FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
FWRM
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
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Women in Politics:

Keeping gender on the agenda

Despite the invisibility of women and women's issues during campaigning for Fiji's 2006 General Elections, women did make some gains at the polls. This year, more women were elected to the House of Representatives - an achievement celebrated at a July reception for women Members of Parliament and Senators hosted by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement.

Fiji now has a total of eight female members in the lower house signifying 11 per cent of the lower house and five female members out of a total of 32 members in the upper house signifying 15 per cent. Of these, there are five ministers in our 36-member extended cabinet, signifying 13.8 per cent. Fiji had a record number of 30 women stand for the 2006 elections, which included one of FWRM's long time members, Pricilla Singh. This is tremendous progress, but is still short of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nation's goal of 30 per cent women in decision making.

It is hard getting women elected, which is why there are so few of us in Parliament. Women face many barriers to political and public participation. These include lack of education, poverty, lack of role models and support for women in power, and discriminatory attitudes and practices.

FWRM recognised that one of the biggest obstacles women face is election funding. It costs money to run a political campaign, from building sheds to printing flyers to the cost of travel around a constituency. Therefore, with the limited time we had, FWRM undertook a Women in Politics (WIP) Appeal to assist all women standing, irrespective of their political party. The Movement thought long and hard about this, and decided that with our current political climate we have to support all women because gender cuts across all party lines. It is more important at this stage to just get women in.

We harnessed the fundraising energy of staff and members and jointly raised a total of $11,000. This money was then divided amongst 30 female candidates, who received $366 each. Some of candidates contributed the funds to charity causes and two candidates reinvested the money with the WIP Appeal fund, which FWRM will use as seed funding for aspiring women candidates in the next elections.

For those women in Cabinet, and the Upper and Lower Houses, there are more challenges ahead. It is the same challenge that every politician faces - balancing the needs of the constituency with the national interest. At present, one of the biggest challenges will be balancing party loyalties within a multiparty cabinet. MPs and Senators will be pulled in various directions. However, FWRM asks that each woman representative think further than party lines and consider the implications of each proposed Bill on women.

Why should our women MPs and Senators do this?

Firstly, because women make up 50 per cent of the nation's population. Women of all races and class are counting on them.

Secondly, because gender is a cross cutting issue that affects the whole country. It is a political reality facing our nation. The fact that so few women are in Parliament is an indicator of this political reality. As women, these MPs and Senators would have faced similar barriers and obstacles to participation. These may have included discriminatory attitudes and practices, unequal power relations between men and women in

■ *Continued on page 3*

Gina Houng Lee (L) and Virisila Buadromo at the WIP Appeal launch.
Photo: *The Fiji Times* Online

From the Director's Desk

Greetings from Waimanu Road!

Firstly I would like to congratulate the 30 women candidates who stood in the General Elections. While many of them did not win seats in Parliament – it was still encouraging that this time around three more women were able to secure seats. During the elections, FWRM initiated the WIP appeal and fundraised for all the women candidates. We were able to secure $11,000 dollars which was shared equally amongst all the women candidates. A big vinaka vakalevu to everyone who donated! Still on the elections, FWRM was also able to conduct a survey on the position of political parties on issues that impact on women. "Women Ask" is a tool that FWRM will make available to other NGOs to use for advocacy.

Our new Human Rights Training Officer, Michelle Reddy and fellow HRTO Unaisi facilitated their first training in May. The Family Law Act training for community paralegals was an opportunity for FWRM and our partner, RRRT to bring together community paralegals and workers and demystify the new Family Law Act. The training would not have been possible without the support of the Asia Foundation, which is also funding the production of FLA information brochures and a media awareness campaign.

Enjoy this bumper issue!

In solidarity,
Virisila Buadromo

STAFF MOVEMENT

Former teacher joins FWRM

Former teacher **Michelle Reddy** continues her calling in education as FWRM's new Human Rights Training Officer.

Michelle is no stranger to the Movement - her passion in advocating for women's human rights emerged in 2004 when she participated in FWRM's Emerging Leader's Forum, part of the Young Women in Leadership Program.

Michelle is a real assest to the organisation with her command of Fiji-Hindi, Fijian and English. She is a graduate of the University of the South Pacific with a BA in Education.

Along with other eternal students in the office, Michelle is back at USP doing a Postgraduate Diploma in Literature part-time.

Apart from studying and working, she also has a passion for Theatre Arts. Contact Michelle at michelle@fwrm.org.fj ■

Congratulations Imrana!

For the first time in nearly two decades, the Pacific will once again be represented on the renowned International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) with the appointment in May of Imrana Jalal, FWRM Board Member and Human Rights Adviser at the Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT), to the position of Commissioner.

ICJ Secretary General Nicholas Howen congratulated Jalal, a long-time human rights advocate and lawyer by profession, on her appointment, saying she was "overwhelmingly elected by the existing Commissioners".

"I am delighted that … more jurists from Asia-Pacific are now joining the ranks of the ICJ," he said.

Jalal served as former Human Rights Commissioner for Fiji in 1999/2000. She currently serves on the board of the International Council of Human Rights Policy, Greenpeace International and the Asian Development Bank's Gender Advisory Group.

Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi applauded the appointment. "Imrana Jalal's election to the International Commission of Jurists is fitting tribute to her passionate and unrelenting advocacy on behalf of human rights in the region and internationally," Ratu Joni said.

Jalal aims to bring a much needed Pacific Island perspective to the Commission.

"I'm overwhelmed, thrilled and honoured to be elected as a commissioner, even though I have no idea to date who put me forward as a candidate," Jalal said.

"The ICJ is highly regarded internationally, its commissioners are distinguished jurists in their own right, and what makes the ICJ special is its impartial, objective, and authoritative legal approach to the protection and promotion of human rights through the rule of law." ■

Keeping gender on the agenda

■ *Continued from page 1*

the family and the exclusion of women from the political agenda. Elected women representatives have come from this backdrop and there is much that they can change by being in power.

Thirdly, women in politics are important role models for women and young girls in the country. They show that women should be in positions of power in order to include women's perspectives in national decision making.

Voting across party lines for the benefit of women has happened before. The Family Law Bill, which had huge implications for women in terms of social justice and recognising women's economic contribution in the home, was supported and successfully passed in 2003. It was the female MPs from both sides of the House who came together in support of the Bill across party lines.

What can women's organisations do to support women in Parliament?

FWRM and other women's organisations can provide a gender and human rights analysis of Bills that come before the house. We are already doing this formally through the various government agencies, but we are happy to provide this analysis to any MP irrespective of political party.

Would it change the way we live if women shared political power equally with men?

While some feel that power is wielded in the same way by men and women, others feel that women would exercise power in different ways. I strongly believe that women bring fresh and creative ways to address problems and help society move forward.

Mary Robinson, former Commissioner of Human Rights, said: "As women lead, they are changing leadership, as they organize they are changing organisations, When women lead and articulate their purposes, it seems that they work together not only as individuals but with a great sense of continuity and networking in a healthy way… Women have fresh and imaginative skills of dialogue and are setting a more open, flexible and compassionate style of leadership." (*Mary Robinson in a speech at the Global Forum of Women, 1992*)

The women of Fiji are depending on our representatives to set the framework for ensuring women's rights are protected and fulfilled at the highest level of decision making. We wish them well.

■ *Gina Houng Lee*

Correction

In the last issue of Balance (Jan-Feb 2006) we ran an article titled 'Our rights are not optional!' (page 3)about the CEDAW-OP. In it we inadvertantly implied that FWRM and RRRT are partnering with UNIFEM for a joint session on CEDAW-OP with the Ministry of Women.

This is not the case, and we apologise to UNIFEM for any misunderstanding.

WIP Appeal

funding progress

We would like to thank

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Women in Business Members

Your generous donation was shared equally amongst all women candidates in the 2006 elections, irrespective of their political party affiliations. Thank you for believing in a world free of gender discrimination and that women should get a fair go.

ELFs spark femi

The Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF) is a year-long component of FWRM's Young Women's Programme, which aims to introduce emerging leaders to issues facing young women in Fiji and around the world. Participants are young women between 18 and 25 years of age, from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Since it began in 2003, ELF has gone from strength to strength, with graduates of the programme going on to wage feminist battles in their workplaces, homes, and schools.

At the University of the South Pacific, a group of ELF graduates got together to lobby for the revival of the Women Students' Association (USPWSA). The USPWSA was probably last active on campus in the1980s, and had been defunct for some time. Young Women's Officer **Anna Padarath** *spoke to* **Rosie Catherine**, **Samita Singh**, **Beatrice Mar**, *and* **Shoma Prasad**, *on the reasons behind the revival.*

Why did you want to restart the Association ?

Beatrice:

I learnt a lot from the ELF programme and was exposed to so many issues I never knew mattered or even existed. I wanted to share that information with other women and voiced the idea to other ELF Pioneers in uni. Last year Akisi Bolabola, Sandy Fong and I formed a core group of people trying to start the Association. With the help of Losana McGowan (former FWRM volunteer), we got the number of signatures required, had our story printed in *Wanslowara* (student newspaper), drew up a constitution and submitted it to the USP Students Association office. And there it sat. Every time we inquired about it, we were told that the matter was still being discussed and we would be informed of the results. Then before we knew it, the year was over.

What happened next?

Beatrice:

In 2006, there were more ELF graduates in uni and it was easier to bring the idea back to life. Talica Taoba came up with the idea of having an awareness tent during orientation week in February where she and Rosie showcased FWRM information, posters, *Dau Vosa* and *HeadStrong* (FWRM Young Women's Programme publications) as well as other pamphlets on HIV/AIDS, the environment etc. It was then that Talica got the first set of signatures from students who were in support of such an association.

Rosie:

When I inquired about the awareness raising tent during Orientation Week this year, the President of the USPSA agreed as he wanted a move away from the usual cultural events toward something more constructive. He went further and suggested that there be an organisation for women. I told him that this had already been proposed last year and a draft constitution with the necessary signatures had been submitted. As no trace of this was found in the USPSA files, the process had to be started again. So we went about finding the constitution and getting the input of the other ELFs to rework it as necessary.

Shoma:

After Orientation Week, the group met to discuss holding a *Thursday in Black* awareness day on the importance of having a women's association. It was held in in late March and got attention and a lot of support from women students. It was vital to get the support of the USPSA Women's Representative. USP ELF members also individually lobbied various USPSA council members for support during the council meeting.

Who drafted the final constitution and how did you go about it?

Shoma:

Some of the ELFs met the same evening of *Thursday in Black* and worked on the draft constitution. The process wasn't easy because we were drafting a path for the female students of the largest university in the South Pacific and we were trying

ELFs at Thursday in Black*: Rosie Catherine (rear), Michelle Reddy and Shoma Prasad (seated)*

inist revival

to be as inclusive, culturally diverse and accommodating as possible. After the constitution was amended through email feedback, the ELF members decided that it was time to pass the ownership on to USP students. The USP ELF members then took over.

How was the final draft presented?

Rosie:

We pushed the USPSA Council to put the WSA on the agenda for their April 2006 meeting. Beatrice was to make the ten-minute presentation and she met with members of the FWRM Young Women's Working Group beforehand to prepare. Bea made the presentation to the USPSA on 26 April with the support of Luisa Fesaitu and Samita in answering questions.

Beatrice:

Their support was much appreciated as a certain Council member was getting hostile and questioning the need for the Association when there was already a Women's Representative. The same person also asked if we had proof of such things as sexual harassment.

Rosie:

The USPSA agreed to affiliate the Association, subject to certain conditions. The elections for office bearers were held on 15 May. The newly elected committee of the USPWSA is president Talica Taoba (ELF), vice president Beatrice Mar (ELF), secretary Esther O'Brien (Solomon Islands) and treasurer Losa Bourne (Samoa).

How will you ensure that the Association does not go defunct again once you all graduate?

Samita:

We definitely need educational empowerment to help the students realise that there is nothing embarrassing in supporting such an association.

How did you find the whole process?

Beatrice:

The whole process was very tiring and a little frustrating as we also had to juggle our studies and then go about trying to organise the awareness campaign. We were meeting nearly every two weeks. We would get vocal support all the time but when it came down to action, they would withdraw.

Samita:

I think that we still need to work on getting students, especially men, to understand what we want because I think that they feel threatened that women are taking over but overall we have fair support. The whole process was a bit demanding but it was a good experience.

Shoma:

The entire process was very empowering. It felt like we were reliving the leadership program of ELF. Advocating for the formation of a women's association wasn't easy. During the question and answer session, a male student asked, "Are you people going to encourage break-ups of families like those women's organisations?" The question reaffirmed the fact that Fiji needs so much education and awareness on gender issues. I would like to believe that the formation of a women's association is a very powerful step towards a new wave of feminism in Fiji where we can help create a new way of thinking! ■

ELF Experience

Shoma Prasad

The Emerging Leaders' Forum is about building self-confidence, motivation and determination. The knowledge and analysis skills I gained have landed me my dream job, advocating for human rights. I am the new Research & Communications Officer for the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF).

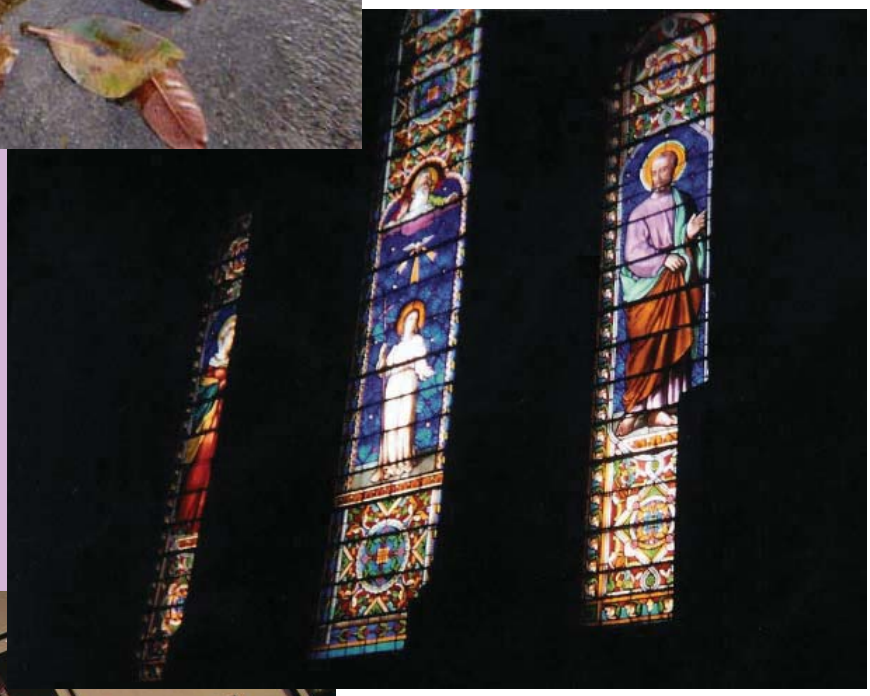
The year we 18 girls spent together, in the second ELF programme, sharing experiences, stories and concerns has broadened my thinking. ELF was like a think tank of knowledge about feminism, health, poverty, media and human rights. I have to admit, as an ELF graduate, I now wear a gender lens all the time. My friends call me 'the good citizen' because of the discussions we have.

The advantage of being an ELF is that we never stop analysing issues. For example, many people were not able to recognise the implications of the Coca Cola Light Babe competition advertisement on the image of women. We started an email debate and wrote letters to the editor, highlighting the effects of the poster on women and their lives.

ELF is not only a group of young women but it is an emotional connection amongst like-minded people who are trying to make a difference. I have discovered that this journey will not be easy. We have already faced discrimination in our work, but the solidarity, encouragement and networking keeps us going!

Picture This!
young women get snap happy

Look for the woman within the Reflection, *taken by 13-year-old participant Alisi Dunk (above)*



Quiet Strength *by Adi Salote Ralulu (right)*

Picture This! participant Rayape Tupou Karavaki gets snapped by Jone Luvenitoga of The Fiji Times *at the exhibit launch. (below)*

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been overwhelmed by the community support and positive response to *Picture This!* a photography exhibit by young women.

For International Women's Day this year the Movement celebrated with images - exploring the International Women's Day theme through the eyes of 26 young women, who were equipped with disposable cameras from Caines Jannif Limited.

The most outstanding photographs were enlarged and framed, and were launched by CEO for Women Emele Duituturaga at the Alliance Française on March 8th.

It was a hot and sweaty morning on IWD as close to 100 people flowed through the Alliance Française exhibit space to see the young women's visions of Women in Decision-Making.

At the launch, members of the diplomatic corps, Government officials, women's rights activists,

businesspeople, lawyers, community leaders, members of the media, family and friends got the chance to meet the budding photographers and discuss their ideas and insights.

"Caines Jannif has sponsored so many photography [projects], but this is the best! It was money well-spent and we will sponsor it again next year," said Caines Jannif Managing Director Ikbal Jannif.

Also present was New Zealand High Commissioner Michael Green, representing the major partner of the event, the New Zealand High Commission.

The photographs, some of which have been bought by members of the public, include *Reflection* by 13-year-old Alisi Dunk. The picture captures the hidden reflection of a young woman in a pool of water and fallen leaves.

Quiet Strength, taken by Adi Salote Ralulu, is about the spirituality and measured strength behind women's decisions.

Other pieces on display were Anjula Devi's *Tabu Soro*, which is a portrait of two homeless women who live in the doorway of a restaurant in downtown Suva. *One Step* by Lauretta Ah Sam, taken in the Suva bus stand, shows a woman deciding to take the first step of her journey.

"The photographs captured the young participants' perceptions of Women in Decision- Making: Meeting challenges, creating change. For them it wasn't about professional women or women politicians – it was about everyday women: mothers, tailors, grandmothers, market-vendors, fisherwomen and the homeless," said FWRM Executive Director Virisila Buadromo.

"It drove home the idea that it doesn't matter how big or small the decision, it is about who is making the decision and how this impacts on them and their families."

The framed photographs, which are available for sale, have been on display at the RoC Cafés and the Caines Jannif shopfront in downtown Suva for three months. ■

To a young feminist

Letters to a Young Feminist *is a visionary book of letters from leading feminist* **Dr Phyllis Chesler** *to the next generation of feminists - men and women - emerging today. With frankness and candor, she discusses the basic aspects of feminism, its relevance in a world that is in danger of taking feminist gains for granted, and steers the next generation toward reclaiming feminism for itself. Chesler examines sisterhood, sex, families and motherhood, work, feminist heroism, and the economics of power. The following excerpt is taken from the book:*

Yes, the world is different now than it was when I was your age. In only thirty years, a visionary feminism has managed to seriously challenge, if not transform, world consciousness. But the truth is, women are still far from free. We're not even within striking range. The most extraordinary legal victories are only scraps of paper until human beings test them on the ground. Women are still punished for trying to integrate male bastions of power.

These women will not be deterred—but they will pay a high price. As a feminist, we learned that one cannot do such things alone, only together.

I want you to know what our feminist gains are, and why you must not take them for granted. (Although it is your right to do so—we fought for that, too). I also want you to know what remains to be done. I want you to see your place in the historical scheme of things, so you may choose whether and how to stand your ground in history. You must stand on our feminist shoulders in order to go further than we did.

Stand up as early as you can in life. Take up as much space in the (male) universe as you need to. Sit with your legs apart, not together. Climb trees. Climb mountains, too. Engage in group sports. Dress comfortably. Dress as you wish.

How do we stop injustice? We begin by speaking truth to power. That child who told the emperor he was naked is one of ours. We begin, of course, by fighting back. To quote Edmund Burke, "All that is necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing." Ah Burke, evil also triumphs when good women do nothing.

Toward that end, you must move beyond words. You must act. Do not hesitate because your actions may not be perfect, or beyond criticism. "Action" is how you put your principles into practice. Not just publicly, or toward those more powerful than you, but also privately, toward those less fortunate than you. Not just toward those who are (safely) far away, but toward those with whom you live and work.

If you're on the right track, you can expect some pretty savage criticism. Trust it. Revel in it. It is the truest measure of your success.

Those who endure small humiliations - daily - say that the most lasting and haunting harm resides in growing accustomed to such treatment, in large part because others insist that you do. After all, they have. What's so special about you?

"So your boss asked you and not your male colleague to make coffee at the meeting - big deal. At least you have a job."

"So, your husband keeps forgetting his promise to help with the housework - at least you have a husband."

Always implied, though unspoken: "It could be worse." But things could be better. That will not happen if you do not act heroically.

Women ask questions

For the 2006 general elections, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement again conducted the Women Ask survey – where political parties were asked about issues that affect women's lives. The survey, which ran between April and May 2006, was aimed at informing the people of Fiji, especially women, on the stance that different political parties were taking regarding women's issues.

The questionnaire was developed through consultations with partner organisations such as AIDS Taskforce of Fiji, Women's Action for Change, femLINKPACIFIC, and the Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team. This consultative process resulted in a 45-question survey that covered topics such as HIV/AIDS, violence against women, the economy, sexual health and the environment.

The political parties were difficult to contact as most officials and candidates were out campaigning for the elections. The FWRM interns who were conducting the survey faced difficulties getting the political parties to respond to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was sent to the Coalition of Independent Nationals (COIN); National Alliance Party of Fiji (NAPF); National Democratic Party (NDP); Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL); Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT); United Peoples Party (UPP); Fiji Labour Party (FLP), National Federation Party (NFP); Nationalist Vanua Tako Lavo Party (NVTL); Party of Truth; and the Social Liberty Party.

Of the 11, three parties did not respond - NVTL Party, the Party of Truth and the Social Liberty Party. The FLP and NFP parties only answered a few of the questions and referred us to their party manifesto for the remaining questions.

A summary of the responses was laid out as a colourful A4 flyer. The Women Ask insert was published in *The Fiji Times* on Saturday, 6 May, 2006, which was the first day of voting. ■

Does your party support the retention of ALL current provisions of the Bill of Rights of the 1997 Constitution?

NAPF ◆Yes. **NDP** ◆Yes. **NFP**◆Will observe the spirit and the letter of the Law. **SDL**◆Yes. **SVT**◆Some provisions need to be reviewed to ensure eveyone is treated equally under the law. **UPP**◆Yes, unless research shows that it is unacceptable in the current form.

Does your party support reform of the Penal Code relating to sexual offences?

NAPF ◆Yes. **SDL**◆Yes. **SVT**◆Yes. **UPP**◆Yes.

Excerpt from the Women Ask *insert in* The Fiji Times, *May 6, 2006.*

Water: A human right

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement supports calls by civil society groups and the Fiji Human Rights Commission against the privatisation of Fiji's water supply.

"Water is a basic human right, and we are very concerned about the possible privatisation of this essential resource," said FWRM Executive Director Virisila Buadromo.

"Globally, experience has shown that privatisation of water DOES NOT work. Privatisation turns water from a public service into a commodity for profit. This has serious consequences for the entire population, but for women in particular because they face added burdens of work when they cannot access clean piped water."

In Colombia and the Philippines, when the privatised water service was suspended due to non-payment, women started using contaminated water, which put them at risk of serious illness. They also spend long hours carrying water, in addition to not being able to cover food, health or education expenses, since they are using that money to pay for the water service.

The privatisation of water in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba resulted in 'water wars' after poor people, who could not afford the hugely increased water bills, rioted in protest. Eventually, the multinational company that had bought the city's water supply had to leave the country due to the civil unrest their profit-seeking had caused.

FWRM says Fiji can learn from the mistakes of the South American and South East Asian governments.

"The Fiji Government must recognise water as a public service and essential human right that cannot be sold for profit under any circumstances," said Buadromo.

"We call on the Government to invest in improving the infrastructure for better delivery of water, without resorting to privatisation."

Civil society groups were moved to speak out on the water privatisation issue following the inclusion of five prominent private sector members in the nine-member charter preparation committee on water and sewage. The committee, which will decide the future of water and sanitation services in Fiji, does not include civil society or consumer representatives. ■

Law to tackle rape myths

At the end of this year, the Fiji Law Reform Commission (FLRC) is expected to release a report that will provide drafting recommendations on the review of the Penal Code. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement along with other non-government organisations submitted its views - in particular our strong dissatisfaction with the current laws governing rape - and suggested proposals for reform.

FWRM has re-submitted its 1997 submission, which was endorsed by 16 women and community organisations. The proposal is entitled 'Draft Sexual Offences Legislation'. This is not the first time that the FLRC has contemplated reviewing this area of law. The last time was in 1999 and the suggested options for reform were contained in the Sexual Offences Report which was submitted to the then Attorney General for consideration.

The report took on board most of the recommendations made in the Draft Sexual Offences Legislation prepared by FWRM. These suggestions were what FWRM believed were necessary improvements to promote equality for women and children within the existing legal system with particular regard to sexual offences.

The recommendations were made pursuant to our Government's ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), with its commitment to substantive equality for women. Specific recommendations were made to reform the existing laws dealing with rape and child sexual abuse to bring them into line with the constitutional guarantee of women's equality and CEDAW.

The recommendations are based on the assumption that the law fails to deal with violence perpetrated by men on women, and against children and young persons. The legal system itself has played a role in recreating and reinforcing women's subordination.

FWRM's submission was compiled with the belief that the criminal justice system can play a significant role in replacing the myths about rape and sexual assault, and the stereotyped views of the situations in which such crimes occur.

It can substitute such myths and stereotypes with views that are based on fact and empirical evidence, relevant to the legal definition of rape/sexual assault. The objective is to transform the way prosecutors analyse and present the issues to be decided in such cases, based on laws and not myths.

Prosecutorial strategy can be influential in challenging these myths and replacing them with factual accounts of the issues relevant in law to rape/sexual assault. This process in turn can influence the way in which rape and sexual crimes are perceived and understood by society.

Susanna and the Elders *by Artemisia Gentileschi (1597-1651)*
Source: Web Gallery of Art

The proposed reforms FWRM is advocating for are based on the following objectives:

- The law must reaffirm a woman's choice to make decisions about her sexual contacts. The existing rape law is only concerned with protecting women against unwanted sexual contact of types that are not socially approved.
- If the objective of the new law is regarded as a tool to protect the right of the individual to self determination in sexual relationships than the law must be interpreted and applied in a manner that excludes all defences based on attitudes, beliefs, and norms that are inconsistent with that right.
- The reforms are being proposed in order to encourage women to trust the criminal justice system when they have been sexually assaulted, and to encourage them to report rapes and other forms of sexual assault.
- And finally the proposed reforms are designed to eliminate sex discrimination in the area of sexual assault in compliance with the Government's commitment to the principles of CEDAW.

■ *Virisila Buadromo*

Pacific being shortchanged

The Pacific is being short changed. The European Union has promised to support development in the Pacific, but so far these have been half hearted promises. Civil society organizations from 12 Pacific countries who met in Nadi in June this year, asked "what's in it for the Pacific?" in negotiations on a Pacific Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU.

The representatives of churches, trade unions, local businesses, environmental organisations, social justice groups, women's groups and other NGOs urge their governments to be united on their position during the EPA negotiations. The negotiations aim to set the conditions of trade between the EU and Pacific member states from 2008 onwards. The new EPA is expected to replace the current non-reciprocal Cotonou agreement.

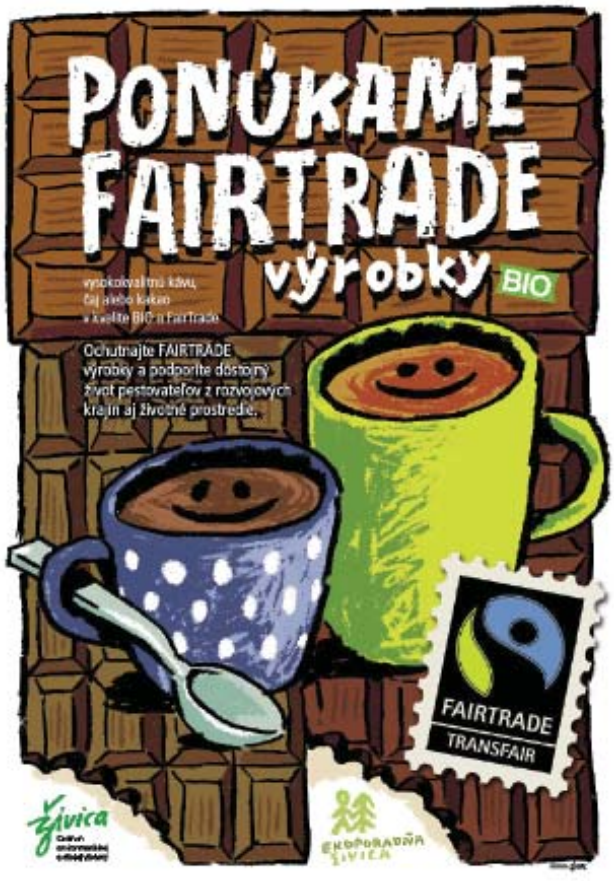
Pacific governments need to ensure solidarity when they negotiate the EPA with the EU, and this unity needs to extend to other developing countries who are struggling to get fair trade rules internationally.

These negotiations are moving quickly – too quickly. There has not been enough groundwork. There needs to be independent and objective impact assessments carried out at the national level that will address issues of poverty and vulnerability, environment and culture. These should include the participation of civil society organisations and people most likely to be affected by the trade agreement.

The lack of meaningful consultation and transparency on the EPA is a concern for civil society. It seems that it is only government trade officials and their counterparts in the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat who have knowledge of the EPA and what it offers. The regional CSO group is fearful that trade negotiations are being carried out on the basis of purely theoretical economic analysis.

(Above) Fair trade poster
Source: pulsetc.com
(Right) Campaign logo
Source: stopepa.org

CSOs are calling for a programme of public education to inform the community about important issues that are being decided over the next year. This should include the involvement of a range of government departments, trade unions, the church, the private sector, environmental groups and women's groups, as well as local communities. Civil society organisations are committed to undertaking public education and call on governments to provide more information and engage in open and meaningful dialogue. Particular provisions in the negotiations that could pose danger to Pacific societies include the local impacts of foreign fisheries, unregulated tourism, lack of control over foreign companies, lack of government's right to regulate in the public interest, threats to public services such as water supplies and pressures for alienation and foreign control over land.



Poster promoting fair trade in cocoa products.
Source: FAIRTRADE

An example of these threats is seen in Tonga's accession package to the World Trade Organisation, currently being considered for ratification. Vanuatu rejected a similar deal in the past.

Regional CSOs say that proposals for labour mobility need to be looked at carefully to include issues of workers' rights, social impacts and migration into the Pacific.

CSOs' past calls for closer study of the impacts of these trade negotiations have largely gone unheeded. They reiterate that these issues are critical and need an urgent response. ■

Laughter under the bombs

Al-Madinah Theatre was supposed to show art films this summer. *Instead it has become a home to scores of refugees, and a cultural oasis where their children can act, draw and watch movies. The Beirut theatre has become a hub of laughter, hope and support in the midst of the Israeli bombing of the Lebanese capital. The children's theatre programme is run by 29-year-old writer, director and teacher* **Sharif Abdunnur**, *who has been emailing out his personal experiences with the children in the midst of a war.*

Tuesday 8th August 6:30am

Yesterday I went home for lunch and afterwards we had to return to the theatre to sit and try to make some sort of plan of how we are going to work with the kids and what our immediate goals should be. As we were sitting there the whole building shook with a loud boom, the stage lights, the metal structures everything just shook, like in some sort of Hollywood special effect. The sound was deafening.

The latest Israeli bombing was horrifying. Very close to us and, more to the point, very inhumane. The area targeted was a cheap residence area, which was full to the brim and more. This area called Shiyah was usually a very full and bustling area because it offers cheap housing in the city. Now with all the displaced families in every room (as in every bedroom of every residence) had upward of 15 people in it. The area had more than 200% capacity... people were like ants.

The bombing targeted one of these buildings full of people. Most of the kids I am working with have family spread out in that neighbourhood. You can imagine the terror and confusion as everyone in the theatre room panicked from the bone-rattling that hit the theatre and that the whole area had felt. The families and kids, all panic-stricken, the tiny battery operated TV being our only light literally as more than a 100 of us huddled to see what was happening, immediately the MK spy planes (now capable of air strikes themselves) were all of a sudden reported above us... me and a few friends with cameras rushed out and to our horror we saw more than 4 planes hovering frantically right above us!

This usually is a very horrible omen, as they usually view the area right before an air strike or bombing from the battleships. We sat and looked at the planes above waiting to see if this would seal our fate... it was pointless to run down and warn the people because we didn't know if the strike would hit us exactly or anyone else in the region. In war it is pure luck, you could be in a basement or on a rooftop... it doesn't really matter if the missile hits the right spot... then that's it.

A man carries clothes from the rubble of a bombed residential building in Beirut.
Photo: XinHua Online

Finally the planes left us. We knew we still were not in the clear but now it was time to gather the kids and see whose parents were missing and where they were. We spent the next 5 hours calling people trying to figure out at least where one guardian for each child was and that they were safe. Thankfully we found at least one direct guardian for each child.

I know that might sound cruel, but we couldn't afford to look for all the family of each child. At times like this we have to start by just making sure that there is someone who can take care of each child. By the early morning hours we were exhausted but at least the children had a caretaker... although that was good in one sense... it doesn't mean anyone was happy...everyone was horrified at the brutal mass murder... the theatre was filled with people sobbing because they were sure they had lost someone.

I have now had a few hours sleep and I just got off the phone and we still don't know exactly how many have been lost as they are still digging through the rubble and tears are still flowing and I know we have another horrible day to deal with and new fresh wounds to care for... and more and more kids everyday with heartbreaking stories to listen to.

Children draw pictures and play in Beirut's Al-Madinah Theatre
Photo: AFP

God save them... and god bless them. I have got to take my cold shower in the dark and run down right now because time is flying and these kids, teens, and adults need everyone around them.

Sharif

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 reform and attitudinal change.

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.

Join us

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

ANNUAL FEE:

Waged - $10 ■ Organisation - $30

Non-waged/Student - $5

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Ph: _____

Email: _____

_____

FWRM

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Ph: 3313156 Fax: 3313466
Email: info@fwrm.org.fj
Mail: GPO Box 14194, Suva, Fiji Is.

Look out !

FWRM AGM

The Movement's Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, 30th September. If you're a member, interested in being a member, or would like to hear more about FWRM acitivities over the past year, please join us at the AGM. Call FWRM on 3313156 or 3312711 for the confirmed AGM venue.

Women & Housing

FWRM and the Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) are organising a national consultation on women's right to adequate housing next month. The consultation, to begin on 14th September, will include local stakeholders, NGOs and Government representatives, as well as UN agencies.

Be the change

Be the change you want is the next innovative feminist multimedia project by FWRM's young women's programme. The project , due to start next month, will involve training a group of young women in planning, scripting and shooting a documentary. With the support of FWRM staff and volunteers, the young women will then make a short documentary on leadership, and the relationship young women have with the national decision-making process. Keep an eye out for the video launch, scheduled for November.

Pro-poor Workshop

The Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSPI), in partnership with FWRM, RRRT and ECREA is organising advocacy training for civil society organisations in late September. The Pro-Poor Training is being supported by the Asian Development Bank.

www.fwrm.org.fj

It's been a long time coming, but it's finally here! The Fiji Women's Rights Movement website is live at www.fwrm.org.fj. The site features Movement news, pictures, statements, press releases and up-coming events.

Workers' Bill

The Employment Relations Bill is due for it's second reading when Parliament sits in September. The ERB currently contains progressive maternity protection for workers, following recommendations by FWRM and other NGOs.

Mongolia

Virisila Buadromo, FWRM Executive Director, will be presenting a paper at a consultation in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The consulation with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief will be held from 11th-12th September. Virisila will be speaking on strategies addressing culture and violence against women in the Pacific. The consultation is being facilitated by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

Family Law

FWRM's Human Rights Training Officers, with the support of RRRT, will be conducting another Family Law training workshop for commnity workers - this time in the West. The workshop on major aspects of the new Family Law Act, is being organised in partnership with FRIEND. Pariticipants will include members of the FRIEND network, community workers and representatives of West-based NGOs.