative? Is it necessary to have the test result before making this change? Might a positive result lead to loss of employment, housing, partners or family? Who is around to support the person if necessary?

The counselling has several aims:
1. To help people to engage in safer practices whether they decide to take the test or not. This will protect them and their partners from infection or reinfection, not only with HIV, but with other STDs;
2. To make sure that people understand the limitations and implications of taking the test before they decide whether to take it or not;
3. To prepare people for the outcome of the test. This appears to help people to cope better with a positive result.

Screening blood for transfusions

It is important to test blood that is going to be used for transfusions. In some countries up to 25 per cent of people with HIV infection acquired it through a blood transfusion. Blood for transfusion can be tested with one ELISA because it is discarded if it is positive, whether truly or falsely so. If the donor is to be told, it is important to confirm the result with Western Blot and counsel and support the person. Testing population groups can help understanding of how AIDS is spreading through the population.

Give women a chance, leader urges

The involvement of women at all levels of decision-making is essential if gender equality is to be achieved in all sections of society.

The president of the National Federation Party's women's wing, Chandra Reddy, made the comment while opening a workshop organised by the Fiji Teachers' Union women's wing on the topic "Leadership Development in Women in the Community" recently.

Mrs Reddy said efforts to improve the position of women in society were viewed with suspicion. "There is a fear that women want to take over. But if everyone realised that women merely want the same rights and opportunities to develop their particular skills and talents to enable them to play a more meaningful role in society beside men, not above or under them, our aspirations will be partly fulfilled."

She took the Fiji Teachers' Union as an example, where, she said, she had been told that at the national level, there was only one woman among 11 men. "With a teaching force of nearly 60 per cent which comprise women, and a similar percentage is reflected in the Fiji Teachers' Union membership, is there balanced power-sharing at the top level?" Mrs Reddy said a similar level of under-representation of women was evidenced at the local government levels, national government and so on.

New Year's resolutions

By Imrana Jalal, From the Fiji Times

What is your New Year's resolution? Many consider it to be a waste of time. But resolutions serve an important purpose. They encourage us to improve ourselves in whatever area of our lives that may have been lacking in the year just past.

When I apply this thinking to our country, I don't know where to start! Well, why not from the top? Cabinet must concentrate on our most intractable problems: the Constitution and the expiry of leases under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act (ALTA) and the basis for long term stability in this country - for that it must be committed, decisive and unafraid.

It cannot begin to solve the alarming situation of youth unemployment unless these issues are dealt with as part of an integrated approach to governing Fiji, including reforming the Constitution and ALTA. The Civil Service must become more civil and service oriented.

Many civil servants, particularly the younger ones, make little effort to assist the general public unless someone is well connected or is well-known.

A commitment to standards of conduct that place the ordinary person at the top of their priorities would vastly improve the image of the Civil Service as well as its capacity to serve the public.

The police need a kinder and more gentle image. The good of the people which is their motto is not served by several cases of alleged police brutality which have been recently highlighted. They bring to mind the reported remarks of a prisoner some months ago in which he alleged an alarming level of violence by the police. Is there some truth to that? Only our guardians of law and order can best answer that question. And do something about it as well.

There must be more accountability in statutory and semi-government institutions. Why? Because public monies fund their operations and tax payers are entitled to know how they are spent. The practical aspect of all this is that it would ensure that a crisis on the scale of the National Bank of Fiji would be detected and remedial action would have taken place before it reached these proportions.

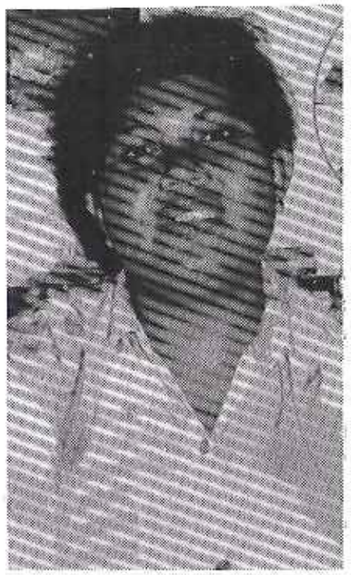
And for non-governmental organisations/civil society groups established with the purpose of improving the lot of women in society, we must try and keep our focus on that goal. We may not be able to speak with one voice on all the issues, but that should be no problem. There has been no reason why I have singled out the institutions mentioned here. It's just that they might benefit from some unsolicited but well-intentioned advice.

To Anjila Devi, who called from a coin-box in Nasinu, to offer bananas from your tree for X-mass because you said you and your mother enjoyed these columns, my heartfelt apologies for not agreeing to come and get them. I cannot tell you enough how this has caused me so much distress. Yet I could not call you back. I am humbled that my columns mean something to you. It is because of you that my New Year's resolution is to be a better person. May 1996 be all that you want it to be and more!

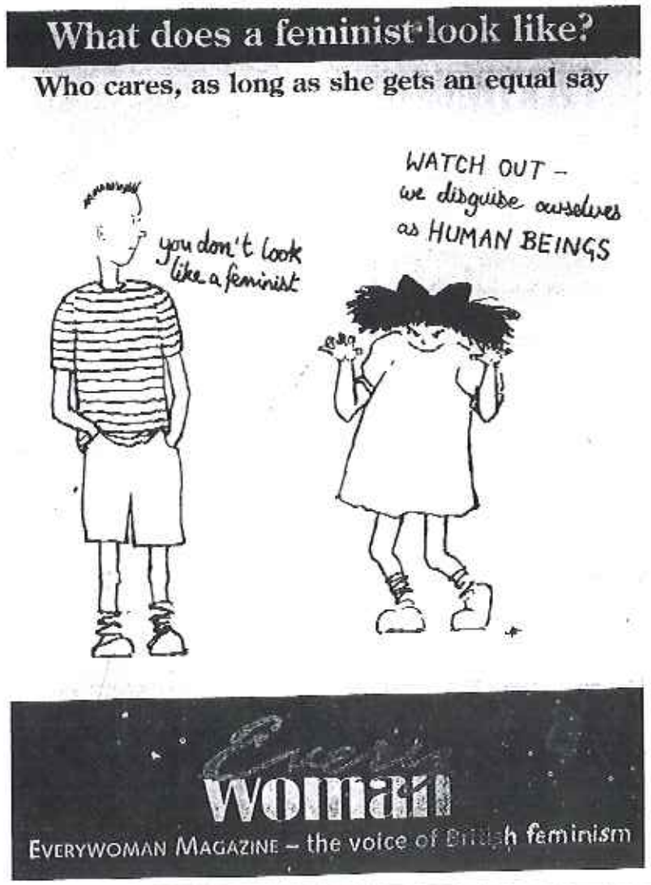
More resolutions overpage

Vika leaves FWRM

We say farewell to our Clerical/Accounts Clerk, Vika Vuiyanuca, who leaves the Movement on February 12. Vika has been a temporary relieving officer for the past nine months. But prior to that she was an active FWRM volunteer and member. Vika will be missed at the office for her hard work and great sense of humour. She will remain a Collective member and will continue to volunteer at the office when she can. Vinaka Vakalevu, Vika, for being a valuable asset at the office and a good friend from all at FWRM. We wish you well in your future endeavours.



Vika Vuiyanuca



FWRM news

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement will launch its book *Labouring Under the Law* on February 6 at the University of the South Pacific Lodge. The launch will be hosted by USP's Continuing Education Centre. The book is a critique of the employment legislation in Fiji and was written by 'Atu Emberson-Bain and Claire Slatter.

FWRM's Women, Employment and Economic Rights project is going to the Western Division in February. Acting Co-ordinator Praveen Sharma will conduct a three-day workshop in Nadi for women in the West. If anyone is interested in attending, please call Praveen on 313 156.

The Canada Fund is sponsoring FWRM's workshop to endorse its Sexual Offences Bill draft legislation. The three-day workshop will be held in Suva in either April or May. Women representing the various umbrella organisations will be invited to endorse FWRM's sexual offences draft legislation before it is tabled in Parliament. *Balance* will provide in-depth coverage of the workshop in later issues.

Congratulations to FWRM volunteer Maraia Silatolu. You met Maraia in the last issue of *Balance* where we told she was a full-time volunteer looking for paid employment. The good news is Maraia has secured work with Dr Roshni Shankar as receptionist in her surgery. Maraia is extremely happy with her new job and wishes to thank FWRM member, Dr Mridula Sainath, for helping her get the job.

AIDS VOICE

AIDS, HIV infection and women

From ***The New Our Bodies, Ourselves,*** *Updated and Expanded for the '90s*
By the Boston Women's Health Book Collective

Overview on women and HIV/AIDS

Women who are diagnosed with AIDS tend to die twice as quickly as men with the same diagnosis, and 63 per cent will die of HIV complications without ever having been officially diagnosed as having AIDS. Women are by far the most frequent caregivers, often unpaid, for men, women and children who have HIV or AIDS.

Protecting ourselves from HIV

HIV can live in the blood for at least 10 years without creating symptoms. If we have unprotected sex or share needles with someone today, we expose ourselves to everyone s/he has exchanged bodily fluids in the last decade. Even if we are in monogamous long-term relationships, our lovers may be bisexual and not telling us or using drugs and not telling us. Or they may have been infected by something they did long before they met us. The only answer is to act as though one or both partners is HIV positive and to use protection. There are barriers that are known to stop HIV transmission. Yet many of us are not protecting ourselves, or we do it sometimes and not others.

Why aren't we building safer sex into our lives? Here are a few reasons that women have mentioned.

1. Our own attitudes: *Who me? I'm not a gay man so I'm safe...I have good taste in men or women...I can tell who's infected...If he had HIV he'd have oily hair and broken skin...I love him so much, he'd never do anything to hurt me...If I bring a condom, he'll think I'm a sleaze...I want sex to be romantic.*

With thoughts like this, who's going to pull a condom or a roll of plastic wrap out of her pocketbook? As one woman said: *That condom seems to pour cold water on the romance by saying, "Okay, to be brutally honest, we've both slept with other people." The condom seems to be a statement of distrust.* Or you may want to have a baby, which means you don't want to use a condom or any birth control method.

2. Our partner's attitudes: Some men complain that condoms ruin sex. Some are afraid that they won't keep an erection while putting on a condom. Or they think it's not really sex without penetration and insist on intercourse even if there's no protection. If they are used to being in charge sexually, they may resent a woman initiating safer sex. They may feel accused of sleeping around. A lesbian lover may believe there's no HIV risk for lesbians. A sex worker's client may refuse to pay for protected sex. Or there are cultural reasons. A woman's group from Chicago wrote: *If you're poor and Latina, sexuality is one area over which men still feel like they have some control in their lives. If the women bring home the safer sex message we may become lightning rods for the frustration and anger the men feel as a result of racism, unemployment and poverty. The educational strategy has to be developed by the community itself.*
Whatever the reason, our suggesting safer sex can provoke a response we didn't look for. The choice may seem to be unsafe sex or no sex.

3. Other factors: Expense and availability of safer sex supplies is a big factor for many women. One large Chicago clinic serving eight housing projects receives a state allotment of less than one-fifth of a condom per client each month. So we are up a lot when it comes to protecting ourselves from HIV. What seems to make a difference is women helping each other. From peer education projects to women friends getting down to basics about safer sex, we can help each other protect ourselves.

AIDS VOICE

Families affected by HIV/AIDS

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

Women whose children have got HIV other than through pregnancy may not have HIV themselves. They will see these children through a varying number of years, healthy and ill, and possibly dying.

With or without children or partners with HIV/AIDS, and whether or not they are infected themselves, women may have adult children, other family members or friends who have HIV or AIDS. They may be involved as caregivers during illness and death, and may take responsibility for any children left behind if the people they are caring for are no longer able to cope.

Children of all ages are affected by deaths of one or both parents from AIDS, and are doubly affected if they have HIV infection or AIDS themselves. These children are a community responsibility. No one wants orphans institutionalised, but in many cases that means that they must be cared for by the extended family. Not all children can live full-time with other members of their families or friends/neighbours of their parents.

Babies and children who test positive for HIV are being left in hospitals for many reasons:
- Mothers have just left them there.
- Mothers are too sick to care for them.
- Mothers may have died from AIDS.
- Fathers might not be aware of what has happened.
- Family members, through fear, anger or limited resources, are not in a position to help.

In developed countries the standard alternative is to children them with foster families in the hope that the families will eventually adopt them.

Some developing countries where the number of orphans is high and increasing are also turning to foster care as a solution. Often, community-based groups or non-governmental organisations arrange placements since no formal government-run social services of this kind exist.

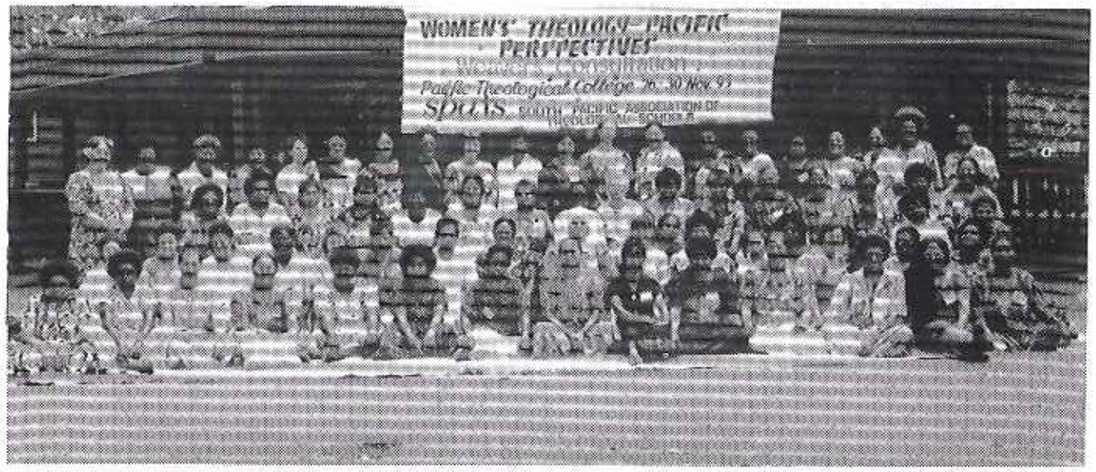
Mothers living with HIV/AIDS

Women face many hurdles as they enter motherhood with HIV. Frequent clinical check-ups for the women, and after delivery for the child are constant reminders of HIV infection.

Waiting for up to 18 months to find out if the child is infected and coping with illness in an infant and not knowing whether it is HIV-related are stressful. Uncertainty is present all the time and continuing support is needed. If the child is infected, it is a hard blow. Health care staff and support organisations are very important at this time.

A women might fear that if the child was not infected during pregnancy, it can become infected later. Women need reassurance that holding and showing love to a baby and giving normal care cannot pass on HIV.

People's fears of infection make it difficult for an HIV-positive women to tell others that she has HIV and that her child may also. Women say they try to guide the child's behaviour so that it cannot possibly harm other children, and this can be very isolating. They very quickly become aware that this close monitoring is something out of the ordinary and look for reassurance from their mother. This places even more pressure on the women, who is probably already stressed because of her own HIV infection.



Participants from throughout the region at the Weavers Consultation in Suva late last year.

Women the key to changes

Expert stresses women's health an important issue

Women's health has traditionally been equated with maternal health and for many years national and international development programmes have overlooked the health needs of women and emphasised the health needs of children.

The "Women's Theology - Pacific Perspectives" Weavers Consultation held in Suva late last year heard that because of the many social and economic changes happening all over the Pacific, disease trends had changed from communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases.

Litea Meo of the Ministry of Health's Education and Promotion Unit said one of the problems was that most of the food produced in the Pacific was sold to earn a living. "The money earned is then used at the major supermarkets to purchase imported food, most of which do not live up to overseas food standards."

Ms Meo added that most of the Pacific Islands had become dumping grounds for food items that were banned in Fiji's neighbouring countries of Australia and New Zealand. "In Fiji, for example, mutton that cannot be sold in supermarkets in Australia and New Zealand because of its fat content, are sold at a very cheap price to local consumers. And because the average family cannot afford to buy a piece of prime steak, mutton chops at a cheaper price is often the favourite," Ms Meo said.

She blamed the introduction of alcohol and tobacco as a major contributing factor to the new disease trends in the Pacific Islands, highlighting a recent survey by the Ministry of Health which showed that there was an increasing number of women smokers not only in Fiji but also in other Pacific Islands.

However, on a more positive note, Ms Meo said women were the key to the changes that would take place in the Pacific. "If every woman in the Pacific knows more about healthy living, we can have a rippling effect to those around us and that is our families."

"We have to create an awareness that women's health is an important issue. This is because healthy women are more likely to have healthy babies, can look after their families and must be able to work more productively," she said.

Ms Meo emphasised the importance of women "getting to know" their bodies, what was good for their diet, what kind of activities to carry out to keep fit and to talk openly about their well-being. She said it was important that women knew the facts on health living.
"As women, if we consider ourselves the forerunners of our families, then we must make an extra effort to change our lifestyle and live a more productive and healthier life."

Lenient molest sentence outrage

Crisis Centre slams sentence

A 42-year-old man was fined $30 and given a suspended jail sentence for molesting an eight-year-old girl. The incident happened in October last year in Labasa, in Fiji's northern division. Newspaper reports said the accused followed the girl to pick fruit and then pushed her up against a fence and fondled her private parts. The lenient sentence handed down by the magistrate, who incidentally acquitted six men of defilement because their victim looked "hefty", drew a barrage a criticism from women's groups and the general public at large. Here are excerpts from the local media.

Legislation on child molesting was too lenient and weighed heavily in favour of the offenders, according to the Co-ordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Shamima Ali. Ms Ali was referring to the sentencing of a 42-year-old man for molesting an eight-year-old girl in Labasa. He was fined $30 and given a nine-month suspended jail sentence.

According to Ms Ali, the law had been helpful so far in deterring rape and other abuse cases but punishment for molestation was regressive in regards to the progress achieved so far. Statistics for 1995 show that there were more child abuse-related cases than there were rape cases. Ninety per cent of the victims were girls and 90 per cent of the offenders were men.

In about 85 per cent of the child abuse cases, the offender was a member of the child's immediate family or someone the child knew. In Suva alone, there were 28 cases of child abuse compared to 13 the previous year. There were 24 cases of rape last year.

"This trend shows that offenders are not deterred at all knowing that sentence is lenient," she said. On the latest case, she said the sentence meant that the man would not be afraid to commit the same offence again. Ms Ali said the victim would be terrified about the offender's presence as they lived together in the same community. At present there is no definite law on child molesting.

From The Fiji Times Letters to the Editor Column

Sir,

We refer to the article "North man fined for molesting child, 8" which appeared on page 3 of *The Fiji Times* dated January 10, 1996. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) is absolutely outraged at the sentence given to the 42-year-old man of Labasa who molested an 8-year-old girl and was sentenced to a $30 fine and given a nine-month jail sentence suspended for 18 months.

We find it disappointing but not altogether surprising that the same magistrate excused six men last year for defiling a 15-year-old girl because she looked "hefty" has now proceeded to allow the molestation of a young child, an eight-year-old girl, to go substantially unpunished as the sentence is inadequate. When this magistrate acquitted the six men who defiled the 15-year-old girl, the FWRM called upon the Government, particularly the Judicial Department, to review the magistrate's appointment. We call for the same thing again. The magistrate concerned has shown himself, in our opinion, to be unable to carry out the duties assigned to him within the criminal justice system and unable to give the clearest signals to the public. We respectfully demand that he be restrained, reassigned or removed. We also request the Director of Public Prosecution to use her powers to call the file for review by the High Court of Fiji. It seems timely that a local lawyer, who is sensitive to local conditions and who is prepared to adequately sentence to deter the increasing crime of violence perpetrated against women and children, be appointed to the position of magistrate in Labasa.

One has only to look at the recent judgement by Magistrate Salesi Temo who, notwithstanding a wife forgiving her husband for causing her grievous injuries with a cane knife, stated the law demanded that the perpetrator of the crime be punished. We commend and congratulate him for his enlightened and correct attitude to criminal justice issues regarding women and children.

The Women's Rights Movement is in the final stages of drafting a Sexual Assault Bill. Women's organisations around the country will be meeting to debate the Bill for eventual submission to the government. All right thinking citizens will be called upon to support the Bill so that such travesties of justice as occurred in Labasa do not occur again.

Yours sincerely,
Vani Dulaki, Praveen Sharma
for FWRM members

AIDS VOICE

Women, human rights and HIV/AIDS

From the Global Programme on AIDS, World Health Organisation
(Continued from Nov/Dec Balance)

The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace highlights the factors necessary to reduce women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The protection and the promotion of the human rights of women and girls is essential to reduce the inequality, poverty and instability which make them disproportionately vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. The following human rights are critical to empowering women and girls to protect themselves in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Rights to health
Women and girls often have less or no access to HIV/AIDS health care information, services and means of prevention, including condoms, drugs and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. Women living with HIV/AIDS may be denied access to health care services, including pre- and postnatal care because they are HIV positive.

Rights to privacy
Women are often subject to hidden or mandatory testing for HIV, especially in the prenatal or premarital context. This not only violates their right to privacy, but if confidentiality is not maintained, also leads to discrimination against those women who test HIV-positive.

Rights to employment, social security and non-discrimination in economic and social life
Because women are discriminated against in access to employment, economic opportunities and social support, they have few economic alternatives but to remain in relationships that may threaten them with infection.

Rights to marry and found a family and non-discrimination in marriage and family relations
Traditions, practices or laws that promote early marriage and childbearing by immature women and girls biologically increase their vulnerability to infection. Many women and girls experience sexual and economic subordination in their marriages or relationships, and are therefore unable to negotiate safe sex or refuse unsafe sex. Women living with HIV/AIDS may be denied the right to marry. If pregnant, women living with HIV/AIDS may be coerced into abortions or forced sterilisation. Discriminatory property, custody and support laws mean that women living with HIV/AIDS who have lost their partners to HIV/AIDS or been abandoned because they are HIV-positive lack economic opportunities and support. This may mean a life of destitution or sex work.

Essential activities

** Ensure women's and girl's access to HIV/AIDS information, education, health care services and means of prevention, including condoms.*
** Reform discriminatory laws, policies and practices and counteract sexual violence and coercion, stereotypes, prejudices and harmful traditional practices that increase women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.*
** Remove obstacles to women's access to economic opportunities, and reform laws and practices concerning discrimination in marriage, property and social support.*
** Encourage countries to replace mandatory and hidden testing with voluntary and confidential testing.*

Rights to the benefits of scientific progress
Scientific progress has not equitably addressed the health issues of women so that the HIV/AIDS-related needs of women are poorly understood. Furthermore, women are often the last to get access to the benefits of scientific progress, e.g. treatments and technologies based on scientific research.

Rights to participation in political and public life
Discrimination against women in terms of participation in public affairs prevents women from full participation in the development and implementation of policies concerning HIV/AIDS, hence from advocating their specific needs in response to the epidemic.

My arranged marriage by Benazir Bhutto

From New Woman, August 1989

At the age of 36, Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, became 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.

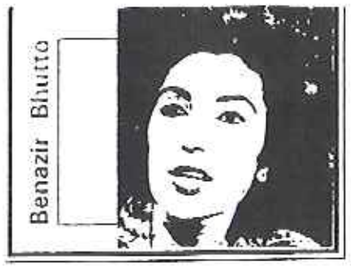
Fate presented itself in the form of a bee. Four days after meeting Asif, I went to the Windsor Park. A bee stung me on the hand and by dinner time it was very swollen. "I'm taking you to hospital," Asif told me when he arrived at the flat to see me. He ignored my protests, calling for a car, arranging for the doctor, buying the prescribed medicine. For once I am not the only one in charge, I thought. I am the one being cared for. It was a very nice and unaccustomed feeling.

Fate intervened again the following night during our search for an elusive Pakistani restaurant. Mummy, my sister Sanam, Asif and I piled into a car with some other Pakistani friends to go to dinner. We got lost. But instead of getting irritable and impatient, Asif kept everybody laughing in the car. He was flexible and had a sense of humour, I noted to myself, as well as being caring.

"What's the answer, Pinkie"? my mother asked the next morning. I took a deep breath. "All right, Mummy," I said. Seven days after I had met Asif, we were engaged.

The reaction in Pakistan was mixed. In spite of the statement I issued assuring the people that marriage would not affect my political commitment, agents of the Zia regime lost no time in spreading rumours that I was giving up politics. When I returned to Pakistan, I travelled around the country, reassuring the people that I was their sister and would always be their sister and that my marriage would have no bearing on my political career. Asif called me every night, wherever I was, and little by little, I got to know him over the phone. He gave me a heart-shaped ring of sapphires and diamonds. He sent me roses everyday. We talked and talked. Our marriage really wasn't between strangers, he told me. When we were teenagers, he'd watched me

Asif Zardari



enter and leave the cinema his father owned. Two decades later, it had been his idea to marry me, not his parents'. "If you want me to marry, then propose for Benazir," he'd told his father five years back. He had waited patiently ever since. "Are you in love with her?" a journalist asked him. "Isn't everyone?" he replied.

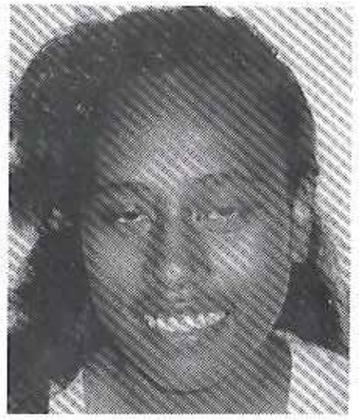
We didn't really love each other yet, though my mother assured me that love would come later. Instead there was a mental commitment between us, a realisation that we were accepting each other as husband and wife totally and for always. In a way, I realised, that bond was stronger than love.

Though I certainly did not - and do not - want to be seen as an advocate of arranged marriages, I realised there was something to a relationship based on acceptance. We were coming into our marriage with no preconceptions, no expectations of each other, other than goodwill and respect. In love marriages, I imagined, the expectations were so high they were bound to be somewhat dashed. There must also be the fear that the love might die and, with it, the marriage. Our love could only grow. The crowds began gathering outside my house a week before the wedding in December 1987.

To be continued

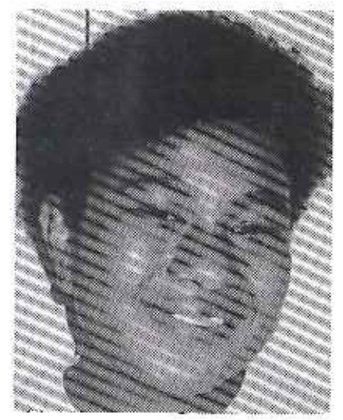
Students pick up vital tips at workshop

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement held a workshop for school leavers and students as part of its Women, Employment and Economic Rights project on January 12. Conducted by Acting Co-ordinator Praveen Sharma, the workshop covered areas such as writing letters of application, preparing Curriculum Vitaes (CVs), and interview skills, which included body language and grooming. Suva lawyer Imrana Jalal conducted a session on being assertive. The participants told Balance at the end of the workshop that they found it helpful and had picked up some useful tips. Here are some comments.

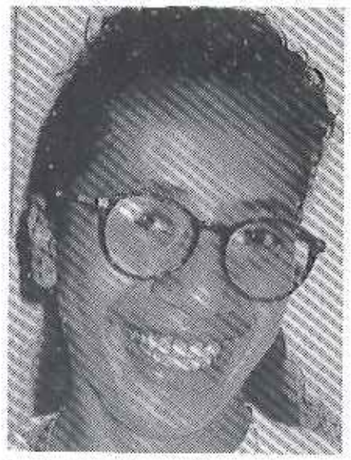


Sonya Leqa, Form 6, Liahana High School, Tonga
I wanted advice on how to go about looking for a job and now I feel better about applying for a job. I also enjoyed the assertive training conducted by Imrana Jalal.

Ravina Devi Prasad, Form 7, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial School, Suva
The most beneficial aspect of the workshop for me was the preparation of a CV. I can share this information with my friends by teaching them to write CVs.



Silo Serucebe, Form 7, Adi Cakobau School, Sawani
I've learnt what a CV is all about, how to write one and how to write job application letters. I will share what I've learnt because at school, we weren't taught how to write CVs.



Rosie Koi Tivao, Form 6, Latter Day Saints College, Suva
I found the talk Ms Sharma gave on interview skills the most beneficial part of the workshop. Now I have the confidence to face what will be difficult, i.e interviews.

Ranadi Kubukawa, Dudley High School, Suva
I learnt the format and lay out of how to apply for jobs and how to write excellent CVs. I will tell my friends what I learnt and to look forward to the next FWRM workshop.

Kuini Komiti, Rabi High School, Rabi Island
The workshop taught me so many things but the most important thing for me is to be honest and confident. I will share what I've learnt with my friends so that it will be a reminder for me.

Police to play their part

From page 1

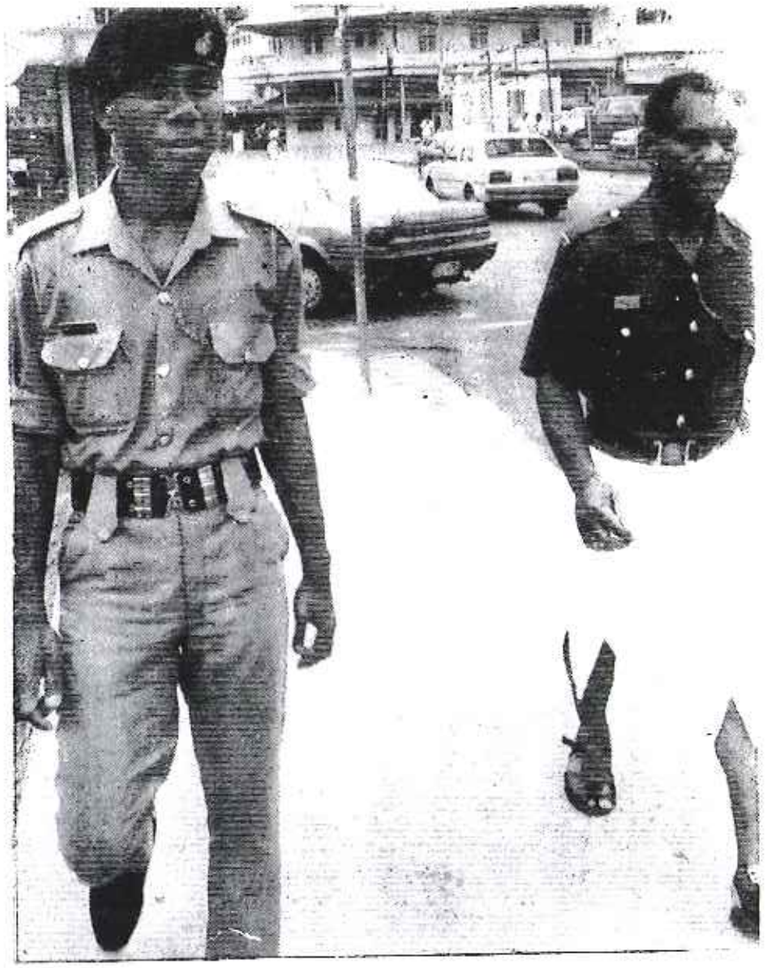
fact that the family is without the bread winner to my mind is better than no family at all if the whole family is murdered.

Q: *So you will be coming down tough on wife bashers?*
A: Yes, we have been saying this with our No Drop policy. I must say that one of the first cases (No Drop policy) that went to court was one of my police officers.

Q: *Are you adequately funded to tackle these problems?*
A: Funding is one of those things that will never be enough, it's a matter of finding where the funds are. I am sure that if a new initiative comes up and if we present a reasonable case, government will be favourable. Under the present climate, government is very favourable about anything that can assist alleviate crime so we are now riding on the waves or while the waves are still up there, we might as well try and introduce other initiatives that can assist the alleviation of crime.

Q: *Are you receiving support from the community?*
A: Yes, the community has been supportive in everything we do. Now they know that if there's something wrong, there's a policeman there who can help. The police are now readily accessible, they now see the police as more visible on the streets.

Q: *There has been some criticism of the treatment of victims of violence by the police when complaints are lodged. Are you addressing this problem?*
A: We are addressing this problem, for example with the Sexual Offences Unit. We are trying to find them (unit) decent space. At the moment they are working with the CID (Criminal Investigations Department). We are trying to find them space in Nabua where they can have access to better facilities than what we have here. We have a woman sergeant who is in charge of the Sexual Offences Unit. One of the things we've got to do is to sensitise the men. There are programmes in place on sensitising male officers. Our Internal Affairs people were in the Western Division talking to officers there about domestic violence. This kind of thing is an on-going programme with us.



On the beat in Suva...Police Constables Lui Vakaloloma and Eremasi Naraga.

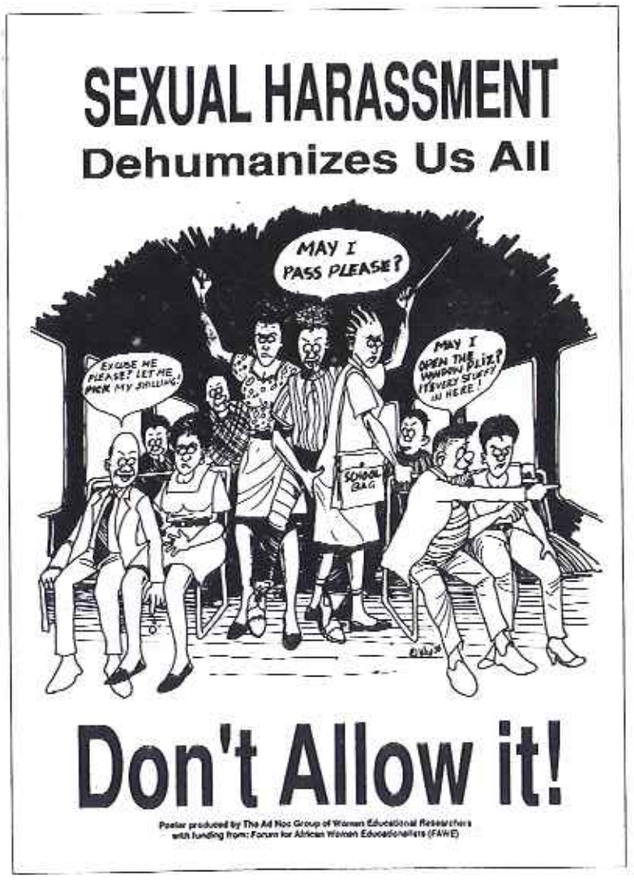
Q: *You have been one of the most vocal police commissioners to date on the issue of domestic violence? Why all the interest and concern?*
A: Most of the men in Fiji, including myself, have witnessed domestic violence in our homes. I believe it is up to us now, my generation, as we owe it to our mothers, our wives and I think more importantly our children, that this cycle be broken. If we do not break it now, than it's going to continue. I'm in a position now to do something about it, so I'm doing something about it.

Change attitudes first, says lawyer

Women can change legislation but what really needs to be changed is the attitudes of the legislators, magistrates and judges who administer the law.

At a workshop to celebrate the United Nations 50th anniversary late last year, women's rights activist Imrana Jalal said women had to try to change gender attitudes of judges and magistrates and this was where gender sensitising programmes became very important. "There is no point in advocating and changing the laws, we must also change the attitudes of judges and magistrates. And we must choose very carefully who our judges and magistrates will be. Just because a lawyer has had five or ten years in private practice, doesn't necessarily qualify him to be a fair and enlightened judge."

Ms Jalal said different judges could interpret laws differently. "You have one judge who can look at some piece of legislation and say, `This means that for women' and that might be a negative consequence. You might have another judge look at the same piece of legislation and come to an entirely different decision because that judge has a better attitude about women." Ms Jalal spoke on the topic Gender Equality and Equity and Empowerment of Women.



POETRY

Corrective Activities

We women ourselves must act
In whatever way possible
In our situation to start
Making corrective changes

Women must speak out
Stand up to be counted
Voice our opinions
Go out to be seen
Participate in
Decision-making
Take control of our lives and
Our actions

Taking control of our
Situations
Articulating our concerns
Sharing our ideas
Teaching by showing
Learning by doing
Actively participating
In planning, deciding and
Evaluating policies,
Programmes and activities
That affect, impinge and
Impact on our lives

We women ourselves
Must assert ourselves
Our identity, credibility,
Visibility
Bringing about that change
Which makes the difference
In upgrading the status of
Women, by giving us women
A measure of control
Over ourselves
Over our own lives
Over our situations
Health and environment

Editor's note: We do not know who wrote this poem but if any of you do, please let us know before the next issue of this newsletter.

Women want quota system in parliament

We are celebrating our 25th year of Independence this year (1995). Despite this milestone, we note the lack of women's representation in decision making bodies. There are many factors/barriers contributing to women's low participation level, ranging from the very public to private. For women to play an equal role in decision making will provide a balance which will reflect the composition of the society. In order to facilitate and accelerate women's representation in parliament, we strongly support a quota system of 30 per cent of parliamentary seats be reserved for women. This should be a temporary affirmative action measure until such time when women can compete on the same level as men. This is in accordance with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations target of 30 per cent of women in decision making levels by 1995. Women make up at least half of the electorate and it is important that their issues and interests are addressed. Women in decision making bodies re-define political priorities and women's gender specific concerns, values and experiences and will provide new perspectives on mainstream political issues. Should Fiji undertake this measure, she will truly be seen as a progressive nation of the Pacific.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement made its submission to the Constitutional Review Commission in July. This is the continuation of the submission, which we will bring to you in full in this newsletter.

We understand that the current fear amongst our indigenous Fijian community is the protection of their rights, particularly land rights. We believe these rights can be protected through an electoral system which allows for a referendum to take place when an issue of particular concern for a particular group has to be decided. This referendum will need to be approved by a majority of the citizens of Fiji including a majority vote from the group/community directly affected.

Chapter VI
Part 3 - The Senate

First and foremost we believe that the Senate should be abolished considering the size and population of Fiji. At the moment our current Senate is not elected. This makes them unaccountable and not answerable to the people. The rationale for a Senate is that it would provide check and balances for the House of Representatives.

Chapter VIII
The Judicature
The Judiciary should be an independent body i.e. from

President, government and political parties.

Establishment of Courts - We have grave reservations about Fijian Courts because of women's experiences of "custom, village, island or traditional" courts which have largely worked against them as experienced in other Pacific Island countries, and not afforded any real protection. This is because:

a) Tradition, culture and custom in the main is defined by men and not women therefore there is a conflict about whose custom is being applied, especially given that custom is largely unwritten.

b) There is a mistaken assumption that Fijian culture is a homogenous, monolithic culture universally agreed upon by all religions, provinces and villages.

c) Those that are socially, economically and politically powerless as women, commoners and poor persons, are not in a position to negotiate that the customs and traditions most beneficial to them should be applied in the proposed Fijian Court system.

Fiji Women's Rights Movement,
GPO Box 14194, Suva, Fiji.
Tel: 313156 Fax: (679) 313466

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

FWRM

Balance

Fiji Women's Rights Movement

P.O Box 14194, Suva, Fiji Is.
Tel.: (679) 313156,
Fax: (679) 313466

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1996 ISSUE

Police to play their part

Women in Fiji can expect changes this year from a police commissioner who treats the problems of domestic violence and rape with the seriousness and urgency that they deserve

Isikia Savua has to be the most vocal police commissioner on domestic violence and rape that Fiji has had to date. He has come out strong warning repeat wife bashers and rapists that they can no longer expect any leniency from the Fiji Police Force.

Commissioner Savua says it is up to his generation that the cycle of violence be broken and he is doing something about it because he is in a position to. *Balance* spoke to Commissioner Savua as a follow up to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Co-ordinator Shamima Ali's interview in the last issue. Here are excerpts of the interview.

Q: *What plans have you in store for 1996 where domestic violence and rape are concerned?*
A: We (the Fiji Police Force) have started on our No-Drop policy (whereby charges of domestic violence cannot not be dropped) and I'm glad to say that the Chief Magistrate is very supportive. We note that this will be the first full year the No-Drop policy will be in place. There will be some opposition from the public. The main argument can be that the bread winner has been put in jail - what's going to happen? The best answer to that would be we now try to put the man away in case the violence results in death. But then it doesn't really answer the social impact of what we are now doing. These are some of the things we've got to think about. And what we'll be doing in that regard is to ensure that when the case is taken to court, the magistrate is presented with the full facts of the matter - what will be the implications if the man is put into jail but over and above that will have to be the seriousness of the violence. The

Isikia Savua

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- *Change attitudes first, says lawyer*