1999 the 'Year of the Possible' for Fiji Women in the race for Parliament.

4. Two major events

4.1 International Women's Day 8 March, 1999

4.2 Fundraising Dinner, 19 March, 1999

Both events were successful in that all women who had been confirmed attended including the three from the Western Division. All the parties proposing women had bought tables. The happy atmosphere is a good indication for the Caucus in that although we may differ and be foes in the political arena, our desire to engender without rancor is a key element in binding & strengthening the group.

5. Change in attitude to women in politics:

Most certainly and particularly with the political education programmes carried out by Fiji WIP. Definitely, women are supporting women and we do have an increased number of gender-sensitised men.

6. Future of the Women's Caucus

I believe it will go from strength to strength. Already we have plans for a Post-Election Seminar scheduled for June 1999 to look at lessons from this Election.

The Caucus aims to run workshops for those who get into Parliament to improve their performance, education awareness and training will be stepped up to target the Municipal Elections expected in the year 2000 and the groundwork to prepare women for the next elections and have a Women's party for the year 2004 will begin because the goal is to have a woman Prime Minister in 2004.

7. My position as Project Officer with the NCW's Fiji WIP Project

I am not resigning unless the NCW Executive asks me to.

I don't see any conflict in my situation. I have been a volunteer (without salary – my contribution to the project) for 4 of the 5 years of the Project. Due to an internal change I took on the salary until a replacement was found. I reverted to being a volunteer in Novemebr 1998 and had requested that I complete the Project whose life officially ends in June 1999.

Since the Project was my initiative and I had been the person in charge since 1994, I want to be responsible for the Termination Report and its Financial Acquittal.

(The essence of this is whether the member is becoming a-political makes the organisation political!)

8. View of FTU on the Rights of Women.

Very progressive, that's why I joined the best party.

Women are mainstreamed and very much part of the management executive decision-making.

~ Manjuwati Verma ~

Name: Manjuwati Verma
Academic Background: MSc (Econs) UK, Dip in Social Work, (USP)
Work Experience: 27 Years Social Work – Dept. of Social Welfare
Political Party: NFP (National Federation Party)
Constituency: Nadi Open

2. What prompted you to go into politics and run for this election?

Human beings are the centre of concern for sustainable development and therefore it is vitality important that those who are disadvantaged and displaced by social and economic change be granted particular assistance not only through handouts but also through the machinery of empowerment. I believe that the poor and the disadvantaged need to be empowered through proper assistance and policies. Improvement in the quality of life of every human being is only possible through balanced and just policies.

To enhance sustainable development in this nation people centred policies are vital. It is in regard I could have the greatest impact policy making. Hence it is vital that I am part of the decision-making forum through which quality of life of every human being in this nation can be improved.

3. *In your constituent, what are the most pressing issues that need to be addresses?*

AIDA, umenployment, poverty, squatter settlement.

In your capacity as a political candidate, are these issues represenatative of the public?

Yes.

4. *Do you think the public is informed enough about women's issues?*

No, they are not.

Of the ignored areas (of which women make up the majority whether it be political, social, economical and private sectors), how do you propose to aaaress the balances in your campaign?

The fact that 50% of the population of this nation is made up of women it is important for the public to realise the vast contribution women make in nation building through their reproductive and productive roles. However their social and economic status in many instances remain inferior to men. For example only 1% of the properties and businesses are owned by women.

Women have been granted equal status in our Constitution. Moreover Fiji has ratified CEDAW and had adopted the Plan of Action based on the Beijine conference commitment. These are indications that the government recognises the importance of women in National Development.

3. *In terms of political support, how supportive are your networks (ie. Political party, associates, public, constituency, family and so forth)?*

Very supportive. My party (NFP) members and supporters are very supportive. I am blessed to be associated with a party that has overwhelming support, integrity and dignity.

4. *If elected into parliament, how do you hope to assist the public?*

- To ensure Social/ Environmental impact assessment be an integral part of all developmental projects to minimize the strains induced on the marginalised groups of people.
- policies be gender sensitive.

Social reforms to address the plight of the poor, disadvantaged and the soxially abused citizens of this nation.

~ FWRM at Work ~

~ Issues Collective Meeting ~

Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) Collective members hosted Emele Duituturaga (the Director of Pacific Women's Resource Bureau (PWRB) with South Pacific Commission) at the first Issues Collective meeting for 1999. Emele gave an enlightening talk on the workings of South Pacific Commission's Programs for 1999 and beyond, specifically focusing on the role of the PWRB.

PWRB's focus is on the networking of women in the Pacific. Emele stressed that the notion of Women's Rights in the Pacific is still fairly new. As such, their role is to ensure that Governments of the Pacific implement mechanisms for women's advancement as requested by the Beijing Platform for Action. She stated that currently the economic reforms being implemented by many governments are putting women on hold. PWRB works with countries in the Pacific to encourage the ratification of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) into domestic law. At the moment there are only four countries in the Pacific, Fiji, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, that have ratified CEDAW. So while CEDAW has been ratified in some countries, PWRB believes that the process needs to be accelerated, so that mechanisms aimed at helping women become implemented at a faster pace.

PWRB will also be undertaking a research project in the South Pacific focusing on violence against women. Fiji is one of seven countries that have been selected to take part in the project. The Solomon Islands has been chosen as the pilot site for the study group, and to represent the connection between macroeconomics and reality. The methodology most likely to be used will be one-on-one interviews and focus groups. A major area of concern that Emele touched on is the need to strengthen the skills of their research participants. PWRB will be looking at ways to enhance the technical and managerial skills of individuals participating in the research project.

In general, the South Pacific Commission has three main areas of work. The first is to expand the skill base of Pacific Countries through implementing managerial and technical programmes. The second is to strengthen regional cooperation by facilitating discussions between governments and by recommending NGOs to potential donors. The third area of concern is engendering the South Pacific Commission.

Overall, Emele's speech gave a good overview of what PWRB is doing in the South Pacific.

~ Laisa Laveti - New PLA to the Fiji Islands ~

Date appointed to position?
January 4th, 1999. Started work on 11th of January.
Previous occupation skills background?
BA (USP) 1985
LLB (Otago) 1991
Began work as a prosecutor in 1992 and was transferred to start up at the Department of Public Prosecution office in Labasa - this was a great opportunity because it gave me a wider scope and I appreciated the experience of working amongst rural dwellers. Having been born and bred in Suva, the experience was eye-opening and has helped me in my current position since quite a number of my clientele are rural dwellers living below the poverty line.

The DPP's office deals specifically with criminal law and prosecutors are based solely on police investigations. In contrast, family law is a branch of civil proceedings and usually the court proceedings are undertaken to try and reach an amicable settlement between parties in a relationship. More often than not, children are the third parties in a relationship and the court acts to protect and saeguard the welfare and interestsof children. As such, the move for me from criminal to civil law and specifically family law is a major one. One of the advantages that I feel I have is that prosecutions had exposed me to court appearances and in my current job, this is a daily requirement.

How did your appointment come about? The position was advertised and I was offered the job.

As the new Public Legal Advisor (PLA) what do you hope to achieve?
First of all I am hoping to improve what is a rather inefficient system. There is a lot of negotiation involved in my work, and we have to find the best result for all involved. Children are often the victims in these cases and we have to obtain the best results for them even if it is not want the parents hoped for. For example, if a mother wants to retain custody of her children and the court deems that this is not the best optionthen we consider what is in the best interest of the children and deal with the custody issue accordingly. At the end of the day, I hope to achieve a satisfactory result for my clientele.

Do you feel that your appointment is a breakthrough for women in the legal sector?
I don't feel that it is a breakthrough as such as before my appointment there were other women employed in the same position. When I started my career in law, there were not a lot of women in the profession. However, there were some who became my role models and have served in important public and private sectorpositions.

What would you advise young women, and indeed, all young people, who are considering a similar career path?
I would advise them to work hard, very hard!
Respect is something that is earned, not given. Some young lawyers think that they deserve respect because they have letters after their names but they should realise that unless they work hard, they will not get that respect. Respect is very important. If you don't give respect, you won't get it.

issues and rising crime were amongst the other concerns. I recognise that my constituency is quite large and the concerns of some may not be representative of the whole, hence, I have a toll free number which the public can access and voice their issues in this way.

Q.4: *Do you think the public is informed enough about women's issues? Of the ignored areas (of which women make up the majority whether it be political, social, economic and private spheres), how do you propose to address the imbalances in your campaign?*
During the past month I have been portrayed in the media as a "women's activist" and as a "supporter of women's issues". This exposure is constructive to my campaign because the fact is that women make up the majority of voters in my constituency! The public is not informed enough about the issues that concern women, and I have tried and will continue to increase the awareness of women's needs.

Q.5: *In terms of political support, how supportive are your networks (i.e. political party, associates, public, constituents, family and so forth)?*
My political party (UGP) is the platform that I stand on, my family is my foundation and the public have provided me with ongoing support. In any campaign, your network is the secret to success, along with faith in God and plenty of prayers!

Q.6: *If elected into Parliament, how do you hope to assist the public?*
Opportunity for people: Employment, education and training.
Focus on women's issues, reducing the crime rate and dual citizenship.
Accountability. As your representative, I shall remain accountable to all my constituents.

~ Adi Kuini Vuikaba Speed ~

Name: Adi Kuini Vuikara Speed
Academic Background: BA (USP)
Graduate Diploma – International Relations (ANU)
Work Experience: Public Service – 20 years
Political Party: Fijian Association Party
Constituency: Serva/ Navosa

First woman to be elected as leader of a political party in Fiji

Q.2: What prompted you to go into politics and run in this election?
I've been in politics since 1986 with my husband's involvement. I am running in this election as the leader of the Fijian Association.

Q.3:In your constituency, what are the most pressing issues that need to be addressed? In your capacity as a political candidate, are these issues representative of the public?
Lack of adequate roads, and infrastructure. Poor standard of local schools and health services. Underdevelopment of agricultural sector. Need for more income generating projects. These issues are frequently raised with me in my capacity as Tui Noikoro, Navosa.

***Q.4: Do you think the public is informed enough about women's issues? Of the ignored areas (of which women make up the majority** whether it be political, social, economic and private spheres), how do you propose to address the imbalances in your campaign?*
No. The best way to address the imbalance is to elect articulate, well educated women into Parliament.

Q.5: *In terms of political support, how supportive are your networks (i.e. political party, associates, public, constituents, family and so forth)?*
Very strong support – from within the Party, also traditional support in Navosa.
Family is of great assistance.

Q.6: *If elected into Parliament, how do you hope to assist the public?*
If elected I will serve all communities to the best of my ability. I will regularly visit my electorate to keep in touch (**remainder of fax transmission illegible - we did try to contact Adi Kuini for the rest of the transcript but were unable to do so.)

~ Lili King ~

1. *Functions of Fiji Women's Caucus*

To assist all women candidates with fundraising for their election campaign.
To assist with advocacy and campaign skills development.
To provide technical support on substantive issues on campaign management.

The concept of a caucus with a multi-party membership is unique to Fiji. It was initiated by the Fiji WIP Project in 1997 and had reached the stage of an East and West Planning Committees of the Women's (political) Caucus. It gelled in December 1998 when a Memorandum of agreement was signed by 27 women representing seven major political parties including the governing and opposition parties.

3. *Affects of Caucus in encouraging women to run.*

The Caucus has certainly been an affective catalyst in getting women supported by parties to run for Parliament. At the Campaign Management workshop in December, 1998, there were 15 confirmed women candidates. To date there are 20 women candidates. However the ground work had been done over the past 5 yearsand the goal had been set in 1994 by Fiji WIP to make

~ FWRM Election Special ~

With the alternative voting system in place and more women then ever in the history of Fiji running for Parliament, this year's elections will be interesting. Kylie Anderson and Katalaini Duaibe managed to get feedback from some of the women candidates despite their busy schedules. Catching up with them was not an easy task. However, in the process, they got a taste of what it is like to be running for elections – in a word, HECTIC! The interview with candidate Lili King focuses on the Women in Politics group and the women's Caucus but our reporters managed to obtain some feedback from her about the election race and her party. (FWRM would like to point out that efforts were made to contact every woman candidate, regardless of political alliance, and that FWRM does not support any particular political party).

~ Dr. Mridula Sainath ~

1. *Name:* Dr. Mridula Sainath
   Academic Background: MBBS, DVD (Diploma in Dermatology and Venercology)
   Work Experience: 10years with the Civil Service and 10years with the private sector
   Political Party: National Federation Party
   Constituency: Nausori – Naitasiri Open

2. ***What prompted you to go into Politics and run for this election?***
   The overriding factor is the new constitution, which is balanced and allows multi-party representation in Government formation. Secondly, working with NGO's [Non-Governmental Organisation] & CBO's we can only lobby for change. We need to be in parliament to make the crucial change.

3. ***In your constituent, what are the most pressing issues that needs to be addressed? In your capacity as a political candidate, are these issues representative of the public?***
   Health Reforms
   Vocational Schools
   Road Infrastructure

4. ***Do you think the public is informed enough about women's issues? Of the ignored areas (of which women make up the majority whether it be political, social, economical and private spheres), how do you propose to address the imbalances in your campaigns?***

   No! Firstly, women themselves question the validity of women running for election. There are number of small women's groups but they concentrate on religious gatherings, there is little if any skills building or self-develop ment on Health, Micro-enter prises. I propose to do aware ness raising and follow up with action.

5. ***In terms of political support, how supportive are your networks i.e. Political party, associates, public, constituent, family and so forth?***
   A number of individuals are supporting. I need to travel at night, a lot, but [a] lot of people had made promises [such as] "go women go" – we are right behind you! But in reality those supporters are out of sight now.

6. ***If elected into Parliament, how do you perceive to assist the public?***
   Depending in what capacity I sit in Parliament.

~ Ofa Duncan ~

Name: Ofa Duncan
Academic Background: St. Joseph's School, Mossman High & Central
Work Experience: 12 years Business Management. Queensland Uni, Australia
Political Party: United General Party (UGP)
Constituency: Suva City Open

Q 2: *What prompted you to go into politics and run in this election?*
After several years as an active community member, I decided to constructively pursue what I believe is best for the people in our community. 17 years of customer service achievement has readied me for the task of serving others. This election is unique for Fiji in that people are taking an interest in who governs the state and most of us are ready to make a choice. The power is given back to the people in that they may vote and exercise their rights as a citizen.

Q 3: *In your constituency, what are the most pressing issues that need to be addressed? In your capacity as a political candidate, are these issues representative of the public?*
In the initial stages of my campaign, I felt that it was crucial to hear from the Suva City constituency about the issues that concern them. Therefore, I printed and distributed a questionnaire asking the public to make me aware of their needs. The response has been overwhelming with 80% of people regarding poverty and water supply restrictions as the most pressing issue. Unemployment, women's

~ Family Law & The Young Lawyers Association ~

Family Law Review

1998 was an interesting year for Family Law. It highlighted the different issues that face people of the community on a daily basis. Apart from the areas of Child Custody, Affiliation, Separation, Maintenance, Assault, Adoption, Divorce, Violence on the Family and Child Abuse, issues that clients come into FWRM with regards to are many. For example, clients came in seeking assistance in the area of matrimonial property disputes, wills, harassment, destitute allowance, visa and children's legal rights to name a few. In comparison to 1997, issues of these sorts were not many, whereas 1998 saw a boost in these areas.

Interesting to note was the high incidence of maintenance, divorce, affiliation and child custody. These complaints made up the highest category of the total nature of complaints. These were 32, 16, 16 and 12 complaints respectively. Females were the majority of clients. Of the 94 clients that visited the office in 1998, only 9 were males. These statistics are available from the FWRM Office

~

Fiji Young Lawyers Association Review

The Fiji Young Lawyers Association provides free legal advice to the public. In 1998, this was possible with the assistance of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement who unconditionally provides us the use of their premises.

The legal services provided by the Fiji Young Lawyers Association was on a weekly basis on Mondays 5pm – 7pm. This services included listening to the client, identifying the issues the clients were concerned with, advising clients on the causes of action available to them and of course directing them to the appropriate authorities.

According to the statistics collected by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, a total of 97 clients were attended to by the Fiji Young Lawyers Association. There was a range of complaints and issues raised by the clients, which included employment, debts owed by other parties, matrimonial, estate and property

The service provided by the Young Lawyers Association has been across a wide cross section of society. From the Statistics collected by FWRM, it is evident that the service provided by us has been fully utilised by the public and we hope that they continue to do so.

* Source: Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Statistics 1998.

~ Women's Economic & Employment Rights ~

A Review

Complaints about sexual harassment in the work place are on the rise while poor working conditions continue to plague women workers according to Women, Employment and Economic Rights (WEER) Project Officer, Raijeli Nicole. The trend not only raises questions about the status of women in the Fiji Island's work force but also reinforces the need for the draft legislation on Labor Law & Legislation reforms to be passed in parliament.

While the largest number of complaints brought to FWRM were in relation to unfair dismissal (29),[1] Raijeli believes this to be an inaccurate reflection of the concerns of women workers. According to Raijeli very few women visit the office to complain about inadequate working conditions (FWRM received 10 direct complaints in the stated period), such problems are only discovered when the worker is dismissed. Women are, however, more willing to complain about sexual harassment with FWRM statistics showing that this issue, combined with complaints about low wages, constitutes a significant proportion of enquires made to the office.

The number of complaints received by FWRM throughout 1997 reinforces not only the continued need of the Movement in the Fiji Islands, but also justifies FWRM's continued focus on the WEER program. Until all workers are aware of both their employment and economic rights in their place of work then the need for WEER and programs like it will continue.

1 All statistics referred to in this article are from the FWRM statistics relating to Women, Employment and Economic Rights Clients from Dec 1997 to Dec 1998.

This article was written based on FWRM statistics and discussion with the WEER Project Officer

~ Killings of Indigenous Activists ~

This article is a statement by The Indigenous Women's Network on the 8th of March, 1999. It was sent to FWRM by e-mail system and was received on the 10th of March, 1999.

On February 25 1999, the Indigenous Women's Network received word that Ingrid Washinawatok, the Co-Chair of the Indigenous Women's Network and Lahe'ana'e Gay and Terence Freitas, two other members of a humanitarian delegation to the U'wa people of Colombia were kidnapped. They were kidnapped by hooded men in civilian clothing, from the car they were travelling in. The three were part of a delegation, that had been invited by the U'wa people to join in prayer and solidarity. The purpose of the trip was to assist the U'WA peoples in establishing a cultural education system for their children and supports their continuation of their traditional way of life.

The morning of March 5, the U.S. Embassy contacted the families of Ingrid, Lahe'ena'e and Terence informing them their bodies had been found in Venezuela, about 30 yards from the borders of Colombia. They had been bound, blindfolded, and beaten, tortured and shot numerous times. It was through Ingrid's credit cards, which were still in her possession that they were able to trace their identity so rapidly.

The Indigenous Women's Network, joining with the Menominee Nation and other Indigenous Nations, is calling for a full prosecution of those responsible, and an investigation into the actions of the US State Department in reference to this incident. They believe that the US State Department destabilized negotiations and ultimately cost the three humanitarian workers their lives, in a possible attempt to gain financial support for US policies in Colombia. They attribute this assertion to the fact that exactly during the negotiations for the release of the three humanitarian workers, the US State Department released approximately $230 million in military support for the allegedly Anti-Drug War in Colombia. The Colombian Government then attacked and killed over 70 members of the Revolutionary Armed forces of Colombia or FARC in and orchestrated attack. The Indigenous Women's Network believes that these two overt acts may have destabilized any hopes for the release of their sisters and brothers.

The U'WA people live in the Arauca province in Northeastern Colombia. The U.S oil multi national corporations, Occidental Petroleum and Shell Oil had been carrying out oil exploration in the area known as the Samore block, the ancestral homelands of U'WA People. It is estimated that these oil field hold less than 1.5 billion barrels of oil, equating to less than a three month supply for the US. The U'WA people had threatened to commit mass suicide if these oil companies were successful in their exploitative endeavors.

US and Colombian government official were prompt to lie blame on the left wing guerrilla forces of FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). This situation is not one that blame can be established through words of Government officials without conducting an investigation. It is a much more complex crime.

The reality is that the indigenous community and the US State Department had both been involved in negotiations for the release of these three humanitarian workers. Apesanahkwat, Chairman of the Menominee Nation was active in attempting to negotiate the release of the hostages as soon he heard of their capture. "I sent a direct communiqué to the leadership of FARC two days after she was captured...The FARC leadership had sent a response by email that morning of the hostages' death," Apensanahkwat said. "They sent greetings to us as a relative indigenous group and said they were optimistic about seeking her release," he said. Yet as Apesnahkwat noted, the US government sent money for arms to the Colombian government four or five days after the kidnappings, knowing that those arms might be used against the rebels who may have held the kidnap victims, and that the kidnap victims might well be executed in retaliation. Seventy FARC rebels were executed.

The Indigenous Women's Network join with the menominee Nation in calling for congressional committee inquiry into the State Department actions in Colombia, with regards to this incident. They also request, on behalf of their sister Ingrid, that her death not be used to forward political ends of the US State Department, but that instead, it be recognized as a crime, a continuation of the Indian wars.

It is a crime against humanity. Against the mothers whose daughters and sons moccasins walk no longer on our Mother Earth. It is a crime against the sane, the Indigenous Peoples and all peaceful citizens of the world. This crime was committed by the insane, the greedy, the corrupt and those that will ignore the exploitative trade agreements which allow and accept these practices as business as usual, all in the name of protecting "National Interest", and subsequently the interests of the multinational corporations. Thus they believe that responsibility for these deaths rests with all these parties.

Ingrid and her companions gave the ultimate sacrifice - their lives - in the struggle for the attainment of human rights for Indigenous Peoples. State Department support will increase the millitarization of a country already fraught with one of the highest rates of violence in the western hemisphere, and a state continuing violence against Indigenous peoples.

It is against violence, and for the life of the people and the land, that Ingrid, and the others stood. Ingrid as well as her companions viewed the situation of the U'WA as a part of the global struggle for Indigenous self-determination as well as the preservation of the natural environment. The deaths of these three companeros must be understood as having a direct relationship to the many thousands

~ Interview with Adi Finau Tabakaucoro ~

When Adi Finau was appointed the Vice President of the Senate she was the first woman to be appointed to that position in the history of the Fiji Islands. Although the appointment was only for a short duration (1 March – 21 March) due to the dissolution of Parliament, Adi Finau hopes to be re-appointed to the position after the May elections.

Becoming involved in politics "out of my own interest" after completing her university studies at Victoria University in New Zealand (she majored in History and English), Adi Finau's political career has spanned some thirty years. In that time she has been involved at a number of levels, including being the Minister for Women, Culture and Social Welfare from 1987–1992.

Adi Finau says that her personal interest in politics stemmed from an interest in poverty alleviation. She was the President of YWCA for eight or ten years and was also the General Secretary of Soqosoqo Vakamarama (Indigenous Women's Society). Adi Finau believes that in the thirty years she has been in politics there have been a lot of improvements in the general social welfare of the Fiji Islands, particularly in the area of public health; "...people are more aware of cleanliness, of clean living. Clean water, that sort of thing. Public sanitation, waste disposal. I remember when I was growing up there were no such things in the villages, whereas now, just about every household in villages make sure they have at least a proper toilet, which wasn't there ten years ago. Although there are still a large number of households, a relatively large number of households that don't have those facilities."

When asked about the male domination of the political sphere she said, "you only can make these summations at the end of your term. When I got involved in politics...at that time, to me, gender was not an issue. I've always considered important performance and merit, in terms of getting anywhere. My activities and my involvement in politics have always been on that basis. Because for me I am one of the few people that came out of university and although I was working for Government, working for other organisations, I was at the same time very involved in party politics. And as I've said, that was out of my own interest. It had nothing to do with my being a woman, because I felt that I had the qualifications as an individual.

"On the face of it, it looks like an equal playing field. But when you scrutinise...of course it is unequal. Although women say that they want to compete equally...you can never rely on female spouses...because the likelihood that they are protecting their husband's position is far greater than one to other women. So in the past where women have been involved in political campaigning and that the role has been in providing support services...if you look at the women who do that...usually there is a husband who is standing. If women wish to access positions, get into positions, they have to get through that first barrier."

Adi Finau also commented on the reason women tend to stay 'behind the lines' in politics, working in the background, stating that many women prefer this option "...because it's easier. It's much more comfortable. You don't have to be sworn at. You don't have to prove anything. Get your husband to do all that, he gets all the flack and you have a happy time...spend all his income..."

One of the major responsibilities of the Senate is the passing or vetoing of bills, reforms and legislature. Finau believes that 1999 may be the year to see the Family Law reform and labor law legislation, declaring that the Family Law Reform "Shouldn't have any problems". Labor Law Legislation may be a different story, however, with Adi Finau saying that it would depend on its structure and acknowledging that the Government has been delaying it.

Adi Finau told us that she always writes her own speeches, declaring that "I don't think that in this day and age you can have members of Parliament go in and read their speeches that most of the time they haven't prepared themselves." She offered further advice to women who wish to follow a political career; "Be qualified...You must have the necessary qualifications. You must have the ability to present your case, to defend your case. You can't go into Parliament and waffle around because if you do you will not do justice to the people you represent..."

Thank-you to Amanda Waqa for providing FWRM with this snapshot of her baby Jessica.

~ Interview with Deputy PM Taufa Vakatale ~

"I AM NOT RETIRING FROM POLITICS, I AM RETIRING FROM BEING A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT"

In a mixed career, Deputy Prime Minister, Taufa Vakatale has been a teacher, a principal, a diplomat and a permanent secretary before being elected to Parliament in 1992. As Deputy Prime Minister for two years and as Minister of Education for almost seven years, Vakatale is looking forward to the end of this year's elections so she can follow her own interests for a while. Granting FWRM's Katalaini Duaibi and Kylie Anderson an interview, Vakatale commented on the loss of her seat, her time in Parliament and her experiences as a woman in such a male dominated field.

The Deputy Prime Minister is not bitter about her loss of power, believing that she is a "positive" person and that her inability to secure a seat in this election has happened for a reason. Attributing the seeming lack of support from her Party to miscommunication, Vakatale will use her time away from Parliament to pursue other activities. A self-described "grass roots activist" from way back (she has campaigned on women's rights and was once the World Vice President of the YWCA), Vakatale says she will donate more time to personal interests.

The resignation does not, however, signal the end of Vakatale's involvement in the political sphere. She says that she still believes in the "spirit of the coalition" and is willing to support any candidates the Coalition partners put forward. The Deputy Prime Minister is currently campaigning for the NFP candidate in one of the seats she intended to run for, a move that she believes will be a good demonstration of solidarity. She will also campaign for her replacement in the Provincial constituency.

When asked about the details about her rather unceremonious unseating, Vakatale said that she doesn't believe it was an issue of gender and that she has always been treated as "an equal". She said, "I've never really felt discriminated against because I'm a woman, and even now that I've fallen through, I don't see that as

a gender issue. I'm sorry, people are suggesting to me, that it might be because I'm a woman. I think it's not really a man or a woman. The only gender thing that I can probably bring into this is that I have a very feminine principle of leadership. I care more for those I work with and for. I can also take anything that comes. I never had difficulty being the only woman... They couldn't avoid picking me as Minister for Education because I was the best person to be made Minister for Education. I think I have earned it not because I am a woman but because I am the best person."

The Deputy Prime Minister also had some advice for new women candidates; "I think that they are all very capable women. I am delighted that there are so many although I think that we could have had more. My only regret is that they are all going into open seats, except one I think, who is going into communal... and she has had to struggle to get into communal. Open seats are risky seats. But at the same time, they (open seats) show what women are like because women are more encompassing in their outlook. More inclusive. They include other races and groups whereas men fight for their own community, I suppose, so it says quite a lot for the women. I would like to say to them that while it's important to go out and campaign on issues, and while I said that I was never discriminated (against) (they should) never forget that we (women) are fifty percent of the population. We haven't really had our fair share yet. They must never forget any issues that come up in Parliament related to women, they are the only ones who can speak with first hand knowledge and they mustn't forget that".

She also asked that the new candidates, if elected, work closely with the Ministry for Women and Culture; "Even though they may be labeled as masculine in their approach to things, I think that they have got to remember not to leave things to the Ministry for Women, that they've got to help and support the Ministry for Women in getting more women into decision making positions". Vakatale said that she hoped all of the women candidates were elected.

Never having imagined that she would attain such a high point in her career, the Deputy Prime Minister says that she will not miss being in Parliament, although the spotlight she has lived in for so many years may be a different thing. Declaring that she has "had a good run", Taufa Vakatale says she has no regrets from her time in the position. She is currently planning to run in the next elections.

of deaths of those who seek human justice not only in Colombia but also throughout Latin America and other parts of the world.

Those who work for social justice must ensure that further repercussions do not fall on the U'WA community simply because they sought and received international solidarity and support from groups like Project Underground, the Indigenous Women's Network and the Pacific Cultural Conservancy International. The Indigenous Women's Network and others will do their utmost to see that justice is done and that they will continue Ingrid's fight in her support of the U'WA peoples and all those who work for social justice.

The history of violent repression in Latin America against Indigenous Peoples would lead them to believe that right wing governments, and their death squads supporting the interests of resources companies and those wanting to interrupt the peace process are more likely to have been involved in the deaths of these three companeros. The Indigenous Women's Network demand that financial support to the Colombian military be withdrawn until the true facts surrounding the deaths are revealed.

As Women, we are the Mothers of our nations. We share the responsibility of being life-givers, nurturers and sustainers of life as Mother Earth is a life giver. The Indigenous Women's Network is committed to nurturing their children and planting seeds of truth for generations to come. Not wanting to repeat past mistakes, they will continue to work to eliminate the oppression of colonization, and to end the Indian wars.

The Indigenous Women's Network demand that the parties responsible for the abduction and execution of Ingrid Washinawatok, Terence Freitas, and Lahe'ena'e Gay, be brought to justice, they must make themselves known and not hide behind the corrupt plunders of those that rape our Mother Earth of her blood and the parties that protect them.

"The essence of feminism is women getting power over themselves. Not over men, over themselves - and society benefitting from that and becoming more human."

~ Mary Robinson, President of Ireland

as quoted in: McHugh, S., *Minefields & Mini Skirts*, Double Day, Australia, 1993, p.267

~ National Youth Summit ~

Interview with Ashika Singh

FWRM's Ashika Singh attended the National Youth Summit (8-12 March). We managed to get a moment of her busy day to get her version of events:

What types of issues were discussed at the National Youth Summit?

Health issues in relation to youths; trying to adapt a draft of the National Youth Policy; drugs - substance abuse; teenage pregnancies; sports in relation to development; resource development.

Do you believe the Summit was relevant to the young people of Fiji?

There was only one youth speaker - the other presenters were older. About 70% of the discussion was relevant. In my opinion more of the presenters should have been youth. The group discussions were relevant. There were 150 participants from all over the Fiji Islands.

What were the outcomes of the Summit?

To pass a National Youth Policy and to come up with recommendations for it. Also to help mark 'National Youth Day'.

What do you believe you gained from attending the Summit?

As a youth I gained a lot. It was good. Some issues were not personal and made me aware of some issues that affect youth in general. As a youth the theme for this youth forum (*Youth Moving the Nation and Making a Difference*) really moved me to make a difference in a more positive manner.

The Hague

Impressions from the Hague

Gina Houng Lee

The ICPD + 5 Hague Forum posed many challenges to NGO's participating. As a women's human right's legislative and advocacy NGO from the Pacific I was faced with many challenges. However I saw three key challenges in my participation at the ICPD Forum.

One was to ensure that Pacific issues were not forgotten in the global arena, secondly the need to strongly link the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with Reproductive Health Rights and finally the continued challenge to monitor our own individual government's progress in implementing the Cairo priniciples.

When you consider the Pacific population (which totals approximately 7 million) compared to populations the size of China's, the Pacific seems so small. But as Cairo had emphasised the issues of population and development are not about numbers but about people and their lives. From the Pacific, the cultures and problems are diverse and unique. We have a population range of countries such as Niue whose population total approximately 3000 and huge countries such as Papua New Guinea with a population of 3.9million. Yet all countries face critical issues such as rising teenage pregnancies, the increase in STDS/HIV/AIDS and the low status of women in the communities.

While there has been strong commitments from PIC countries in addressing the issue of empowerment of women, Pacific women have a low political, cultural, social and economic status in most communities, violence against women continues to be a critical issue and women's access to income is limited and they make up a significant portion of the poor. The international commitment made by government's need to translate down into practical working actions that will address these concerns. At the main plenary and at a panel discussion on the Pacific I emphasised the importance of Pacific Island Countries to ratify CEDAW and to ensure that CEDAW was practically implemented. I believe CEDAW is an effective tool in addressing the empowerment of women as it is a powerful tool to pressure Ministers and policy makers.

I felt that monitoring and evaluation was critical to the process and we needed to continue to pressure Pacific Government's of the international commitments made at Cairo. The participation of NGO's (women's ngos) was crucial in this regard as they needed to return to their home countries and pressure governments.

Overall I was motivated and inspired by speakers attending the Forum and also at the workshops. One such advocate was Frances Kissling from Catholics for A Free Choice. She organised a workshop and invited speakers from 5 major religions to discuss and debate women's theology. This was an interesting workshop and, as religion and custom is an important issue in the Pacific, I was inspired by brave religious women who challenged their own faiths in addressing women's equality.

As we head towards the Millenium, we must continue to ensure that the empowerment of women continue to remain central in furthering the principles of Cairo.

****A copy of this report was also supplied to WIDE**

~ International Women's Day ~

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement celebrated International Women's Day with a number of activities throughout the month of March. This involved participating in a march alongside NGOs, a donation to the Fiji Women's Caucus and taking WEER to the west of Fiji.

The 'Reclaim the Night' march was held in Suva on Saturday the 6th of March. Organised by the NGO Coalition on Human Rights, the event attracted a crowd of about 300 people. Staff of FWRM, members of the collective and their supporters joined in a march that was seen as historical in the history of women's organisations in Fiji. This year's theme was 'A World Free from Violence Against Women'. The demonstrators held candles and placards and marched through the city reclaiming the night for safer streets. The march, which began from the Walu-Bay end of Rodwell Road ended at Suva's Government Buildings with songs and speeches.

Furthermore, FWRM donated $1000 to the Fiji Women's Caucus, to assist women candidates in their political campaigns for the upcoming May elections. The Fiji Women's Caucus is made up of women who have agreed to collectively advance the status of women. In making the donation, Co-ordinator Gina Houng Lee said, "we hope this money will be like yeast and continue growing, we want to kick start their campaign funds so that they are well prepared for their campaigns". The candidates had earlier spoken on the need for more women candidates in Parliament. Organised by the Fiji Council of Women, the 'Women Candidates Speak Out' was an exciting start to what the coming elections has in store for the people of Fiji.

In keeping with the program, FWRM decide to take WEER to the West. WEER Project Officer, Raijieli Nicole will be holding a talk with Garment Workers in Nadi on the 21 of March about the proposed Labour Legislative changes. The trip is also and awareness raising trip with regards to WEER. Raijeli will be holding a Sexual Harassment training with Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji as part of the taking 'WEER to the West'.

~ Ministry of Women & Culture ~

Institutional Strengthening

The Ministry of Women and Culture is implementing a Project that will strengthen the Ministry's capacity as a consultant on public policy issues regarding women and the coordination of culture and arts.

Implemented in 1998, the Institutional Strengthening Project will address the present structure and system of the Ministry and look at avenues at which these could be strengthened. It will also look at strengthening ties with other sectors and Non-Governmental Organisations, as well as a clear and recognised role in the coordination of culture and arts. Ministry of Women and Culture's Permanent Secretary, Nemani Buresova, has highlighted the project as commencing at an opportune time when the Hon. Prime Minister has just launched the *Women's Plan of Action 1999 – 2008*. The *Women's Plan of Action 1999-2008* details the Government's commitment to work with civil societies, academic institutions and the private sector toward the full and active participation of women in society.

The institutional strengthening project will address strategies that will improve, develop and carry out to fruition the skills of management and staff of the Ministry, which will follow on and improve the Ministry's policy role. The Project will look at developing mechanisms to ensure the Ministry is more proactive in an initiator role in policy formation. To do so, it will ensure that processes and procedures in the coordination and review of policy advice that impacts women in society is strengthened.

Furthermore, the project will develop a mechanism that will ensure that the Ministry's views are adequately canvassed in the decision making of mainstream government. Apart from strengthening internal links with other government sectors, the project aims to improve links with Non-Governmental Organisations, so that there is an appreciation of each other's activities and roles.

Fiji Women's Rights Movement was consulted in the drawing up of the terms of reference of the Institutional Strengthening Project. Coordinator, Gina Houng Lee said that this project was more consultative and a good opportunity to have a say in the direction of the Ministry of Women and Culture.

A copy of the *Women's Plan of Action 1999-2008* is available from the Ministry for Women & Culture.

~ Editorial ~

A warm welcome to you all.

We apologise for the tardiness of this issue but I can assure you that you will enjoy the scintillating interviews with women who are vying for seats in the *Vale Levu* (Parliament) at Veiuto.

As we are all beginning to get "election fever", it is therefore apt that this first issue of *Balance* for 1999 takes a look at some of the women who will be standing in the next election. In fact it will be a very interesting election for female voters due to the largest number of female candidates ever fielded in any general election to date in Fiji. *Girls can do anything!*

FWRM is fortunate that two of its own collective members, Dr. Mridula Sainath and Ema Tagicakibau, are vying for seats in Parliament. We take this opportunity to wish all of the female candidates who are out in the community campaigning all the very best.

Keeping in mind our advocacy role, this issue also provides hard core legal information in relation to family law.

So from the energetic and creative *Balance* team of Kata and Kylie (our new research assistant) and the hardworking team at the FWRM office, we wish you all a very belated new year.

Stay Positive!

Gaylene

~ The Year Ahead ~

Since 1986 FWRM has been striving to 'make a difference' in the everyday lives of men and women, regardless of social standing, throughout the islands of Fiji. 1999 is promising to be an equally busy year as those past if the last three months are any indication. Already the year has been filled with conferences, meetings, arrivals and departures. From the 'Training of the Trainers' workshop to the National Youth Summit, the workshop Ema Tagicakibau and Zarina Begum attended in Bua, the welcoming of new members and Ema's departure for a career in politics, the office has barely had the chance to catch its breath - and there is still more to come!

As many of you will be aware, Fiji, along with most of the world, recently celebrated the last International Women's Day for this century. In Suva, FWRM joined in with the commemoration by participating in the 'Reclaim the Night' March and attending the joint Women's NGO Coalition on festivities at Sukuna Park. The two hour event at Sukuna Park provided people with the opportunity to meet with women politicians and candidates for the upcoming election. By all accounts it was worth attending. In Nadi related events are still on the agenda with Raijeli Nicole on her way there soon to address Garment Workers as part of FWRM's ongoing commitment to WEER.

While all of these occurrences are covered in more detail in this edition of ***Balance***, this article is a good opportunity to alert people to other events throughout the year. as well as WEER, FWRM is continuing its commitment to Family Law. Strong media campaigns are being planned to create awareness for both. The Asia Pacific forum for Women, Law and Development (APWLD) will be held early in June. Following this will be a meeting of the taskforce for the Review of Labor Law and Legislation. Late November the 16 Days of Action campaign will start again, ending on Human Rights Day (10th of December). Paralegal training will also begin at the end of the year as part of the Family Law and Literacy program. 1999 may also be the year that draft legislation regarding 'labor laws' and 'sexual offenses' are passed by Parliament.

FWRM is looking forward to the release of *Fishing for Justice* written by Atu Emberson-Bain (author of the 1995 publication, *Labouring Under the Law*[1]) as well as an additional research paper on Gender and Trade. There are also plans to produce a magazine regarding the 'Girl's Can Do Anything' campaign as part of the Expo in Suva, Labasa and Lautoka in July. Publications such as these represent a concrete example of the positive and continuous work of FWRM.

Of course, FWRM is well aware that a lot of its work could not be carried out with the ongoing assistance of the members and volunteers. This year promises to provide a lot of opportunity for people to become even more involved with the Movement. As such, if you are interested in assisting with any of the campaigns, if you have any ideas for a theme for Human Rights Day, or just want to become involved and are not sure how, please do not hesitate to contact the office. FWRM looks forward to seeing you soon!

**This article is based on discussions with FWRM staff members*

1 Emberson-Bain, A., (with Slatter, C.), *Labouring under the Law*, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Suva, Fiji, 1995.

~ Girls can do anything ~
Like represent Fiji at the Hague!

Teresia Teaiwa

Ziena Nitasha Jalil is the headgirl of Natubua High School in Lautoka. In 1998, Ziena entered an essay competition sponsored by UNFPA. Her winning essay got her a trip to the Hague, in the Netherlands, to attend the 1999 Youth Forum for fulfilling the commitment to the International Conference on Population and Development made five years earlier in Cairo.

Ziena feels that there is insufficient information for teenagers on sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is especially the case in Lautoka, where she lives. Ziena believes that teenagers need more realistic images in the media. Cultural taboos on sex education need to be overcome aswell, she says.

Ziena's faith as a Muslim is not an obstacle, she asserts: "There is no taboo for Muslims in terms of discussing sexual issues. And family planning is an individual choice". She is the youngest daughter in a family of two children.

Before coming to the Hague, Zeina's political experience was limited to highschool debates and oratory competitions. But once she was oriented at the Youth Forum, Ziena took the UN's culture of negotiation like a 'fish to water'. Ziena gained valuable experience participating in plenary sessions, working groups, and drafting documents at the Youth Forum.

Ziena joined the group on sexual health and rights, and made a presentation for the sub-group on gender. She was particularly excited by the third plenary sessions she attended, when the Youth Forum's final 33 recommendations were presented, and there was conflict over the recommendation on "information on abortion".

One of Ziena's criticisms of the process at the Youth Forum was when it came to finalising the votes, abstentations were not counted. "Abstentations are really important and should be counted in relation to oppositions."

Ziena noticed that a lot of the debates at the Youth Forum were about the precise wording to be used in documents and statements. Ziena made a special contribution at a plenary session by opposing the use of the phrase 'committed personnel' and recommending that the phrase 'trained personnel' be used instead. Ziena clarified, "Anyone can be committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights, but youth need people who are trained.

After the Youth Forum, which ran concurrently with an NGO Forum from 6-8 February, Ziena stayed on in the Hague to attend the official Government Hague Forum. At the opening of the forum, Ziena was chosen to sit in the front row.

Some of the highlights of Ziena's visit to the Hague included meeting Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of UNFPA; the First Ladies of El Salvador and Ghana; Ambassador Biegman, the Netherland's Ambassador to the UN; Wouter Meijers, the convenor of the NGO forum; and the Mayor of the Hague.

"I've learned a lot and my principal (at Natabua) said I can talk to the assembly. That will be the first time in my school that we talk about sex education in assembly," said Ziena.

The form 7 student says she wants to pursue further studies in the area of commercial law.

Photograph by Teresia Teaiwa

~Train the Trainers Evening~

The 'Training of Trainers' dinner and workshop evening hosted on the 3rd of February by the FWRM and RRRT was a great success with participants arriving from all around the Pacific region. Representative LRTOs from the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands (to name but a few) were there as were numerous representatives from RRRT. The two volunteers from Sydney, Vicki and Marianna, also attended and were presented with t-shirts as a token of thanks for their efforts in the office. Speeches were made by Gina and Trevor about the program while Zarina and Christine tended the bar. All in all it was a great evening that everyone enjoyed.

Thank-you! Thank-you! Thank-you! Thank-you!

On the 22nd of January 1999, Mohammed and Ben from Paperchase presented us with a new addition to our office – a Sharp photocopier!

Thank-you! Thank-you! Thank-you! Thank-you!

Goodbye~ Farewell~Moce~Kudha Hafiz~Al-Bidha~Goodbye~ Farewell~Moce~Kudha Hafiz~

FWRM staff members were sad to say goodbye to Ema Tagicakibau who had been our LRTO for the past two years. Below are some of the things remaining staff had to say to Ema:

"Ema was a source of support and stability for the staff... will miss her"

Raijeli

"I'll miss you and I liked working with you heaps. Wish you all the best in your future endeavours"

Ashika

"Great working with you. Your clients will really miss you... All the best in your political aspirations"

Gina

"It was a pleasure working with you and I wish you well for your future endeavours."

Zarina

~Goodbye~ Farewell~Moce~Kudha Hafiz~Ram Ram~Goodbye~ Farewell~Moce~Kudha Hafiz~

~What's Happening at FWRM ~

Visitors to the Office included:
Patrick from Jamaica
Carly from Chile
Epi Verebasanga
Adi Finau Tabakaucoro
Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development

Staff Movements
Raijeli attended the Asia Monitor Resource Center meeting in Hong Kong, 22-26 Feb
Ashika attended the National Youth Summit 8th - 12th March.
Zarina will be on leave until the 29th of March and will then commence three weeks of training.
Raijeli traveled to Sigatoka on the 30th of March to give a talk to a Rotary Club about proposed changes in the Employment Act

Subscription Rates:

Fiji - waged: FJD$10.00
- non -waged /student:FJD$5.00
- Organisation: FJD$25.00
South Pacific/Australia/NZ: USD$7.00
Other Countries: USD$10.00

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FWRM

Balance

Newsletter of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement

"Balancing the Scales" January - March 1999

More women candidates running for election than ever before in the history of the Fiji Parliament?

How's THAT for balancing the scales!

FWRM congratulates *all* women politicians ~ past & present

Asenaca Ravu
Bentley
Adi Litia Cakobau
Litia Cavu
Savitri Chauhan
Miriama Cama
Ofa Duncan
Seruwaia Hong Tiy
Lili King

Akanisi Koroitamana
Adi Koila Nailatikau
Salote Qalo
Lute Taoba Powell
Lavinia Padarath
Suruj Pal
Marieta Rigamoto
Mere Samisoni

Dr. Mridula Sainath
Adi Kuini Vuikaba Speed
Ema Golea Tagicakibau
Manjuwati Verma

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