FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
FWRM
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
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Women at work: Fiji's Employment Relations Bill

The Employment Relations Bill will be tabled for its second reading in April 2006. The Bill looks at the reform of existing labour laws as well as the creation of new ones. These include prohibiting and penalizing offenders of sexual harassment in the work place.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been involved in employment relations, in particular its impact on women workers, since 1995. This followed the publication of an FWRM paper *Labouring under the Law*, by Senator Atu Emberson-Bain and Claire Slatter, which analysed the status of women under employment legislation in Fiji. It identified succinctly the many areas where women were disadvantaged by the laws. This discrimination was two fold. In several areas women workers were entirely excluded from the protections of employment law. In other areas, the specific needs of women workers were not accounted for.

Major problems identified in the research were the lack of legal protection for domestic workers in Fiji, the absence of adequate maternity leave provisions, the absence of effective enforcement provisions where women workers were covered by the law, the absence of laws prohibiting sexual harassment and discrimination against women and the absence of laws guaranteeing equal pay for work of equal value.

FWRM believes that the ERB as its stands is a significant advance for women workers in Fiji. However there are amendments which need to be made to ensure these improvements operate as intended. For example, it is very important that there be mechanisms for effectively enforcing the law in all provisions. Otherwise the provisions are meaningless.

Barriers to women's equal rights in employment such as discrimination and harassment must be able to be effectively challenged. Women's employment equality also depends upon equal pay for work of equal value.

Also, the socially vital role that women play as mothers as well as workers must be recognized. The burden on women workers who are mothers is not only unfair and unjust but creates significant stress on the family, the fundamental unit of society. A women worker should not be penalized and have her economic status severely reduced because she cannot afford not to work and there is no paid maternity leave.

All recommended changes are in accordance with International Labor Organisation standards and the United Nations Treaty provisions and statements in relation to women. Particular reference is made to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. ■

Women's Work *by Vinita Jha (2002) Ethnic Arts Foundation*

From the Director's Desk

Greetings from Waimanu Road and welcome to the first issue of Balance for 2006!

A lot has happened at FWRM since you last heard from us. We've had some major staff movement over the past five months. Seema Naidu, experienced Human Rights Training Officer, is moving on to regional work with the Regional Rights Resource Team. We'll miss you Seema, but I'm sure that you will continue to feed your experience and knowledge into the development of the Movement.

We've also brought in three new faces to fill some long-standing vacancies. Naeemah, Unaisi and Tara have fitted in well with the rest of the FWRM team, and we have been enjoying have a full office again for the first time in a long while.

Balance is filled with a selection of the advocacy work we have done over the past six months, but take a peek at the back page to see what's coming up for the Movement. Something we're all looking forward to is the Picture This! launch on International Women's Day, March 8th. Picture This! is the first of what we hope will be an annual project, where young women use disposable cameras to explore the International women's Day theme.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and we'll see you at International Women's Day 2006.

In solidarity,
Virisila Buadromo

STAFF MOVEMENT

It's not really goodbye Seema

Seema Naidu, our Human Rights Training Officer, is moving on after more than three years at the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. She joins the Regional Rights Resource Team from February, as a Community Development Trainer. The move will broaden the scope of her training work, as Seema will be providing technical support to RRRT's regional partners in countries like Kiribati, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

"The main thing I'm going to miss at FWRM is the contact I have with the community and doing hard-core advocacy work on issues which are deemed political, like the RTU Bill," Seema said on her last day at FWRM.

But, Seema's skills and knowledge are not completely lost to the Movement. With RRRT being one of FWRM's major partners, we'll still get to see a lot of one of our favourite feminists. ■

FWRM welcomes new faces

All those empty desks have finally been filled at the Fiji Women's Rights Movement! Programme Manager, Naeemah Khan, and Human RightsTraining Officer, Unaisi Valenitabua joined in October, while Information and Research Officer, Tara Chetty, came on board in November. Naeemah has extensive independent research experience and has also worked in the area of violence against women, at the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

Unaisi has a background in law, and is enjoying the new challenges of feminist analysis and human rights training. A former FWRM board member, Tara comes with a media background and a handy gender lens.

(L-R) Tara Chetty, Unaisi Valenitabua and Naeemah Khan

All three enjoy the FWRM workspace, especially the meeting of minds over a cup of tea and a muffin during the regular in-house Gender Forums.

"This is an excellent training ground for me, as it has helped build my capacity and broadened my horizons," said Unaisi. ■

Our rights are not optional !

Women's advocates from around the globe met in Malaysia late last year for a consultation on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (OP-CEDAW). The consultation, held from the 27th to the 30th August in Kuala Lumpur, was organized by International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW).

Pacific women were represented by Fiji Women's Rights Movement's Seema Naidu, Gina Houng Lee from the Regional Rights Resource Team, Andie Lynch of Vanuatu's Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association, 'Ofa Guttenbeil as the United Nations Volunteer with the Tonga Catholic Women's League, and Rebecca Wulf from the Office of the Attorney General in Samoa.

CEDAW-OP is a separate treaty that allows women who have been denied access to justice at the national level to have their claims reviewed at the international level. This treaty enables the International Committee of Independent Experts that monitors compliance with CEDAW, to review the individual complaints and to conduct inquiries into grave or systematic violations of human rights. This treaty therefore creates a space for women to seek remedies and justice at the international level when they themselves have experienced discrimination.

Judges during the *Asia South Pacific Regional Judicial Colloquium for senior judges on the domestic application of International Human Rights Norms relevant to women's human rights* supported the adoption of an optional complaints mechanism for the women's convention. They recognized that women in the Pacific had limited access to the judicial process to enforce their rights.

'Not many know about the CEDAW-OP and its importance'

This global consultation opened space for dialogue and discussion on the CEDAW-OP. Success stories were shared by representatives from Nigeria and Yemen where NGOs played a pivotal role by lobbying the executive, judiciary and legislature for ratification.

Four CEDAW Committee members, Salma Khan (Bangladesh), Pramila Pattern (Mauritius), Maria Regina Tavares da Silva (Portugal) and Shanti Dariam (Malaysia), also shared experiences on the application of CEDAW-OP around the world.

Following the consultation in Malaysia, the Pacific participants have formed a Pacific NGO CEDAW Network that createa space for information sharing on CEDAW and CEDAW-OP. Country representatives are currently working with their respective women's machineries. In Vanuatu, the newly-formed ACT (Action for CEDAW Today) wrote to the Department of Women's Affairs on September 19th last year, calling for the ratification of the Optional Protocol. In Fiji, FWRM and RRRT, in collaboration with UNIFEM, are preparing a joint CEDAW-OP session for the Ministry for Women. A similar forum will be organised for NGOs early this year.

Not many know about the CEDAW-OP and its importance. FWRM, as part of its training programme, will be creating greater awareness on the Protocol so women in Fiji can themselves say "YES to CEDAW-OP". ■ ***Seema Naidu***

Participants at the CEDAW-OP consultation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in August 2005

Dawn

Si el papa fue un mujer (if the Pope were a woman)…. was part of the feminist chant I found myself humming as my plane touched down in Nadi. Smiling to myself I found it hard to believe how fast the past three weeks had flown, how much I had learned and what solid friendships I had developed with a diverse group of amazing women.

In early November, 26 of us from 19 countries of the economic South had descended on Montevideo, Uruguay for the second feminist advocacy training programme hosted by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN).

The DAWN Training Institute (DTI) was centred around DAWN's four theme areas of the Political Economy of Globalisation (PEG), Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Political Ecology and Sustainability (PEAS), and Political Restructuring and Social Transformation (PRST). We knew how fortunate we were to be able to draw on DAWN's considerable experience in using feminist analysis to effectively engage at UN Conferences and their preparatory processes.

Dr Claire Slatter (L) and Professor Gita Sen talk DTI at Hosteria del Lago

Clearly, a deeper understanding of the inter-linkages between issues, particularly in light of the current global political and economic context, was needed in order to sharpen our own critical analysis and advocacy skills.

Programme instructors stated from the beginning that what they were aiming to provide was a framework within which to place our experiences, as three weeks did not allow the space to go in depth into any of the themes.

A collective sigh of relief was audible at that point as each of the themes would have required at least a semester of coursework to do it justice.

Nevertheless, PEG, SRHR, PEAS and PRST, along with countless other acronyms, soon became as familiar to us as our own names.

This unique training experience was probably unrivalled for its breadth of experience shared across the boundaries of region, time and subject: Professor Gita Sen of India with her famous historical perspectives; Sonia Correa of Brazil with her PowerPoint works of art and her interjections on every possible topic; street warrior Gigi Francisco of the Philippines and her vast storehouse of knowledge on trade; Dr Yvonne Underhill-Sem of New

# of a new feminist

Zealand and Anita Nayar of India on sustainable livelihoods; Dr Viviene Taylor of South Africa on PRST; Zo Randriamaro of Madagascar; Cecilia Ng of Malaysia; Françoise Girard of Canada; Bene Madunagu of Nigeria; Afua Hesse of Ghana; graduate of the 2003 training institute Alejandra Scampini of Uruguay; Ximena Machicao of the Popular Education Network of Women from Latin America and the Caribbean (REPEM) and Celita Eccher, DAWN Latin America Regional Coordinator, with her charming English.

Topics discussed included trade liberalisation, development, poverty, aid, debt, power, the Bretton Woods institutions, the United Nations, the Millennium Development Goals, gender inequality, the Beijing Platform of Action, patriarchy, social contracts, sovereignty, sexuality, the Brazil Resolution, population, violence, rising fundamentalism, the Washington Consensus, abortion, the Global Gag Rule, the World Social Forum, biodiversity, climate change, 'common but differentiated responsibilities', structural adjustment policies, prostitution, governance, natural resources, democracy, security and many more.

Anna Padarath takes a break from the intensive training, at Punta del Este

While the programme had appeared daunting, in the end the broader perspective we all gained allowed us to 'place' discourses, i.e. to 'step back' from our own thinking and interrogate it in order to gain a better understanding.

We felt much more confident of fulfilling DAWN's expectations of being able to live comfortably with complexity and develop frames of reference to make sense of events.

Monica of Bolivia voiced a general feeling of the entire group, saying "clearer knowledge of the power and resources of fundamentalist forces is extremely depressing" but she is undaunted.

We left Montevideo buoyed up by each other and filled with hope and assurance that by creating dialogue across movements and networks, we can use our creativity to come up with alternative visions and recast power.

To quote the World Social Forum slogan… *Another World Is Possible.*

■ ***Anna Padarath***

Children stop for a chat in the historic streets of Colonia del Sacramento

Tonga WTO accession on "worst terms ever": Oxfam

The tiny island Kingdom of Tonga made history on the 15th of December last year in Hong Kong. Tonga joined the World Trade Organisation on what are arguably the worst terms ever offered to any country, according to an analysis of leaked documents released by international agency Oxfam.

"The terms of Tonga's accession package are appalling," said Oxfam's Phil Bloomer.

"This is one of the world's smallest and most vulnerable economies, and the extortionist demands being made on it should have no place in a 'development round'."

"Apparently, the rhetoric of development means nothing at the WTO when pitted against the commercial interests of the world's richest countries."

As the price of joining the WTO, Tonga will be forced to slash the tariffs on which it depends to pay for vital public services such as health and education.

"Tonga will have to fix its tariffs at levels lower than any other country in the history of the WTO, with the sole exception of Armenia," said Bloomer.

Tonga will be allowed tariffs of no more than 20% on any product. In comparison, the US applies a 350% tariff on beef imports, and the EU applies an equivalent tariff of over 300% to block sugar imports. Such low tariffs threaten to wipe out Tonga's vulnerable farmers and small businesses.

"Both the EU and the US were active in the negotiations which led to this atrocious deal. This highlights the grotesque double standards in operation at the WTO. It sets a very depressing tone for the talks," Bloomer said.

Other terms of the deal are also extremely worrying for Tonga's development. The country is being forced to open many of its vital services to foreign companies, including all levels of education, hospitals and telecommunications, imperiling access to essential services for the poor.

On education, these commitments go well beyond those of any of the rich countries which negotiated the deal. Other commitments, a number of which exceed current WTO rules, remove Tonga's right to employ the industrial policies that rich countries and the Asian Tigers used to promote development. ■

Regional training addresses human rights

The problem of how to combat and effectively address the violation of human rights is a tricky one, but it's something that most feminists and human rights activists have to grapple with daily. Fortunately, there are many organizations in the region that provide important technical support and training for frontline activists, trainers, civil society and institutions like the judiciary.

FWRM Human Rights Training Officers Seema Naidu and Unaisi Valenitabua last year attended one such training workshop. The Regional Human Rights Standard Training was held at the Tokatoka Resort in Nadi from the 7th to the 11th of November. The training clearly had high-level support, as it was opened by Fiji's Vice President, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi.

The week-long UNDP/RRRT workshop was aimed at training lawyers on international conventions and their application to domestic laws.

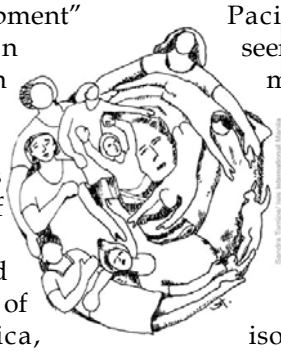
The training focused on guidelines for rights-based legal practice and the analysis of legal practice from a human rights perspective. The workshop also aimed to foster a network of human rights advocates and legal practitioners who would be able to challenge discriminatory laws and practices in their countries, by applying international conventions and precedents.

Participants included lawyers and magistrates from across the Pacific. By the end of the week, they were able to identify indicators of human rights violations and the root causes and interrelatedness of discrimination. The attendees left with a greater understanding of gender, equality, law and human rights and the challenges in promoting human rights effectively.

Human rights and the Commonwealth

On the 20th and 21st November 2005 just prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), human rights activists from across the Commonwealth met in Valletta, Malta, for the second Commonwealth Human Rights Forum.

Complementing the official CHOGM theme of "Networking the Commonwealth for Development" participants focused on "Networking for Human Rights" and examined the reality of space available to civil society for human rights within members countries of the Commonwealth.



Participants shared experiences such as the abuse of police powers in Jamaica, Zimbabwe and the Maldives, suppression of freedom of expression in Tonga, recent religious fundamentalist marches against the homosexual community in Fiji and the abuse of migrant workers in detention in Malta.

Other issues addressed were laws, rules and regulations that affect civil society in the Commonwealth.

As Fiji's representative from the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, I emphasised the problem of our outdated Charitable Trusts Act and similar legislation in the region that is an obstacle to the development of human rights NGOs in the Pacific.

Representing both the Regional Rights Resource Team and FWRM, I shared case studies on social security concerns of human rights defenders in the Pacific.

I told them that, "for us in the Pacific, human rights is seen as a western concept; most people believe that it goes against the very foundation our culture, the Indigenous culture. As an NGO or human rights defender we are subject to social isolation and alienation from our families and communities".

The presentation focused on security concerns and threats perpetuated by culture, religion and mainstream fundamentalist belief systems that further marginalize vulnerable and minority groups and are obstacles to human rights work in the Pacific.

Following the forum, a communiqué was presented to the CHOGM.

Key recommendations included:

A formal report-back process to the next CHOGM on the implementation of heads of Governments' commitment to human rights in Valletta.

Commonwealth Governments should ensure that human rights norms are not compromised using security as an excuse.

Commonwealth Ministerial Group should investigate the human rights situations in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Maldives.

Commonwealth should agree that all members should offer standing invitation to UN Rapporteurs and other UN Investigators as commitment to transparency.

Such international human rights fora are very useful for the development of civil society organisations in the Pacific.

As growing social movements, we need to dialogue with NGOs across the globe, to learn from their experiences in diverse cultural, social and political climates.

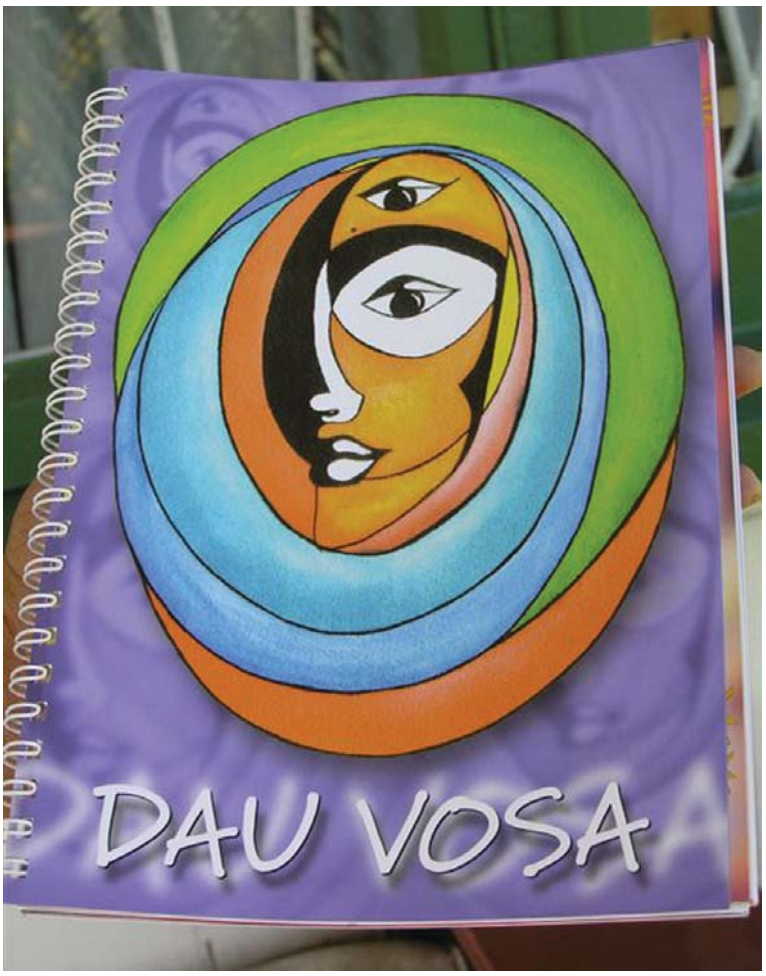
The Pacific stories and experiences are seldom shared in such forums.

It is vital that the Pacific is represented in such international arenas so our issues can become part of the international agenda.

■ ***Seema Naidu***

OTHER NEWS

...FWRM's Angels & Demons *Christmas party was a great success!*



Dau Vosa, produced and launched by FWRM's Young Women's Programme in October last year, is aimed at empowering young women, while also being a useful resource. It's named *Dau Vosa* to acknowledge that the women of Fiji can and must speak, so that issues we raise will be heard and our contributions to society recognised.

The journal also features young women from FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum, who have been inspired to advocate for positive change in their communities. The journal is being distributed to girls in selected schools throughout Fiji. ■

Look out !

www.fwrm.org.fj

It's been a long time coming, but it's almost here – the Fiji Women's Rights Movement website will be online in March. The site, www.fwrm.org.fj, will feature Movement news, pictures, statements, press releases, up-coming events and some useful links.

With FWRM's presence at regional and international fora, the website will provide activists and the curious with an easily accessible source of information on the organisation, it's main goals and objectives and some of its recent work.

Picture This!

FWRM will be celebrating International Women's Day a little differently this year with our Young Women in Leadership Project. Picture This! gives young women the chance to artistically explore the theme of International Women's Day through a camera lens.

The project brings participants together to snap their ideas onto film, using a disposable camera, and then discuss their favourite shots with other young women.

A selection of the best pictures will be displayed on International Women's Day in Suva, with the chance to see for yourselves (and buy!) enlarged and framed views of 'women in decision-making'.

About us

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural non-governmental organization committed to removing discrimination against women through institutional reforms and attitudinal changes.

By means of core programmes and innovative approaches, FWRM practices and promotes feminism, democracy, good governance and human rights.

We strive to empower, unite and provide leadership opportunities for women in Fiji, especially for emerging young leaders, indigenous and locally-born women.

The FWRM vision is for the women of Fiji to be free from all forms of discrimination, have equal access to opportunities and to live in a healthy environment where the principles of feminism, democracy, good governance, multiculturalism and human rights prevail.

FWRM

Join us

YES! I want to support the Fiji Women's Rights Movement

ANNUAL FEE:

Waged - $10 ■ *Organisation - $30*

Non-waged/Student - $5

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