MELANESIAN DOCUMENTATION TRAINING LOOKS AT MILLENIUM

Communication Officer RosemaryNaivalurua was invited by the Papua New Guinea Integrated Human Development Trust to attend a week-long Melanesian Documentation Training in Port Moresby, PNG from December 14th to 21st 1997. She writes about her experience in PNG and what she gained from the training.

After a slight hitch-up with travel plans, I finally left Nadi on Tuesday morning enroute for Honiara via Port Villa (the Triangle or Melanesian route). Overnightning in Honiara, Solomon Islands with relatives, I finally arrived in Moresby on Wednesday December 16th and was straight away whisked off to the venue of the training, Hisiu Resort, about two and a half hours drive from the capital city. My first impression of PNG upon disembarkation was that of a hot, dry and quite dusty country. Rightfully so, considering that Port Moresby has been undergoing a severe drought which upon my arrival had lasted around 8 months.

Vani Dulaki and members of the* Beneath Paradise Documentation *group aims at strengthening ties within the Pacific including Melanesian networking.

I was met at the airport by Lillian Maxwell, the national training coordinator of the PNG Trust who immediately became my guide cum advisor during my stay in PNG. After a long and bumpy ride on PMV (Public Motor Vehicle), sharing of buai (beetlenut) and some conversation with other passengers, we arrived at Hisiu. I was rearing to meet other participants and learn the proceedings of the previous days. After introductions to the participants two of whom were non-Papua New Guineans, Lai from Vanuatu and John from the Solomon Islands, we settled down to discuss the topics and areas of discussions of the days, prior to my arrival. I was informed that the training facilitator from the Philippines had cancelled at the last minute and therefore, the Coordinator of the PNG Trust Rupunare Abare was to conduct the training. The sessions were conducted mainly in Pidgin English. I was the only non-Pidgin speaking participant and and to my relief, I was helped along by other participants.I introduced myself and spoke of FWRM' roles and objectives and what we do in Fiji in terms of promoting women's rights. The participants were curious to find out about the Movement and asked questions ranging from the organsiational structure to membership and the various programs and projects undertaken by the Movement. The training program was basically to teach the participants skills in reporting and documentation as a means of network strengthening.

The training program was also held in support of Melanesian Trust (Meltrust), a network mooted by PNG Trust to strengthen ties amongst NGOs with mutual interests in the Melanesian gorup member countries of PNG, Solomon's, Vanuatu, Fiji and in association with the Asia & South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE). Participants learned how to put together proposals, names of contact people in the region were also shared. Report of activities and programs also featured during the five day workshop. The group discussed the need for recording of meetings and discussions and skills in liasing with the media and writing of proposals for video documentaries. Meltrust aims to organize an event to celebrate the millenium. Plans are underway to organize this event alongside the government initiated Melanesian Spearhead Meeting in the year 2000. It was interesting to talk to the other participants and find out what they were doing in their respective areas. Two participants from Karkar Island, Loretta Bush and Makui Benbeth spoke to me about their work in promoting women's rights in their area. Their work ranged from promoting environment conservation to addressing domestic violence and women's rights. Loretta and Makui like most of the other participants were termed CP's (Committed Persons) and were not paid for the work that they do. I was impressed with the courage and determination to carry on with the work against the odds of insufficient resources. Another participant who everyone called "Pastor" because he was an Assembly of God pastor cum social worker said that in some remote areas of PNG, he and his wife would go into some villages where people

were still very entrenched in traditional customs and were still unclothed.He and I had some friendly debate over this issue as I was of a view that in preserving indigenous cultures and traditions, "some things were better left untouched," his point was that, gender violence was rife in such set-ups and it was almost necessary that they be made to be aware that the outside world did not tolerate barbaric acts committed against their women. Papua New Guinea for me is a wild and untamed country. I remained in the country on my two weeks leave intending to find out more about the country. I discovered that despite the economic setbacks and political instability, which resulted in mass urban poverty and high rate of crime, PNG was a beautiful country with an untapped resource, its human resource. They were a people full of life and pride in their culture and traditions possessing determination and selflessness to carry out the work they are committed to do as non-government representatives. ■

ATTACKS ON YOUNG WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

by Tahilul Islam "Rising Wave of Violence Against Women"

Despite tough sanctions on offenders who abuse women, the rate of incidence of crime against against women in Bangladesh, particulalry rape and acid attacks is alarming. A Dhaka plastic surgeon and consultant estimates that one to two girls with acid-burn injuries are admitted to Dhaka Medical College every week. More than 450 rape cases were reported to the police last year. Of these, 17 victims were girls 5 to 10 years in age. Acid Attacks became quite frequent in the early 1980s until government imposed capital punishment on acid throwers. At least half a dozen offenders have been indicted and sent to jail.

Hapless Girls

The most recent publicized acid attacks happened in March, two separate incidents within days of each other. In both instances, the victims were schoolgirls, Sonia and Sathi.

Sonia was sleeping one evening when Chand Mia, her alleged assailant, entered her house and threw acid into her face. Sonia survived the attack but was badly disfigured. Prime Minister Sheik Wajed promised the offenders immediate apprehension and the Dhaka police offered $750 for information leading to the suspect. Chand Mia's father presented his son to the police insisting that the reward money did not influence him. The Prime Minister has also instructed the Dhaka Medical College, where Sonia is being treated, to ensure that she receives the best treatment. Following this, a special medical board was formed to monitor the recuperating victim (who comes from a poor family) and to provide extensive surgery including remodeling.

The second victim Sathi, was on her way home from school late one night when she was attacked with acid. Her attacker, named Quddus surrendered to the police when he realised that they were closing in on him. Quddus used to harass Sathi in the streets on the way to school.

Best Armor

Social scientists and political analysts believe that stringent legislation will not eliminate violence against Bangladeshi women altogether. Bangladesh has had two consecutive women presidents. Opposition leader Khaleda Zia was Prime Minster from 1991 to 1996 and the current Prime Minister is also a woman. The best defense, it seems, is still the education of women so that they gain a sense of self-esteem and are emboldened to fight for their rights.

Adapted from Women Envision, an ISIS International Publication

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for human cell lines extracted from citizens of Panama, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands;

There are now 163 deposits of genetic materials from the people of the south housed around the world with a view to extracting valuable scientific information from indigenous peoples' cells. An international anthropology project called the Human Genome Project seeks to study the "the entire richness of the entire human species" by taking blood, saliva and hair samples to study DNA composition. There are some 100 Pacific communities on the list of those people to be tested.

Women recognizebioprospecting as another form of colonialism. Previously the colonial powers were governments that could be held accountable in some way. Transnational corporations and scientific institutions accountable to no one are perpetrating this new form of colonialism. *Source: Issues in Gender & Development, Asian Pacific Development Center.* ■

"A man without vision does not realise the full potential his wife has for his personal development" - Edwin Cole

Mother & Child Dilemma

Of all the issues discussed at the recent Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, one in particular remained in the mind of writer Kong Rithdee. Cow's milk is ideal for calves, human's milk is ideal for babies: any pediatrician would give this advice to a pregnant mother. And it looks on the surface, as if everybody seems to be content with that. But look below the surface and you will see that everybody is not a HIV positive mother. Healthy Mums are endowed with hope and optimistic anticipation, while the virus stricken ones have to endure 9 months of fear, shattered hopes and persistent nightmares. At the 4th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific held in Manila recently, the debate on the long supported breastfeeding and the safer bottle-feeding was conducted vigorously. The dilemma unveiled its hidden implications, which encompass the unresolved issues of social disparity, governmental policies and the protection of human rights.

Should HIV /AIDS infected mothers breastfeed? This question is the center of debate and controversy in medical circles but in poor developing states where mothers cannot afford to bottle feed, it is a question of survival.

Data and research were presented; experts from several countries voiced their views for and against breast-feeding by HIV mothers. As it turned out, they seemed to agree that the conclusion could not be arrived at by mathematical calculations alone but by taking into account the vast economic and social differences amongst the afflicted nations. Like any other predicament caused by the deadly virus, the quest for a solution to the breastfeeding issue still has no end in sight.

Let's clarify some significant information here first. The fact is that an infant born to an HIV-infected woman is not always doomed to inherit the virus. The proportion of infected babies is 25 per cent and most causes of maternal to child transmission of HIV, medically termed as "vertical transmission," takes place during late pregnancy and delivery. But studies have shown that breastfeeding can produce an additional risk of between 7 and 22 per cent. Normally the virus can only be detected only after one year or if employing state of the art laboratory technique, about one month after a child's birth. And doctors can't identify precisely whether an infected infact has acquired the disease under the condition of normal risk i.e. 25 per cent or by the additional risk generated by its mother's breastmilk. At the Conference, the United Nations Program of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) compared the chance of vertical transmission in developed countries where women generally do not breastfeed and developing countries where they do. The risk was 15 to 25 per cent in the former, as opposed to 25 to 45 per cent in developing countries.

A significant difference so,what is so complicated? Just publicize this information and instruct HIV mothers not to breastfeed. That's it! Problem solved! In fact World Health Organization (WHO) and UNAIDS have done exactly the opposite. For a long time they have recommended that all mothers should feed their babies with the nutritionally and psychologically beneficial breastmilk. But despite the acknowledgement of the increasing risk, WHO makes no exception to its generalized principle when talking about HIV-contaminated mothers. "Irrespective of HIV infection rate," UNAIDS said, "breatsfeeding should be protected, promoted and supported." The reasons behind this are not medical but social, unfortunately though, they do not fit into the unique conditions of every country. Adding the ineffectiveness of information dissemination in many nations, the message of WHO and UNAIDS sometimes get confused and eventually lead to unclear strategy in tackling the problem.

The reason WHO continues supporting breastfeeding is Africa," explained Dr Usa Thiskayorn of Chulalongkorn Hospital's Department of Pediatrics. "Poor living conditions in the continent make new-born babies vulnerable to malnutrition and breastmilk is the only readily available source of nutrition. "It's useless to promote formula milk which mothers can't afford in Africa, not to mention the

Environmental Health & Fiji Today

- by Ruth Lechte

In 1992 I was working in Colombia and was present at the formation of a network of women's groups fighting the practices of the cut flower industry which exports mainly to North America. The university women, the YWCA and others, were appalled at the health effects on the (mostly women) employees and their living and working conditions. Illiterate women from Andes Indian tribes were being carted by trucks through long distances into the flower growing areas and used as labor, especially in the application of fungicides, herbicides and pesticides. Although directions as to the quantities to be applied were available, the women could not read Spanish if they read at all. In a few months they suffered from miscarriages or their periods stopped, they had skin and eye complaints and stomach upsets. Once they were too sick to work they were fired but not given the resources to return to their own homes.

The threat to all of us from synthetic chemical compounds is serious. They disrupt development of the reproductive, immune, nervous and endocrine systems by mimicking hormones and blocking their actions. There is a growing suspicion that lowered sperm counts and breast and testicular cancers are direct results of contaminants in the environment. Contaminants are carried as gases or particulate in the air, in surface waters, ground waters and by ocean currents across and between continents. They even enter the food chain in areas remote from their site of release. Most governments have no idea of what is happening and governments of poor and small countries certainly do not and often could not care less.

Consequently, there are a number of major concerns in Fiji. To name a few, the refusal by Government to enforce a control of emissions from motor vehicles especially from buses, trucks and taxis. The reduction of lead was a start but there is still much more to be done for the good of citizens' health and to prevent further contamination of the atmosphere contributing to global warming. The refusal of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF) to replace Nadi Airport's incinerator where organic and plastic burning occurs is disastrous because it adds PVCs into the atmosphere. People and groups have been lobbying on the issue for years by writing letters to the press, sending delegations abroad but still nothing happens. The spread of weed killer on farms and to clean drains is widespread in Fiji, especially in the cane belts. It is the lazy person's answer to agriculture. Clearing of land and drains could be a national youth project subsidized by the authorities. Maybe Viti Corps can kickstart this idea.

Environmental health in the wealthier countries is considered the responsibility of the state. These responsibilities include safe and adequate water supplies, energy availability, correct nutrition, disease prevention. At the same time, citizen groups ensure that the authorities, industries and those involved in agriculture do not abuse the environment and natural resources which could lead to destruction of ecosystems and thus the support base.

In Pacific Island states and the developing world generally, resources differ. Primarily, health care, environmental awareness and social action become the concerns of non-governmental agencies NGOs), citizens', women's groups and advocates of human rights.

The health of human beings is dependent on the health of the natural world. People in desperate

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Why Women are Concerned about Biodiversity

Biodiversity refers to the enormous range of different living species on earth. One million have so far been named, but scientists believe there are 5 million species. Biodiversity prospecting refers to the exploration, extracting and screening of biological diversity and indigenous knowledge to extract commercially valuable genetic and biochemical resources. The Biodiversity Convention (1992) and the GATT agreement on intellectual property rights contain certain clauses that lend legitimacy to bioprospecting.

Women are often the main custodians of indigenous and traditional knowledge about traditional medicine, crafts, artistic designs and expressions, natural resource management systems and ritual practices. They are therefore concerned about the disrespect for indigenous peoples' lives and the blatant exploitation of their knowledge for commercial purposes that have occurred over the years. GATT will encourage these abuses because:

- when indigenous people share information or genetic materials with others, they effectively lose control over such resources;
- indigenous people are not adequately compensated for sharing valuable information with transitional corporations which patent the knowledge and gain huge profits;
- in many cases of bioprospecting or biopiracy, the sacredness of life is being violated because some companies are claiming patents

entertainers of high status possessing special talents. They are often sought after by respectable men in Japanese society for companionship. Pre-Christian traditional systems in Fiji condoned women who offered themselves to chiefs. Women of chiefly lineage were often forgiven for having more than one partner in the course of strengthening traditional ties. For "women commoners", siring children from men of high traditional status would almost automatically elevate their status. Husbands were flattered when their wives are selected by the chief as a lover, with the prospect of siring children who would then be of chiefly lineage and naturally render them special privileges. Many are uncomfortable comparing such women to that of a prostitute. "A sex worker does it for economic survival, whereas in the traditional system, women offered themselves to men of authority for status. "Geisha girls had to be accomplished in many areas and must possess special qualities. Intelligence, being an excellent masseur and a good listener were special qualities sought after in Geisha girls," said a friend during a discussion on this issue.

For some women in Fiji, the sex trade is a lucrative option but comes at a high price once exposed. Women have to be empowered by seeking knowledge which is power as these women learn at a recent WEER Project workshop in Nadi.

However talking to Gyan revealed an interesting side to prostitution in Fiji, "some men don't want sex, they just want to talk but they still pay the money. Most of the men that come to us are rich and men you will not expect to be doing it. If you really think about who can afford to pay for sex, it is quite obvious that the most men are well-off with cars and can pay for motel rooms," she says. She confirmed speculation that some women in the sex industry are married with children. " Some do it to supplement their husband's income and their partners are aware of what they do. Others do it to earn some money for themselves and the children because, maybe, their husbands don't give them anything," she says. The question that plagues many people including FWRM is: should prostitutes be decriminalized? FWRM is concerned about the discriminatory intepretations of the laws governing prostitution. Most women sex workers are penalized while the male clients are free to go. Legalising prostitution may be a form of control, particularly in ensuring that women (and men) in the sex industry are given some protection from abuse. Legislators should also be sensitive to the many cultural and religious persuasions.

In Fiji, the debate on prostitution catapulted to national attention when a Suva motel alleged to be operating as a brothel was raided by the police. Whilst charges were laid on the women workers caught in the night raid, the male clients were allowed to walk free causing consternation amongst women's rights groups including the Fiji Women's Crisis Center and FWRM. For many, prostitution is either not discussed or is a matter of ridicule, the subject of course being the female and the male sex workers. Gay male sex workers are on the rise noticeably since of late and their stories vary from violent homes to sexual abuse in the home. For many women and men "in the streets," they find a home and a niche for themselves. "Many of us just fantasize and pretend we are doing it in a big city like New York and ignore the people who recognize us. At times we get violated by clients (and other times by the very people who are supposed to be protecting us, the Police) but for most of us, it is better than what we would be facing in our own homes," at least this way, we get paid for it," says one. The general assumption appears to be that people turn to the sex industry not only for economic survival but for refugeand support. "At least in this work, we have each other and support one another because our situations are similar," he ssaid.

The major concern of FWRM is that with the increased exposure to western culture and with the increasing social suffering, poverty and ineffective legislation, women and youth are increasingly resorting to the sex industry. A recent newspaper report said that girls as young as 13 were engaged in prostitution and it was alleged to be occurring in rural towns. A university lecturer's house was recently raided for what Police suspected to be a case of paedophilia involving young school girls who were believed to be living with him. An Australian civil servant was also charged recently with paedophilia after Police discovered pornographic materials and testimonies of sexual relations from several victims, some of whom were known to have been financially supported through food items and education. He was released on bail and there are allegations that the sex ring findings were just the tip of an iceberg.

This recent cases also triggered positive debate to the roles of parents in such situations. Skeptics summed

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scarcity of clean water. And what if normal mothers observe the bottle-feeding practice amongst HIV mothers? Confusion would be inevitable, imitation would bring disaster and discrimination would likely to follow." "WHO sees no other way but to reaffirm their policy," said a doctor with first hand experience in Uganda.

The condition is not that distressing in Thailand, currently with 20,000 HIV infected mothers but the globalized principle of protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding has also caused doubt here from the very beginning. WHO tried to encourage breastfeeding in our country since the first baby was born to an HIV mother in 1988," said Dr Usa. WHO was there and voiced strong opposition. "Insufficient information prompted our department of Health to adopt the principle advised by the organization. I explained to them that we are not that desperate, that we have better alternatives. Our HIV mothers still have a choice and their babies don't have to assume this unnecessary hazard. "Local research support this. Of the babies born to infected mothers in Bangkok who mainly opted for bottle-feeding, approximately 20 per cent were at risk of infection. The figure of children in the North, who were conventionally breastfed was 40 per cent. The difference speaks for itself". Luckily her words were heeded. The Department of Health later revised its policy and began offering free formula milk to HIV mothers nationwide. Nothing's wrong with breatsfeeding unless you are HIV positive, that is the new message. Anyway, hold the cheers. Medical people said that our crumbling economy might cause a discontinuation of this free milk program. Tough luck on our ill-fated mothers and our babies More disquicting is the fact that many less-educated mothers in the rural areas and the hill villages have barely any knowledge on this matter," said Dr Usa. So breastfeeding is still practiced unquestioningly. They don't learn about our free milk campaign. Some aren't even aware that they are infected. The consequences is that many children are born unprotected."

The bottom line nevertheless is that the decision whether to breastfeed or not relies on the mothers. According to UNAIDS, this is a question of a basic human right of the world population. And it should be respected. But UNAIDS also emphasized at the Conference that these mothers need to be fully informed and empowered so that they can make a sound judgement. Efforts should also be made to improve access to counseling and testing for women, to hygiene and sanitation, minimizing health risks and prevention of commercial pressures for artificial feeding, the organization declares. Speaking of protecting human rights, an Indian delegate made a striking point at the conclusion of the session, "a human right?" he asked. "Whose right exactly. The right of the mothers to breasfeed? But what about the right of the child to survive?" No answer from the experts. Not from the public. Yet his question echoed in our minds. In dealing with AIDS, utmost caution is required, whether it be in bedrooms, laboratories, up in the hills or out in the streets. We are no longer dealing only with the virus. It would be a lot simpler if we were. ■

One Woman a Minute is Dying in Pregnancy, Says UN

by David Ljunggren

London, 28 May 1997 (Reuter) - A woman somewhere in the world dies every minute from pregnancy related causes because of a lack of decent health care and advice on contraception, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) said. It said that despite efforts to boost the quality and availability of reproductive health care, widespread failures combined with discrimination and violence against women amounted to a massive violation of human rights.

"Given the choice, most women would have fewer children than their parents' generation," UNFPA executive director, Dr Nifis Sadik told a news conference to launch the organization's *1997 State* of the World Population report.

"Ensuring women and their parents can exercise the right to choose will speed the global trend towards smaller families and help countries find a balance between their population and their resources," she said.

The report said that the effect of denying people their rights meant 585,000 women - every minute - died each year from pregnancy related causes. Nearly all of them are in developing countries - most in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia - and many times this number are disabled as a result of childbirth. "If women were given more say over their bodies it would help keep the world's population at sustainable levels," Sadik said. There are at present 5.8 billion people on earth and estimates for 2025 range from 7.7 billion to 20 billion."

"I think we can make the eight billion figure if we work hard to implement the recommendations in the report. That is do-able," she said.

At an international conference in Cairo in 1994, 180 nations agreed that high quality reproductive health services and information should be made available to all by the year 2015. They agreed to spend $17 billion a year by 2000 to boost the care of reproductive healthcare but current spending falls short of that target, largely because industrialized countries have not fulfilled their commitments.

Sadik reported some positive change among leaders of affected states but acknowledged resistance lower down. "Many leaders are supporting the programs and speaking out against violence in a much more open way than they did before," she said. "We believe the laws as a starting point but laws won't change society by themselves."

The report said about 200,000 mothers dies each year because of the lack of or failure of contraceptive services. Up to 150 million women want to space their pregnancies are without the means to do so. About 74 million pregnancies are unwanted and there results in 45 million abortions. The report further stated that 120 million women had undergone some form of genital mutilation, while two million girls age five to fifteen are introduced into commercial sex each year. ■

DOMESTIC WORKER AWARDED $47,000 FOR UNPAID LABOUR

Lost in the Los Angeles media attention in May of last year (1997) of an unprecedented US$47,000 backpay judgment to a victim of Los Angeles' domestic slavery was a darker and more bitter reality: the case of Yuni Mulyono will be the last brought to Court of the rights of low-wage immigrant workers by the Labour Defense Network, once a division of LA's Legal Aid Society. The Network which handled Mulyono's case , has fallen victim to Federal budget cuts for legal aid to the poor.

For years, LA's low wage workers found their way to the Network office in a nondescript building on Crenshaw Avenue. Bitter stories poured across the desk of Attorney Michelle Yu of unpaid labour, work without overtime pay, wages below the minimum and of the wholesale denial of conditions most people take for granted.

Not only did federal cuts close the Network office, what little Government funding is left for legal aid programs now contains another killer provision. It prohibits aid to undocumented workers. Yu estimates that the undocumented made up a large percentage of her cases. "That's who low-wage workers in Los Angeles are," she says, "and that's especially those who wind up being cheated and even held to work against their will."

With funding cut, restrictions on the legal status of clients and the doors of the Networks closed, it is much less likely that workers like Mulyono will find legal advocates to fight their cases. "We'll have a law," says Yu, "but no one will be there to fight the cases needed to enforce it."

Mulyono was the last of Yu's clients, recruited in Indonesia five years ago by a family which brought her to Los Angeles to work in their home. "I began working when I got up in the morning," Mulyono remembers, "and I worked until it was time to go to bed at night. In the morning, I would prepare the family breakfast and lunch and cleaned the kitchen and living room. I mopped and swept. I had to wake up their daughter, get her dressed and ready for school and feed her. She's now seven, so she was two when I started. After they left the house, I had to clean the backyard. They had me feed and clean up after their two dogs. Everyday I did the laundry and washed the bathroom. I fixed the dinner and served it to them and washed the dishes. Sometimes the wife would ask me to give her a massage in the evening and I would do that too." For this non-stop labour, Mulyono was paid US$100 a month and that was only after she complained. Her situation of underground semislavery was made possible by its invisibility to the outside world, a problem shared with thousands of other low-wage workers in Los Angeles. Low-wage immigrant workers are the invisible workforce. Their work is done below the radar screen - necessary jobs that make the world function which are hardly noticed. Domestic workers are the most invisible workers of all.

For almost three years, Mulyono, a slender woman seeming younger than her twenty-seven years lived in this hidden economy. She was finally helped out of this modern bondage by another immigrant, Marco Rodriguez, a stocky Salvadorian from halfway around the world. Her personal account of her courageous escape from bondage was broken into LA Weekly's Underground LA series in November 1996. Mulyono was awarded US$47,000 in backpay last week by Superior Court Judge Jack W Morgan. According to Christina Riegos of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Workers Rights in Los Angeles (CHIRLA), it was the largest such award ever granted in southern California. As the Network's swansong, it was quite a case, not only because of the size of the award but because of the hard and complex legal fight needed to win it.

While Mulyono testified in Court that she was paid a US$100 a month for her labour, the family which employed her denied they paid her anything at all. Lina Nilam and her husband Reginald Hall called her a guest in their home.

Mulyono is an ethnic Javan. Nilam while also from Indonesia is from a wealthy, ethnically Chinese family. Mulyono had previously worked for Nilam's relatives in Jakarta before she was recruited to work in Los Angeles. Expert testimony at the trial described the extremely hierarchal nature of domestic service in Indonesia. It would be extremely unlikely, witnesses testified for a wealthy Chinese-Indonesian family to bring a Java-Indonesian woman, whom they would usually view as poorer and lower-caste to the US as a guest.

Mulyono's memories of her years in the Nilam's were so traumatic that she could testify in detail about times

have consented to prostitution.

The issue of choice and consent as an analytical tool is worthless to understand prostitution. Prostitution pre-exists as a system that requires a supply of female bodies and women and girls will be kidnapped, deceived, enticed or persuaded to ensure that supply. What is one to make, for example of the case of the hundreds of Nepali girls trafficked into India? In the first two or three years of their confinement in Bombay brothels they are kept closely guarded and not allowed outside because at any opportunity, they will try to escape. In later years, they will stand displayed in their finery outside the brothel door with no risk of their running away. They may even leave for a time and then return. What then is the quality of that later "consent" that would define the prostitution exchange as concensual activity?

In recommending the recognition of prostitution as legitimate commerce, the Government of Netherlands goes so far as to propose the concept that a person may "fully and freely consent to his his/her own exploitation""(cited in *le Monde Diplomatique* March 1997). For women (as for workers, indigenous or colonized peoples" whose historical conditions has been one of subordination and exploitation, this is clearly a barbarous and unacceptable concept. Some prostitutes and prostitutes' rights advocates vigorously assert the possibility of the integrity of women's agency in prostitution and accuse antiprostitution feminists of being patronizing and disrespectful of their perspectives. In fact, how women get into prostitution is irrelevant to the functioning of the prostitute system; rather prostitution maintains itself as a system *by what is and can be done about women* in prostitution.

The issue of "personal choice politics" rests on a western liberal understanding of human rights that elevates individual will and choice above all other human values and above all notions of common good. But for example, as a result in certain advances in biotechnology, the concept of personal choice has been questioned and ethical issues raised about the integrity of the human body and persona and in connection with the sale of human organs, surrogate motherhood or human cloning. Individual choice is also generally not accepted as argument for drug abuse. Against the conception of the human and social good, human community has often seen the necessity to mark the boundaries of personal liberty. But perhaps because of mainstream concepts of social good have never included the class of women, traditionally "socially subjugated" (Charlesworth 76), it is tolerated that prostitution, "practice..... (that) integrally contributes to the maintenance of an underclass" (Mackinnon 73) be accepted on the basis that some women are freely choosing it. On that basis slavery could have been accepted by human society.

Adapted from Women in Action No.2, 1997 (to be continued in the next issue)

PROSTITUTION IN FIJI - SHOULD IT BE DECRIMINALIZED?

"I have turned to prostitution because I cannot get any other job and I have a family to look after!" These are the words of Gyan, an Indo-Fijian sex worker. For Gyan, prostitution is just another job. Prostitution in Fiji is becoming more prevalent. The issue has been discussed at great length in many circles - amongst authorities, women's agencies, religious organisations and social development experts. Christian pundits label it the "sign of the times" with prostitutes branded as amongst the worst breed of humans. Meanwhile, a renowned and influential church leader making comments in *Caught In the Crossfire*, a TV documentary on prostitution said that prostitution should be decriminalized. Rather progressive comments from a church leader. However, prostitution is still very much a shunned issue in Fiji.

People who engage in prostitution are not just the downtrodden and underprivileged but most hold paid employment. Some sex workers are hired out under the guise of male/female escorts. This is a more organised form of prostitution. Some critics have commented that "every woman is a prostitute, marriage is just another legalised form of prostitution. Because a woman would perform at her best with her lover/husband if she had an agenda."

Gyan's family moved to Suva to seek financial security. She was unfortunate in not finding employment. With sick parents, siblings and children to care for, she resorted to prostitution as a means of earning. Whilst talking to Gyan, one cannot help but marvel at the frankness with which she speaks about her employment. She has been finding it difficult to get work since her appearance on national television in *Caught In the Crossfire*: "I have lost all my fixed clients because they do not want to be seen with me. People recognize me now and I have lost the meager money I was earning from other sources like welfare. My son was pushed out of school and my husband's family are trying to take my children away from me," she said. She has also been formally charged by the Police since her appearance on TV and subsequently fined. Getting caught in prostitution has a large price tag, socially and economically. For Gyan, those are the risks one takes as part of the job. "Now the Police are rounding up the girls and no one is to be seen loitering in the streets with the intention of prostitution from 10.00 pm."

What really pushes a woman to prostitution, an age-old profession that has been silently accepted and shunned throughout the times. Geisha girls in Japan are women

implications of human rights on an individual's right to choose means of survival. For the average "Joe Blogg" the reputation and stigma associated with this industry precedes any arguments by prostitution advocates on the matter.

The following article adapted from Volume 2 of the publication Women In Action

"Radical feminist analyse prostitution as a cornerstone of patriarchal control and sexual subjugation of women that impacts negatively not just on the women and girls in prostitution but on all women as a group."

puts us in perpective of other people's view, some of which may be contrary to our personal beliefs on the matter.

With the worldwide explosion in recent decades of industries based on the production, sale and consumption of sex primarily personified in women's bodies, there is even more pressing need to understand the phenomenon of prostitution in the range and diversified form it is taking, and for feminists to analyze these developments for their significance and impact on women's status.

The flesh trade in Thailand has been estimated by End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) to generate between US$18-21.6 billion a year or over half of the entire 1995 budget of that country. In Japan it equals the Defense budget. Perhaps because a powerful economy has arisen around the sale of sex, totally integrated into the local and national economies and hugely profitable for industrialists and for states, more voices are being raised to suggest and in some areas, to demand that prostitution be accepted as commerce and as legitimate work for women and a valid means for women's economic empowerment.

Differing Feminist Analyses

Some arguments claim to find in prostitution a practice of women's resistance to and sexual liberation from norms and traditional moral precepts on sexuality that have served to control and subordinate women. Radical feminists' ideology, on the other hand, view prostitution as a cornerstone of patriarchal control and sexual subjugation of women that impacts negatively not just on the women and girls in prostitution but on all women.Because prostitution continually affirms and reinforces patricarchal definitions of women as having a primary function to serve men sexually.

Human Rights Arguments

Human rights arguments are being marshaled on both sides of the divide, for and against prostitution. Feminist movement apply a human rights framework to women's condition while at the same time challenging and redefining mainstream human rights principles with women's perspective.

Right to Self-determination

For the prostitution advocates, foremost among human rights principles invoked to defend the right to prostitute is the right to self-determination. This is understood as the individual's right to make autonomous choices and decisions which can include engaging in consensual commercial sex as well as setting the terms of that sexual exchange. There are many problems with this position. Firstly, its failure to acknowledge the social, economic and political imbalances and sexual relations of power between men and women, which is the context whereby these choices and decisions are being made.

Secondly, it also fails to ask the question whether or not prostitution can lead to social and sexual equality for women or will it in fact continue to reinforce gender disparities of rights and status. As has been pointed out by human rights advocates, "by failing to take the phenomenon of male domination of women in both the public and private worlds into account, the right to self-determination can in fact reinforce oppression against women through its complicity in systematic male oppression and violence." (Charlesworth,'75).

It is predorminantly a North and class-blind perspective that trivialises the

"The issue of choice and consent as an analytical tool is worthless to understand prostitution. Prostitution pre-exists as a system that requires a supply of female bodies and women and girls will be kidnapped, deceived, enticed and persuaded to ensure that supply".

massive phenomenon of the abduction, deception and trafficking into prostitution of women and girls, mostly from countries in the South but today also from the dislocated economies of eastern Europe which constitutes by far the most prevalent procurement method worldwide. It does not take into account the plain fact that male users of prostitution do not ask to know or care if the human merchandise they purchse consent to being put at their sexual disposal. The stated consent of some, therefore, can damn the others who by no means

she tried to convince them to treat her as an equal and pay her fairly. Trial observers on the other hand described the family's testimony as rehearsed. In the end, Judge Morgan rejected the assertion that Mulyono was a an extended houseguest and calculated her back wages at the $4.25 legal minimum for 2 years, 9 months and 65 hours a week (including overtime). That produced the award of $47,000. Yu and Mulyono both believed that while dramatic, her situation is very common. That belief drew Mulyono to become active in Domestic Worker's Association, CHRLA project which seeks to organize and inform domestic workers of their labour rights. ■

International Women's Day

FWRM staff is gearing up for the International Women's Day in March, 1998. As part of the Coalition of NGOs which are planning on a series of activities in celebration of the *UN 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights*, FWRM will be holding some exciting and novel events to celebrate the Declaration in conjunction with IWD in March. The NGO Coalition comprising of organizations such as SPACHEE, Fiji Women's Crisis Center, Red Cross, Women's Action for Change, AIDS Taskforce, Fiji Young Lawyers Association, Fiji Trades Union Congress, Fiji YWCA, Greenpeace and Pacific Concerns Resource Center have divided up the calendar year and allocated months during which time to hold respective activities according to organizational objectives and aims. FWRM along with WAC and FWCC will be holding activities in March and plans are underway to host breakfast shows in a local radio station , hold a women's breakfast and panel discussion, host radio and TV programs, contribute articles and sticker inserts into the local newspapers and initiate poster and essay competitions targeted at school kids. The Movement's theme for the International Women's Day campaign will be *Girls Can Do Anything* relative to FWRM's main project, Women's Employment & Economic Rights (WEER).The theme was also chosen to recognise the Rights of the Girl Child with the vision that the rights of girls and young women will be highlighted and recognised. Plans are also underway to hold fundraising drives for the Movement such as hosting a Niu Waves evening with the USP based writers group and members are invited to assist staff in implementing the activities planned by visiting the FWRM office or calling us by telephone on 313156.

Please send in your views about stories covered in this newsletter. We also welcome contributions such as short stories about what is happening in your corner of the globe.

Position Vacant

Housewife:

Applications are invited for the position of manager of a lively team of four demanding individuals of differing needs and personalities. The successful applicant will be required to perform and coordinate the following functions: companion, counselor, financial manager, purchasing officer, teacher, nurse, chef, nutritionist, decorator, cleaner, child care supervisor, social secretary and recreation officer.

Qualifications: Applicants must have unlimited drive and the strongest sense of responsibility if they are to succeed in this job. They must be independent and self motivated and be able to work in isolation and without supervision. They must be skilled in the management of people of all ages. They must be able to work under stress for long periods of time without tiring. They must have the adaptability to handle all new developments in the life of a team including emergencies and serious crises. They must be able to communicate on a range of issues with people of all ages, including public servants, school teachers, doctors, dentists, tradespeople, businesspeople, teenagers and children. They must be competent in the practical skills listed above. They must be healthy, creative, active and outgoing, to encourage the physical and social development of the team members. They must have imagination, sensitivity, warmth, love and understanding, since they are responsible for the mental and emotional well-being of the team.

Hours of work: All waking hours and 24 hour shift when necessary.

Pay: No salary or wage. Allowances by arrangement from time to time with the income earning member of the team. The successful applicant may be required to hold a second job, in addition to the one advertised here.

Benefits: No guaranteed holidays. No guaranteed sick leave, maternity leave or long service leave. No guaranteed life or accident insurance. No worker's compensation and no superannuation.

COLOMBO MEETING ADDRESSES VIOLENCE

by Vani Dulaki

The meeting on Violence Against Women (VAW) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on August 21st and 22nd was organised by the Asia Pacific Forum of Women, Law & Development (APWLD).All network parties/affiliates were invited. FWRM was the only organisation from the Pacific region invited to attend. In keeping with APWLD's commitment to facilitate network building and mobilization for change in the Asia Pacific region, especially in the area of policy advocacy and reform, the meeting objectives were as follows:

- to be able to critically discuss and analyze community violence and facilitate deeper understanding of the range of issues and the varied positions thereon;
- to be able to explore possibilities for the different groups represented. To follow-up nationally and regionally on the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW presented in her 3rd report to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva;
- to be able to assist the Special Rapporteur on VAW in her forthcoming report on "State of Violence" and "Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict Situations".

The Special Rapporteur, Dr Radhika Coomaraswamy reiterated that the issue of violence was only highlighted during the Vienna Meeting in 1993. Thisled to the formation of the Declaration of Violence and the establishment of the UN Special Rapporteur. The meeting heard that VAW was a new issue not only to the Human Rights Commission but also to the Women's Movement. One of the things that she emphasized in her report were ways in which preventative measures empowers civil societies to deal with issues. She also reiterated that concerted effort should be made to counteract violence issues. She informed participants that her role as Special Rappateur was basically an outcome of pressures by women's movements throughout the world. In her third report she addresses rape, domestic violence and trafficking of women. Some participants felt that her report was more focused on rape and that it fails to recognize other forms of violations that women are subjected to. In her report, Dr Coomaraswamy also provided case studies to enable readers to have a clearer picture of the vulnerability of women, more importantly, the seriousness of the acts of violence. These case studies, I believe allowed women to recognize similar forms of violence perpetrated on women. ■

"Whatever largely male religious leaders may claim about God's views on how men should treat women, men's attitudes and behaviours are largely responsible for the stresses that lead to violence against women and drive women to suicide," Wadan Narsey, NFP Parliamentarian

STARSTRUCK!!!

A well known footballer raped a girl of 16 years in Uganda. The ordeal was said to have gone on for over 30 minutes during which time the perpetrator fell asleep. The girl managed to escape locking the rapist in the house. She immediately reported the matter to an uncle who escorted her to the nearest police station. The police went to the scene of the crime and found the rapist still asleep as reported. He was arrested and detained at the police station.

The story broke out in the newspaper on July 10 (the incident took place on July 9th). Football fans and relatives of the rapist were enraged and swore revenge on the girl's family for the damaging the footballer's career (he is a professional based in Turkey). The girl and her family went into hiding to avoid possible harm to them.

The perpetrator was kept at the police station for five days after which time the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) released him on the approval that the complainant had changed her mind about giving evidence at the trial. The DPP declared he had no doubt that an offense had been committed but ruled that the case could not proceed without a complainant. The Ugandan Constitution gives the DPP authority to decide whether or not to prosecute. The law requires that every person suspected of committing an offense should be produced in Court within 48 hours of committing the offense. The suspect in this casewas held in police custody for five days. The DPP stated that he had also taken into consideration the reputation of the suspected.

Women's rights organisations were outraged by the DPP's decision. This has become a regular pattern where sexual offenses against women are not prosecuted on the same grounds. There are some information that police officers and relatives are involved in convincing survivors of violence not to prosecute. Activists in

those employers, employees and unions do not practice discrimination based on sex in the workplace and in collective agreements. Ensure that workers will not be discriminated against because of gender.

To change laws, administration policies that may not be in line with the convention.

3.Convention No. 156: Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981

This Convention applies to both male and female workers who have family responsibilities, example dependent children, elderly immediate family members who need their care and support.

When a country ratifies this convention, it agrees to:

Enact laws and/ or policies which will make allowances for women and men workers with family responsibilities.

It encourages the development of community services such as childcare in the workplace, domestic leave in order to attend to sick children and dependents. The convention specifically states that family responsibilities will not be reason for termination of employment.

The Convention allows those workers who wish to leave the same family responsibilities would be given equal support to re-enter the workforce. The Convention encourages the provision of training and guidance for workers to enable them to cope with these responsibilities whilst maintaining paid employment.

It ensure that the Collective agreements (those made between the union and the employer) shall also take into account family responsibilities of workers; when transferring workers from one place to another, issues such as whether or not the spouse will be able to find employment in the new area and whether or not there are schools suitable for the children.

It ensures that employers are sympathetic to workers with family responsibilities when dealing with issues such as overtime. The issue of reduction in the hours of works for workers with family commitments should be entertained. Women returning to work following maternity leave should be entitled to obtain a leave of absence (usually called parental leave) without it affecting her employment. In the case of Fiji, it means that the worker will be guaranteed job security if she wishes to take extra leave to be with her newborn child. This parental leave should also be available to both partners.

There is a whole range of provisions for workers with family responsibilities that is covered in Convention No. 156 and recommendation No.165.

As factory workers, most garment industry employees are denied basic employment rights such as maternity leave and have been known to work in inhumane working environments. FWRM continues to fight for their employment rights.

This piece compiled by WEER Project Officer Reijilci Nicole appeared in the Fiji Times Supplement of World Human Rights Day in December 1997. It is based on the research paper "Labouring Under the Law" by Alu Emberson-Bain & Claire Slatter.

IS IT A HUMAN RIGHT TO PROSTITUTE?

Prostitution - the age-old profession, taken for granted by many societies. In parts of Asia, the "Flesh Trade", as it more coloquially known generates approximately US$18-21.6 billion dollars per annum - a lucrative industry indeed.

In many human rights and feminist circles, debates continue on whether or not it is the individual's right to choose such a profession. some argue that the right to "self-determination" usurps all other argument and ideology on the matter. It is understood that the individual has the right to make choices and decision involving their economic survival.

In Fiji, where prostitution is illegal, the average person may not fully comprehends the

ENHANCING WOMEN WORKER RIGHTS THROUGH THE ILO CONVENTIONS

Article 23 of the Human Rights Declaration stipulates that:

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. 2.Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. 3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. 4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his/her interests.

As part of its role in addressing the economic inequalities and the employment injustices experienced by women workers in Fiji, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) through its *Women, Employment & Economic Rights (WEER)* project will be lobbying the Fiji Government to ratify certain International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions.

There are altogether 22 Conventions and 20 Recommendations which are relevant to women workers and of these, Fiji has only ratified one ILO Convention (No. 45 - Underground Work).

There are three specific ILO Conventions, which the FWRM believes should be ratified and practised by the Government of Fiji if we are to achieve better workers' rights and ultimately human rights for our women. These conventions are:

1. Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951.

The Recommendation associated with this convention is No. 90 which is titled the Equal Remuneration Recommendation, 1951

2.Convention No. 111 : Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958. The recommendation complementing this convention is No.111 titled Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Recommendation, 1958.

3. Convention No. 156: Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention. 1981. Recommendation No. 165 is the complementing recommendation which is titled "Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981

4.Convention No 100:Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951.This convention addresses the issue of equal pay for both men and women on the principle of *Equal pay for Work of Equal Value*. That is, men and women who do the same jobs should be given the same pay. There is no ground for discrimination based on sex, which means that you cannot pay a women worker less than a male worker if they are performing the same tasks. There have been many cases where, a male worker and a female worker have been doing the same job but the female worker receives less than the male worker does simply because she is a woman.

If there are to be differences in wages, it will be based on merit of the worker e.g. her academic qualifications, her experience and NOT her sex!!!

The accompanying recommendation (No. 90) sets out guidelines for achieving the aims and objectives of the above convention. According to the recommendation, the government should:

Practice the principle of equal pay for work of equal value for its own employees
Inform and encourage statutory organisations, local governments and other employers to do the same. Bring about laws which make equal pay a legal right and at the same time set out penalties for those employers who continue to discriminate between their workers because of their sex.

The recommendation also says that in a company, which has a system of increments, the size of the increments should be the same for both male and female workers performing the same type of work. The aim here is to do away with procedures within an organisation, which discriminate according to sex. Workers whether male or female should have equal access to promotions, further training opportunities etc.

2. Convention No. 111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958

This convention prohibits discrimination in the workplace on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, or social origin. The term Employment and Occupation in this convention includes, training opportunities, access to jobs, the terms and conditions of that job. FWRM is lobbying for the ratification of this convention to ensure that women workers are not denied access to jobs, training, and promotions on the basis of their sex.

When a country ratifies ILO convention No. 111, it agrees to:

Remove discrimination based on the sex of an individual.
Take all appropriate action to ensure

October 23, 1997

The Editor
Letters to the Editor Column
Fiji Times
Suva

Fax: 301421

Dear Sir,

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement writes in response to Noa Nadruku's acquittal in a Canberra Court yesterday, as reported in both the daily newspapers. We are concerned that Nadruku's acquittal after assaulting two women, one being his wife, by Magistrate Madden will have great ramifications on similar cases that come before the Courts. This is an example of blatant hypocrisy in the justice system. It goes without saying that Nadruku's actions would have left a "sour taste in the mouths" of rugby league fans worldwide and we hope that he will heed the call: you can fool some people some time but you can't fool all the people all of the time.

Dual sporting hero and household name Noa Nadruku (left) pictured here with Fiji's Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka during a recent event. His case triggered mixed reactions but the fact still remains that violence should not be tolerated in any Court. Photo" Courtesy of the Fiji Times.

We are shocked that the Court, being the one place where women expect justice and redress from the violent and bullying tactics of men has, through this judgment reinforced one of the oldest myths - "he was too drunk to be responsible for his actions". This is virtual licensing drunk men to go around assaulting and harassing women and being justified in the name of alcoholic "blackout". What kind of message does his action (condoned by Courts), send out to impressionable young men who look up to Nadruku as a role model?

This scenario is becoming all too familiar : A pub/nightclub scene, intoxication (or so he claims) and physical violence against women. Except that the offenses occurred in two different countries, earlier in Fiji and recently in Australia.

Suffice to say that the women involved in this case would be feeling cheated by the cause of justice. Although neither cases ended in a court judgment defining women's rights in this area, both would be empowering experiences for the women who were involved. They took matters into their own hands, acting as individuals (with sympathetic lawyers) in a class action. A class action is a group of people suing on behalf of a larger group affected by the issue. Within our region, individual women have pursued cases such as these at great personal cost and some have triumphed inspite of the system.

Nadruku now has a police record and if justice serves, the Court should dish out out punishment to fit the crime. Being a re-offender justifies a harsh penalty.

Nadruku's status has obviously shielded him considering that this is the second time he has gotten away with it. The fact that this has happened in a NSW court is ironical and saddening because organisations such as ours look up to the NSW state as a model for its progressive policies and strategic plans to address violence against women.

Nadruku must learn to take responsibility for his actions and he obviously needs help for it. The message must continue to go out that only weak men beat up women - and that there is no justification for violence whatsoever - alcoholic "blackout" or not. We hope that the current progress by some of our Magistrates in Fiji in sentencing wife bashers will continue to be a beacon of hope for the women of Fiji as we support our government's commitment in Beijing to work towards a society free of violence against women.

Yours sincerely,
Gaylene Osborne
Ema Tagicakibau
Rosemary Naivalurua

This letter was compiled by the staff of FWRM in response to the acquittal of national rugby representative Noa Nadruku, who was charged for assaulting two women in Canberra last year. Nadruku had committed the same offense in Fiji in 1995 and was also acquitted. For reasons unknown, the letter was not published in the local newspapers. ■

"In passing, I think that the first time Adam had a chance, he laid the blame on woman," Nancy Astor

From the Editorial Desk

Happy New Year!!!

The staff of FWRM would like to wish members a happy New Year. The office closed its doors from December 24th 1997 to January 2nd 1998 to allow staff time with loved ones during the Christmas season.

The editorial team apologizes for the delay in printing this issue. For those members who have inquired about Balance, thank you for your interest. Late last year, FWRM has taken onboard two additional staff. As mentioned previously Reijieli Nicole takes over as the new WEER Project Officer.Gina Houng Lee has been appointed the new Coordinator. She replaces Gaylene Osborne. Gina has been an active member at the FWRM for many years and she has a special interest in women's rights advocacy and lobbying. She was Personnel and Training Manager with the Oil Company Shell (Fiji) Ltd. and her role is to push FWRM to greater heights. We would like to thank you for your support throughout year and look forward to your continued support in 1998. A reminder to members who have not paid their annual subscription fee that your subs are due. Please come in and see Communication Officer Rosemary Naivalurua about payments of subs or send in your cheque or money order to the address listed below. Your membership fee goes a long way in sustaining this publication and enables us to send you your copy of Balance. We hope that you enjoy this copy of the newsletter and please write in about your views or if you wish to have a story or piece published in Balance.

Send in your letters and subscription fee to:
Fiji Women's Rights Movement
P O Box 14194
Suva
Fiji Islands
Telephone: (679) 313156 or
Fax: (679) 313466

Subscription rates:
Fiji: F$5
South Pacific Member Countries: F$10
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Europe & Sub-Sahara: F$25

Uganda are working under a network called U'WONET to ensure that this practise is stopped. The network is prepared to file a constitutional court to challenge the DPP"s decision and/or to have the constitution provision interpreted.

Some of the legal issues raised were:

- is the DPP's discretion absolute i.e. without an obligation to act judiciously?
- is the withdrawal of the cooperation of the complainant fatal to the prosecution case even where there is other evidence in support of the case? Would rules pertaining to hostile witnesses apply in this case?
- does the Government have an obligation to prosecute cases of sexual violence against women? If so, does this obligation imply a duty to carry out thorough investigations and provide a criminal procedure and evidence system which is victim friendly? What is extent the extent of this obligation?
- does a private individual have a right to withdraw a criminal case (not being a private prosecution? Is the position different if the individual is a minor at law? ■

(From page 16)

it as a case of parents choosing to turn a blind eye and deaf ears because they were enjoying the perks lavished on them by these "rich people with nice cars and a lot of money." As is the case of Australia, some believed to be involved in paedophilia activities in Fiji are those in the higher echelons of society thus the difficulty in ascertaining the facts and perpetrators. "This shroud of secrecy is because of the fact that some involved are in high up places and it is in the best interests of the community that some things be kept from the public. It is the ultimate crime, debasing the innocent and pure and those who are attracted to these paedophilia activities are normally those who feel untouchable by law," said a commentator. The rise in prostitution and recent paedophilia cases in Fiji is testimony to the vulnerability of women and children to the sex industry. What needs to be done now, is for everyone to be involved in serious dialogue and awareness raising about the issues surrounding prostitution and other sex related activities. The zealous promotion of Fiji as a tourist destination, the eroding religious and cultural beliefs, the clamping down of sex tourism in Southeast Asia and the accelerated exposure of Fiji to the global economic and information systems can make Fiji, the "hub of the Pacific" a fertile "hub of the Pacific sex industry." Let's do something now! ■

(From page 8)

poverty often have no choice but to exploit the natural world in order to survive. Serious action is required to provide the basic necessities of life so that the natural world is not exploited beyond its regenerative powers; to develop the environmental health basics, water, clean air, safe food, sanitation and waste management – blocks on which wellness is built and to work for the protection of the environment and the conservation and rehabilitation of degraded systems.

(From page 9)

some of the problems we are being faced with today. Respecting others' human rights is true democracy. Governments allowing the effective participation of its people in the decision making process, the politically and economically strong giving a helping hand to the underprivileged, the respect of other people's religion, cultures and traditions and the protection of the less physically able people are hallmarks to true democracy. Let's join hands in achieving this by supporting the promotion of human rights. ■

(From page 3)

PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IS TRUE DEMOCRACY

December 10th was earmarked as World Human Rights Day. FWRM joined other organizations in celebrations which included a street procession, an open day and other activities to raise awareness about human rights. 1998 will be the *50th Anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights* and Fiji will be joining other nations in celebrating this event.

Human rights is an issue much bandied about in international circles. The UN Declaration of Human Rights was developed following the second world war when world leaders resolved that war was the ultimate abuse of human rights. As much as 50 years have passed when countries ratified the Human Rights Convention. Debate on human rights have been and continue to be a wide issue and governments and peoples all over the world have committed themselves to promoting the concept.

I asked a friend if human rights also meant the right to pillage and steal from the rich to feed a starving family and her reply was "with human rights comes responsibilities." I then understood that stealing from that privileged someone to cater for the need of the not so privileged is violating someone else's human rights.

Along the same concept, one could view those who are more economically and physically powerful violating the basic human right of others as a violation of human rights such as bad governance and corruption.

As I write, there are countries in which the violation of basic human rights are occurring. Countries such as Cambodia, Bouganville and East Timor. A university student came to the FWRM office with a picture magazine of the violations in East Timor in which soldiers are realizing a fortune in taking photographs during torture and killing sprees and selling them. The pictures were very disturbing and graphic depicting women and men tortured and killed like animals. When one talks of human rights, what was in that magazine showed the ultimate violation of basic human rights of a person. Trading in the dying moments of a human being can be considered the ultimate violation of human rights by stripping away someone's right to die with dignity.

Closer to home, violations of human rights also occur in various forms. The rape and physical abuse of women and children, the miscarriage of justice resulting in persons being imprisoned unjustly without proper representations, workers not being compensated for injuries sustained during duty, the maltreatment of (women) workers by unscrupulous employers and racial, religious and cultural human rights abuse are just

Led by our sisters from FWCC, with Edwina at the helm shouting down the hooter. Rosemary and Reijieli were joined by members Vika and Sofaia who lent numbers to the FWRM lineup. Rosemary also joined Edwina using the hooter and it was not long before other marchers gained enough confidence to shout slogans and messages. At Sukuna Park, marchers and members of the general public congregated to listen to speeches by NGO representatives. Closing the celebrations was Ramulo Garcia, Resident Representative of the Untied Nations Development Program. Reijieli delivered a brief speech on behalf of FWRM. She spoke on the Movement's role and plight in promoting women and children's basic human rights in Fiji. Back at the office, the day ended with children receiving prizes for games. More than 60 people entered the doors of FWRM in response to our invitation. ■

If women are to claim their rights, it has to start by being aware of what their rights are as these Methodist women learnt from a one-day workshop conducted by FWRM last year.

(turn to back page)

leadership roles and in decision making in the community.

The denial of women's rights to control their own bodies in reproduction puts their lives at great risk, especially when it is combined with poverty and poor health services. Sustainable development can not be a reality without women's full participation. Yet we know only too well that women cannot contribute and participate as equal partners with men as long as they are burdened with the scars of violence and abuse at home. No government policy can hope to enhance women's economic empowerment or political participation as long as women live under fear and threat of violence in the home. The reality of women's and children's experience of violence and control by males at home denies them their potential to participate as equal partners with men in the process of development. Violence against women in the home, workplace and in the community must therefore be considered as human rights violations.

Women's lack of access and rights to own property such as land and house, to credit facilities and lack of control over family income must also be highlighted as a human rights issue which needs to be addressed

Female-headed households comprise a high percentage of the poor in Fiji. Women's economic rights include their right to organize as workers and highlight issues such as sexual harassment and the exploitation of women as a source of cheap labor where they work long hours without adequate protection for social security, leave conditions and occupational health and safety standards. Inequality reinforces gender violence against women.

Through its Legal Literacy and Economic Rights Project, FWRM aims to contribute towards building a culture of human rights in Fiji by educating the community about the basic human rights of workers, etc. It seeks to encourage those people to claim their rights, to plead with those who have the power to respect the rights of others and defend them. Ultimately it is not about women's rights or children's rights; it is about respecting the rights of others in our society so that we can realize the vision where everyone – men, women and children can enjoy their human rights.

The following commentary was adapted from the article by Ema Tagicakibau published in the Fiji Times on Sunday 14/12/97 in commemoration of world Human Rights Day. ■

NGOs consolidate and march for human rights during the World Human Rights Day in December last year. Photo: Courtesy of the Fiji Women's Crisis Center.

FWRM OPEN DAY

FWRM's office was a flurry of activity on December 8 last year to celebrate World Human Rights Day. FWRM staff and members prepared themselves for an Open Day, the very first time in FWRM's history. The objective of the Open Day was to invite the general public to find out more about our advocacy and human rights work. Staff did not go home until late into the night on the eve of the Open Day. Posters were put up, display boards were prepared, treasure hunt clues were planted, and books were strategically placed and arranged in the library in preparation for the big day. Special gratitude goes to Punja & Sons for kindly donating snacks for refreshments.

On the morning of the Open Day, the office was a sight to behold! It was almost as if it had been given a facelift overnight. Fresh and clean cloths covered the tables holding information on family law, women's and children's rights, HIV/AIDS, women and employment etc. and colorful posters donned the passageway, flowers blossomed in its holders, tea was brewing and refreshments were set out for guests. By 10.00 am there were a handful of visitors trickling in to view the displays and meet the staff. Children of staff

AGENDA 21: PROGRAM OF ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

AGENDA 21 calls for:

- Elimination of all obstacles (legal, administrative, cultural, social & economic) to women's participation in sustainable development & public life, including the elimination of violence against women
- Implementation of the Forward-Looking Strategies, which recognise women's role as ecosystem managers, & the need for women to participate in the control of environmental degradation
- Increasing the proportion of women as decision-makers, planners, technical advisers, managers & extension workers in environment & development programs
- Assessing the impact of development & environment policies & programs on women
- Ensuring that women participate in & benefit from environment & development policies & programs
- Revising educational materials to ensure that women's knowledge and roles in environment & development are appreciated
- Consultation with women to develop & promote environmentally sound technologies
- Research on women's knowledge & experience in managing natural resources
- Actively promoting & ensuring women's full participation in all aspects of forest management, conservation & sustainable development
- Recognising the vital role that women play in the conservation & sustainable use of biological diversity

*** AGENDA 21 is a program of action for Governments, UN agencies, & NGOs to take from now to the 21st Century, to promote sustainable & environmentally sound development. AGENDA 21 was adopted at the UN Conference on Environment & Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 1992. One of its 40 chapters is devoted to Global Action for Women towards Sustainable & Equitable Development.**

Prepared by Juliet Hunt for "Beneath Paradise: Documentation by Women in Pacific NGOs" July 1994
Graphics by Anna Luces & Rose Marua from "Teim Bipo" Sogeri National High School, PNG, 1988

UNITED NATIONS EFFORTS TO RAISE THE STATUS OF WOMEN: THE LONG MARCH

1946: Commission on the Status of Women formed to monitor women's situation & promote women's rights.

1952: Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the first global mandate to grant women equal political rights under the law - the right to vote & hold office.

1957 & 1962: Conventions on the equal rights of married women.

1975: International Women's Year & 1st World Conference on Women in Mexico. Agencies asked to collect thorough statistics on women for the first time. **1976-1985 proclaimed as the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development & Peace.**

1979: Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which became an international treaty in 1981.

1980: 2nd World Conference on Women, Copenhagen

1985: Nairobi 3rd World Conference reviews progress during the decade & adopts the **Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (FLS).**

1993: Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights at UN World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, makes women's human rights a priority.

1993: Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

1995: 4th UN World Conference on Women & NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95

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Graphic by Anne Lucas from "Tain Bipo" Sogeri National High School, Papua New Guinea, 1988

Women's Employment & Economic Rights

Balance

FWRM

Newsletter of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement

Balancing the Scales — *November - December 1997 Issue*

BUILDING A CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN FIJI:FROM VISION TO REALITY

Imagine if girls and women in Fiji were no longer allowed to work outside the home, earn income, access basic health care and hospital services. Imagine if they were banned from access to formal education. Imagine a world where there is no such thing as fundamental human rights for women and girl children, and where gender-apartheid is the living reality of women's experience. Impossible?

Well, spare a thought for the plight of our sisters in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule where being female simply means being invisible.

Here in Fiji, women are subjected to the same restrictions, to a certain degree. Current health and educational facilities and staffing work against women wanting to access such services.These limitations are eminent in rural areas where majority of the medical officers are male. Such social attitudes are reflections of the way our patriarchal society views and treats women. Respecting the basic human rights of women means providing special facilities for women and girls in the areas of education and health to name a few.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement acknowledges and supports attempts by the international communities in particular the United Nations for the different conventions, which recognizes that "the human rights of women and of the girl-child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights". In particular the *50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights* on December 10th 1998 and the *UN Decade of Human Rights Education* (1995-2004) is an opportunity for women's groups to work together to make women's human rights central to the celebration in order to highlight the achievements and progress made over the past 50 years. At the same time, demand an end to the many violations that still occur.

Ema (left) FWRM's Legal Rights Training Officer, Elizabeth Mermer of Vanuatu and Asesela Naisara of Fiji Catholic Women's League. Ema writes about women's rights as human rights.

The majority of women are inadvertantly prevented from participating in decision making because of the imbalances within the home dynamics - the unequal sharing of domestic reponsibilities. In many societies, women are relegated to child-caring role which means that they do a double shift if they are also engaged in paid work – leaving them little, if any time, for themselve, let alone outside participation. Women are restricted from actively pursuing leadership roles in the community. Non-recognition of women's unpaid work means there is no financial returns for the work they do in the home. These are examples of the unequal playing field that women are up against in attempting to participate in