FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
FWRM
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
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Suva by night: Targeting local human rights defenders

"*Ciri, Ciri* – RUN!" It sounded a little inhuman, more like the roaring inside your ears than a voice. But that could have been because it was almost 2.00am on Christmas morning, and I was watching my colleague and other familiar Suva faces being forced to run out onto wet and deserted Mead Road.

Of course, we had been giggling about "jogging" up at the camp along with the rest of Suva, over lunches and coffees, discussing the latest funny rumour about a tipsy politician who insisted on doing extra laps.

But the reality was scary, brutal and most definitely not funny. I only witnessed 30 seconds of the hours-long ordeal that six people went through on Christmas morning, but I was left shaken and with a deep sense of betrayal.

Human rights violations are the ugly underbelly of Fiji by night. Human rights defenders have been targeted, facing intimidation, detention, and physical violence.

Activists taken in by the military include prominent lawyer Richard Naidu and Executive Director of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Virisila Buadromo. Both cases were widely publicised in the local and overseas news media.

It is becoming increasingly difficult and dangerous for activists to voice their opinions publicly. Most have kept quiet about their experiences during detention, and feel very nervous about discussing their ordeal or their opinions, even in private.

The targeting of human rights defenders is a common phenomenon around the world in areas of conflict and political transition.

Many, many activists, including women's rights activists, have been threatened, tortured, raped, maimed and killed for speaking out in support of principles like human rights for all, democracy and the rule of law.

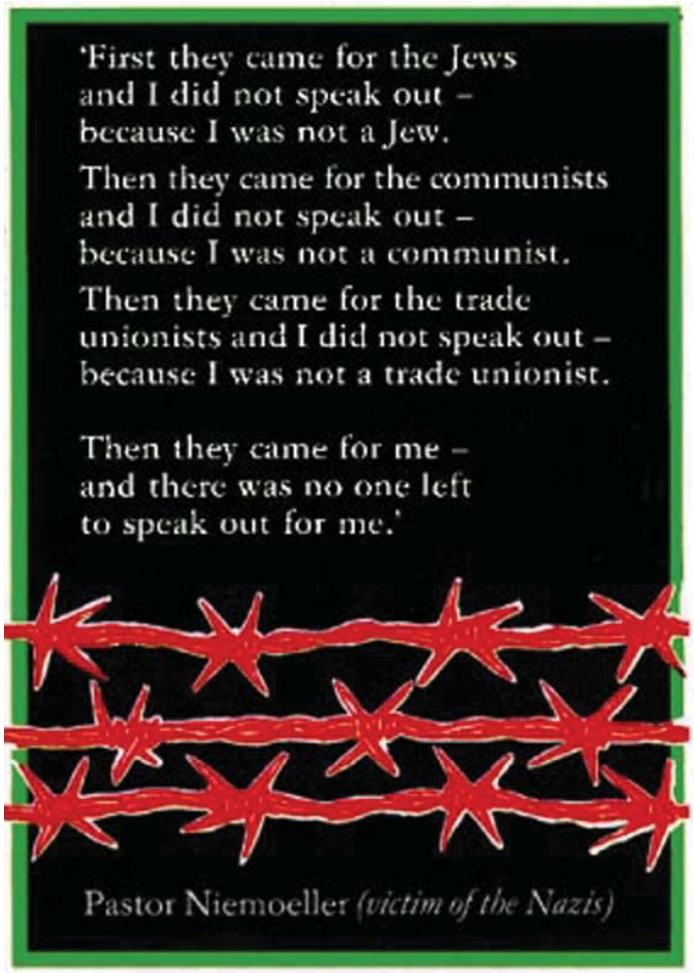
This is why we commemorate Women Human Rights Defenders Day on November 29th every year – to celebrate their courage, rejoice in their successes and remember those who have been lost.

This is Fiji – we love laughter, funny stories, fried *dalo* for breakfast, tin fish curry and good times.

The nasty things that happen in the early hours of the morning, when nobody's watching, are not the kinds of things we can continue to face and remain unchanged.

We all hope that it stops.

■ *Tara Chetty*



Famous lines by Pastor Niemoeller, who was originally a supporter of the Nazis, before his horror at their crimes turned him into one of their best-known opponents.

From the Director's Desk

Greetings from Waimanu Road and welcome to the first issue of Balance for 2007!

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been in the limelight as of late last year – in particular our strong position against the military take-over and our support for the principle of the rule of law and the 1997 Constitution.

This has meant that FWRM is once again at the forefront of Fiji's pro-democracy movement.

Many members of society, some of whom include our family and friends, are questioning our stance – saying we were not as vocal or as visible in previous coups.

I disagree – FWRM's position has always been consistent when it comes to the rule of law and democracy. Over our 20 year herstory, this has meant that we have not only lost members because they did not always agree with our organisational stance, but it has also meant that attention and resources are taken away from our core women's rights work. Our energy and resources are instead focused on helping Fiji back to Parliamentary democracy as quickly as possible.

Like other coups, December 5th 2006 has hit FWRM personally. Some staff and management board members and/or their loved ones have received threats; some have been illegally detained, as well as physically and psychologically abused.

Therefore it was pertinent that a conflict situation policy/emergency plan for staff and management board members was developed. This living document is a testament to the times that we live in. We have found that the document has been helpful to other organisations going through similar situations. Another skill that FWRM has developed due to the increase in human rights violations is the documentation of these abuses .

The documentation framework, which was developed by one of our partners, is now being used by FWRM to monitor and collect stories of human rights violations. It is hoped that this documentation will assist in bringing some justice to the survivors and/or their families.

While most of our time and resources are going to be focused on pro-democracy work, we have decided to continue the focus on building the capacity of our young women. It is important to engage and support young women in these difficult times.

So two of our successful and popular projects are back - these are the "Emerging Leaders Forum" (ELF), and photography project "Picture this!". While ELF will be based in Suva, the latter will be going to Nadi. We look forward to wonderful results from both projects.

In Solidarity,
Virisila Buadromo

FWRM baby boom

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is pleased to announce the imminent arrival of two brand new members! Programme Manager, Naeemah Khan (seated in picture), and Administrative Assistant, Ranjeeta Chand (left), are both expecting babies in early March.

These are the first babies for both Naeemah and Ranjeeta, but not for FWRM. Arrivals from our recent past include Board Chair, Gina Houng Lee's son, Max. Former trainer Seema Naidu had twins Jaden and Jay during her time at FWRM, followed closely by the arrival of board member Imrana Jalal's son, Roma.

In line with the organisation's stance on maternity rights for working women, both Naeemah and Ranjeeta will be taking three months paid maternity leave. This component of the proposed Employment Relations Bill means women who have children are not also faced with crippling financial penalties for rasing the next generation of Fiji Islanders.

The new FWRM babies will also herald in a fresh chapter for the Movement. Their arrival coincides with our shift to a new office, which is more visible and safely accessible for our clients and visiting students. ■

NGOs call for peace

In light of the recent political events in Fiji, civil society groups and concerned citizens came out in public to show their support for peace, non-violence and human rights. The last few months has been a trying time for the local NGO community, with increasing differences of opinion over our engagement with state institutions, as well as differing analyses of politics and governance issues.

However, civil society organsiations are united in a belief in peace and non-violence - which has been expressed in a variety of ways. Demonstrations included weekly silent vigils, organised by fem'LINKPACIFIC, along with their Blue Ribbon Campaign. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement showed support for the rule of law by wearing black every Thursday, and walking for peace through central Suva.

A candle burns for peace at the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral in Suva (above), while FWRM's Naeemah Khan keeps silent vigil (below).

Concerned citizens and human rights activists walk for peace in Suva on Thursday, December 14, 2006 (above) The informal walk was a spontaneous show of support for peace, human rights and the rule of law.

Human rights lawyer and FWRM board member, Imrana Jalal, speaks peace at a Blue Ribbon vigil in Suva on November 30, 2006 (right)

Bookdrive for Kup kids

The Kup district is a comparatively undeveloped area in Simbu Province in the rugged Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Although coffee is the major cash-crop, poor roads and market infrastructure make it difficult for people to get their produce out to markets.

Tribal fighting in recent years has also severely damaged development in the area. Women from four rival tribal groups in Kup came together following this devastating breakout of violence and formed the Kup Women for Peace (KWP); with the intention of *Downim heavy belong all mama* (reducing the sorrow of the mothers) by putting a stop to tribal war.

KWP has done an amazing job of promoting peaceful development in Kup, but they can use all the support they can get, especially in a place where the closest facilities may be a day's walk away over rugged terrain.

The teachers of Kup Primary School, many of whom are young women, do the best that they can and their students are eager to learn about the outside world. However, the limited resources make doing so much more difficult. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement met up with the Kup women to discuss young women and leadership, when Executive Director Virisila Buadromo and Young Women's Officer Anna Padarath visited the Highlands in 2006.

Against the stunningly beautiful backdrop of the mountainous district, Virisila and Anna listened to stories about the harsh realities of life as a young woman in Kup.

Upon their return to Fiji, Anna shared the Kup stories with the 25 graduates of FWRM's Emerging Leader's Forum (ELF), an intensive one year leadership programme for young women. The ELFs now feel a strong sense of solidarity with the young women and children of Kup and decided on a book drive as practical support for their counterparts in the PNG Highlands.

The book drive has been very successful and the ELFs have managed to collect a range of quality books that have been kindly donated. Currently they are fundraising to send the books to Kup, with stalls at the monthly ROC Markets in Suva, as well as raffles. The ELFs are also selling feminist t-shirts with all the proceeds going towards the Kup Kids Project.

■ ***Michelle Reddy***

Ruined

Compiling the statistics that figure in our annual Pacific Almanac is always a sobering and challenging experience, and in the case of unemployment figures for our various islands, an alarming one.

Granted, statistics offices around the region concede these numbers are somewhat unreliable, in many cases they don't identify underemployment, but even with this and other qualifications, the situation is deteriorating, not improving.

The fact that it is the Pacific's young people that make up the vast number of our unemployed gave some additional context to the recent political and human crises in Fiji and Tonga featured in this issue of *Pacific*. In Tonga, six young people have died in the riots of "Black Thursday" – November 16. Reports from Tongan media have suggested that the deceased were among the rioters that trashed downtown Nuku'alofa, causing millions of dollars worth of physical damage.

There have also been widespread reports that they were part of a drunken crowd, that was under or unemployed and vulnerable to exploitation by others.

Tonga's consul in Australia has said that many of the young people involved in the riots had been deported from Australia, New Zealand and the United States, after being jailed in those countries for petty crimes, where as she put it, "we taught them how to be good criminals."

In Fiji, which for some years has been struggling with a workforce that is growing dramatically in size as thousands of school leavers graduate, the economic future again seems grim. Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama's coup has prompted members of the "Emerging Leaders Forum," all graduates of a Fiji Women's Rights Movement's mentoring program, to write, "What we have now is a ruined future for all of us, young people in

d Future: What now?

particular. We have a future where young people might not have access to education through cancellation of international scholarships; unemployment will increase locally as well as international work schemes being stopped and our confidence in law keepers has reached an all-time low.

"It is amazing how adults like the Commander and the Prime Minister were not able to sort things out by talking. We need to stop this 'coup culture.' Commander, you have taken us 20 years back in history. We have very negative male role models in Fiji – it is no wonder our crime rate is increasing."

One of the signatories to that letter is Jacque Koroivulano, president of the Pacific Youth Council, who told leaders gathered at the Pacific Islands Forum in November that the concerns of young people should be given more weight, and backed up with budgetary support.

The challenges of providing sufficient opportunity for the Pacific's young people are well known from Majuro and Saipan to islands further south—witness Port Moresby's ongoing crime problems and riots in Honiara early last year. Regional leaders are hoping that the recently announced Pacific seasonal work scheme with New Zealand will provide a model to alleviate some of the pressure. But the pressure is on to continue to find solutions at home, too.

Sandra Torijos / Isis International-Manila

■ *Samantha Magick*
Pacific Magazine, January 2007

Source: ISIS -Manila

This is the original 'Ruined Future' letter to the editor written by the ELF alumni. The letter was widely published and quoted; a brave move by the vocal young women. ELF graduate Jacque Koroivulano was later detained by the military.

Despite pleas to Army Commander Frank Bainimarama and Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase to work together, an illegal takeover has taken place.

What we have now is a ruined future for all of us, young people in particular. We have a future where young people might not have access to education through cancellation of international scholarships; unemployment will increase locally as well as international work schemes being stopped and our confidence in law keepers has reached an all-time low.

It is amazing how adults like the Commander and the Prime Minister were not able to sort things out by talking. And it is very disappointing to see the Commander taking executive authority from the President of Fiji; it is an unconstitutional move and makes a mockery of democracy. We don't want this type of leader or role model.

The essence of the rule of law requires us to solve our problems using lawful processes and democratic institutions such as the courts, the police and civil society. Nothing can be achieved by putting the fear of the gun in Fiji's people. It is not only inhumane but unlawful too.

With 35 per cent of our population living in poverty, the illegal takeover will push more people into absolute poverty with no provision to support their children's education and people will struggle even more to make ends meet.

Women are usually marginalised in development and their position will get even worse during and after this crisis. To make things worse, there have been threats of violence and rape against vocal women. These criminal acts will not help anyone. In fact it will make us women more vocal against the act of terrorism.

There are many ongoing programmes to assist in the capacity building and training of women and young girls in various fields. Now that we have aid sanctions from our donor communities, all that effort has gone down the QEB drain.

We need to stop this 'coup culture'. Commander, you have taken us 20 years back in history. We have very negative male role models in Fiji – it is no wonder our crime rate is increasing.

We should let the rule of law and lawful processes take their course without any threat. Please put the elected government back. ■

20 years of change: A

Community Outreach

1986

FWRM established - To teach about the law and change laws unfair to women. However were labelled as radical women promoting overseas issues.

1999

Promotion of Women in General Elections - Women's voices was not being heard in the political arena. Two of the eight women who were part of Parliament were from the women's movement.

2004

Protest about Fiji's nomination for the International Criminal Court election for judges. FWRM stated that Fiji's nominee was allegedly was involved in the drafting of decrees supporting the illegal regime of 2000. FWRM lobby to endorse a female Fijian judge was declined and the Government instead nominated a former chief justice .FWRM showed ICC why they should not support Fiji's nominee. Threats of a defamation suit against FWRM and its Director, were received the nominee's lawyer.

Legislative Reform

1986 – To date

Draft Sexual offences legislation: Women in rural and urban areas complained that the laws were outdated. While men and women began to understand why laws needed changing, the Government of the day and politicians ignored requests by NGOs to change the rape laws. Laws were under review before the 2006 coup.

1993 -1995

Lobby for the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): Makes government committed to programs for women's equality. The Government of the day insisted on being shown that all women wanted this law. Unprecedented meetings, petitions and lobbying finally led to Fiji ratifying CEDAW in 1995.

1993-2003

Family Law Campaign (active during three different governments): Laws were unfair to women and children. Many in government and politicians disagreed as they misunderstood the act to be anti-men, or anti-Christianity. However in October 2003, the Family Law Act was passed unanimously by both houses of Parliament.

1994 to date

Employment Relations Bill Campaign: Reforming outdated and sexist labour legislation. Maternity protection, equal employment opportunities, equal pay for work of equal value and penalising sexual harassment in the work place was incorporated into the ERB 2006 and was at its last reading in December 2006. FWRM critiqued and made public their concerns about protection of women and human rights in the Employment Relations Bill.

2002

Report to CEDAW Committee: FWRM spearheaded the NGO shadow report. NGOs commented on Fiji government actions which antagonized government but stimulated them to implement the Family Law Act.

2005

Anti-Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity (PRTU) Bill Campaign: FWRM believed that the Bill was unconstitutional and illegal. FWRM and FWCC with NGOCHR lobbied and protested against the SDL-introduced PRTU Bill. Three FWRM members arrested over anti-Bill peaceful protest. Two march permits were denied.

FWRM

Reflections of *Imrana Jalal*

In the beginning...

"When the Crisis Centre began we knew
not going to be popular with the governme
sister organisation which could deal with
women's rights or feminist politics. So
Alafina Vuki, 'Atu Bain, Kuini Bavadra, E
anecdotes that come out of that time. An
independent woman's organisation that
woman's rights issues, to put women's rig

...to

"Vigilance: Don't take for granted the righ
assume that the right to equality in the
employment, has not come without a stru
rights; they're hard won fights. Given
society, don't assume that those rights w
an education in gender issues because y
generations. Be on your guard - the funda
the conflicts in Melanesia and Fiji mean
that have been won."

A herstory of activism

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement, formed in 1986, is a multi-ethnic and multicultural non-governmental organisation committed to removing discrimination against women through institutional reform and pushing for change. By means of core programmes, as well as innovative approaches, the FWRM practice promotes democracy, good governance, feminism and human rights. It strives to empower, unite and provide leadership opportunities for women in Fiji, especially for emerging young leaders.

The Movement continues to stand by these principles, both publicly and in the work that we do in Fiji's communities and the wider Pacific region. This means that we have often had to face harsh criticism, arrest and even violence when engaging with a state that opposes these principles. Surviving 20 years of advocating for Fiji's women is a moment of celebration for us all.

a founding member:

that a lot of things that we wanted to do was ent so we thought we'd form an independent some of the more controversial elements of there was Shamima, myself, Peni Moore, Ema Drauvesi - there's lot of interesting little d so that was the main purpose; to form an would engage politically with feminist and ghts on the national agenda."

o young women

nts won by those before you. Don't e Constitution, maternity rights, ggle. Don't take for granted those the return to conservatism in this won't be taken away. Get yourself ou have a responsibility to future amentalist backlash heightened by the slow whittling away of rights

Source: fem'LINKPACIFIC

Advocacy for Democracy

1987

Rabuka Coups – FWRM criticised Rabuka & the army. FWRM spoke up for democracy and the rule of law because it is the foundation for good governance and underlies any rights for women. This resulted in activists threatened, intimidated and assaulted. Members of the women's movement were arrested and detained.

1995-97

NGO's submissions to the Constitutional Review: FWRM made submissions regarding women's rights in the constitution and to ensure the implementation of a strong Bill of Rights. NGOs active in nation making and raising awareness of issues on non discrimination and multiracialism. This was a very unpopular move with some but eventually women's rights were enshrined in the 1997 constitution.

1996

Women's Coalition for Women's Citizenship Rights: Both the 1970 and 1990 constitutions ignored women's equal citizenship rights. The 1997 constitution grants equal citizenship and residence rights to both men and women. Furthermore, it was due to the engaged work of activists that Fiji has one of the most progressive Bill of Rights globally.

2000

Coup: FWRM strongly opposed the actions of the George Speight team. Did not support or engage with the interim administration – labelling it illegal. FWRM opposed the Blueprint for Affirmative Action. This resulted in phone calls and threats to staff about their stance. FWRM lost one staff and three management board members as a result of the coup.

2001

Chandrika Prasad legal challenge: Prasad's home had been robbed and damaged, his livestock had been butchered and his crops destroyed. Prasad sought "a declaration that the 1997 constitution remains in force and that the elected government of Fiji had not been lawfully dismissed" FWRM was one of the NGOs that filed an affidavit in support of Chandrika Prasad. Prasad case received wide support from civil society community with affidavits written against the appeal of the interim administration. The affidavits showed that opposition to the Interim Administration did not emerge in public because dissent was suppressed by force. Focused on violations of human rights, eg freedom of expression and movement.

Young women talk sex

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement recently revived its infamous Issues Collective meetings for members and friends. While these meetings have again been put on hold in 2007, due to the political climate, there was time for one in late 2006.

Around 20 people gathered at the Forum Secretariat Bure in early November last year to hear about research by Roshni Sami, a Master of Arts graduate from Auckland University and current coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalisation. Roshni was based at FWRM in 2005 while she researched how young women in Suva make sexual decisions.

Her key findings were that belief and value systems impact power hierarchies in the sexual and reproductive health sector, and infiltrate bureaucratic processes in significant ways impacting the distribution of power and resources. Amongst young women, higher levels of education or wealth did not necessarily correlate with agency, though they did increase women's choices.

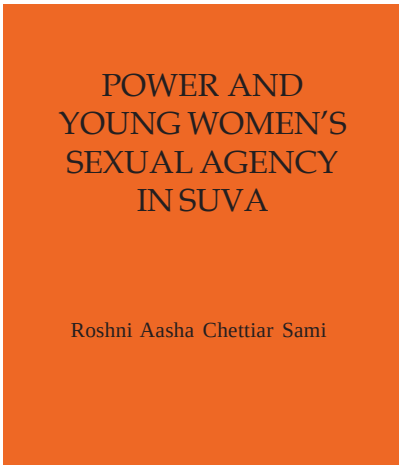
Young women who gained insight to alternative ways of 'being and doing,' through disrupting status quo belief systems based in patriarchal values, had an increased sense of agency. Increased agency would impact sexual agency.

Though how sexuality was constructed and situated in different women's lives was an important determining factor in whether this benefited the young women's sexual and reproductive health or not.

Power is inherent to understanding SRHR, and power relations help us understand: how central women are to the structures in which they live and therefore their location and power to change them; to recognise the value and power individuals have even from positions of marginalisation; how women are active reproducers of the same structures that marginalise them and that despite being marginalised always have power.

Roshni's thesis showed that a power relations framework can capture the nuanced aspects of these dynamics but is time-consuming and complex and therefore has limitations and is not always useful.

Roshni Sami (R) presents FWRM Executive Director, Virisila Buadromo with a copy of her thesis at the Issues Collective meeting in November 2006.



■ *Roshni's thesis is available for reading at the FWRM Resource Centre.*

Postcard from Florence:

Pacific voices at expert meet

I'll have to meet Michelangelo's David some other time – even though he was only a short walk down the road from the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre where I spent four days in late September 2006.

I was attending the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl child, as an observer and Pacific media liaison. The Pacific was represented by appointed expert Shamima Ali, coordinator of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. She was one of 12 independent experts at the EGM held in Florence, Italy from September 25 – 28, which was organised by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW).

"In many Pacific Island societies, 'culture' and 'tradition' are frequently used as justification for discrimination against, and even abusive treatment of, women and girls," Shamima said in her presentation to the EGM.

"But these 'customs' are often distorted versions of the original – such as the tradition of bride price being used to trade daughters for cash and the custom of informal adoption being used to secure child labour for the household."

Experts found that discrimination and violence against girls begin at the earliest stages of life and continue unabated throughout their lives. Girls often have less access to nutrition, physical and mental health care and education and enjoy fewer rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood and adolescence than boys. They are often subjected to various forms of violence and exploitation, such as sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation.

"I don't think any of us realised, when we started this, just how invisible the girl child is," said Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), Carolyn Hannan, at the closing of the meeting at the Innocenti Research Centre.

"We have a fantastic opportunity to try and change that."

Tara Chetty (middle) takes a break with South American girl-child experts outside the Duomo *in Florence last year.*

Over the course of the meeting, experts discussed how girls are largely ignored by governments and communities, which makes them more vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse.

For Shamima, the outcome document and the Pacific situation paper presented at the meeting, provide a good starting point for making the girl child 'visible' in the region.

"The meeting is over, but for us in the Pacific the work is just beginning," said Shamima. "The girl child has been missing from national policy and programming, and we will have to work hard towards changing that."

The Pacific situation report, including concrete recommendations for action, was released in late 2006 and is available from UNICEF Pacific.

The report from the Florence meet is also available, on the UNDAW website, and will be presented at the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2007. The report was drafted by experts in working groups, with the input of observers and organisers.

The final report has also been translated into child-friendly language, and distributed to girls around the world – including the Pacific. The girls' comments on the report will be taken to the Commission on the Status of Women meeting, which will also be focusing on the girl child.

UNICEF and UNIFEM Pacific facilitated Pacific participation in this process by supporting Shamima's attendance as an appointed expert, and I as an observer. They also hosted pre- and post-EGM briefings, to involve local civil society organisations in the process and to report on the findings of the EGM and its implications for girls in the Pacific.

As for you, Michelangelo and Botticelli – maybe next time. Ciao.

■ ***Tara Chetty***

Warning! Dangerous dealings

African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries are currently negotiating an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union. The EPA is the economic part of the Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000, which replaced the Lomé IV agreement.

Lomé agreements I-IV were preferential trading arrangements between Europe and it's ex-colonies in the ACP regions. They provided subsidies and set prices for the developing economies of the colonies, and were supposed to facilitate and encourage development; they also guaranteed supply of raw materials to European industry. Over the last thirty years little 'development' happened under this strategy: the Pacific still exports raw materials and European companies still use them for value-added production and on-sell goods for a profit. Why has value-added production of sugar not developed in Fiji? Why has the profits of this economic activity remained in Europe? These questions can mostly be answered by the post-colonial social, economic, and political situation Fiji is still working through.

The preferential trading relationships of Lomé have been challenged in the WTO so the EU is seeking to make its economic relationships WTO compliant. Therefore the EPA will have tovbe a reciprocal trading agreement, based on neoliberal 'development' principles.

This puts the Pacific in a very difficult and dangerous position, and poses huge risk to our societies, economies, culture and environment. Firsly, the negotiations have very little stakeholder participation and there is a huge disparity in negotiating power: the EU has divided the ACP countries into six blocs and is negotiating with each individually. Pacific ACP countries do not have the expertise to compete with the EU negotiators, and we also do not have adequate information from government departments to negotiate – for example what quantities and types of agricultural products we are currently producing. The Forum Secretariat is coordinating the Pacific EPA negotiations and their idea of stakeholder consultation has been

A protest from the 'Stop EPA' campaign
Source: www.traidcraft.co.uk

appalling. As is perfectly obvious in Fiji there is very little understanding in the general public that these negotiations are actually going on, let alone the content or the consequences, if the Pacific EPA is actually signed at the end of 2007.

Secondly, the EU has shot down key development aspects of the Pacific EPA proposal making a mockery of the development principles fundamental to the Cotonou Agreement. Forum Secretariat experts assure us that this just part of 'negotiating'. However this answer is unacceptable. Trade agreements are not a game certainly not when lives and livelihoods are at stake. It is becoming very clear that the Pacific EPA is about continuing an exploitative economic relationship between the EU and the Pacific. For the Pacific, there are very few benefits that will come at great expense.

Thirdly, the EPA will trigger PACER. PACER - the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations - is an agreement the Pacific Forum island countries were bullied into signing by Australia and New Zealand, and which will mimics a similar transition from trade preferences to free trade in goods but between the Forum island countries (which includes Australia and New Zealand).

A fourth concern is that the Pacific EPA proposal opens up services. Services is an extremely complex area. PACER does not require negotiation on services until Pacific countries have experience. A feminist lens can easily foresee huge gendered consequences from the proposed labour mobility scheme as well as from increased barriers to public services such as health, education and utilities that can result from removing regulation in these sectors.

Adequate social impact studies on the EPA have not been conducted. The few existing studies are being conducted by staff that have experience mainly in commerce and economics, and do not have sufficient experience in social, gender and environmental issues. For example, the Forum Secretariat EPA staff have not consulted with the Forum Gender Issues Advisor on their work. It is evident in the Pacific EPA proposal that social factors have not been considered well enough.

Finally, we, the Pacific civil society organisations are behind on trade issues: we don't know enough about trade, nor how it will impact our work and communities.

It would be absurd if the Pacific signed the EPA in its current form. It is being negotiated on a fast-track without adequate consultation or impact studies, and with a huge imbalance in negotiating power and capacity between the two parties. Trade agreements are made behind closed doors and profoundly restructure our economies. Trade agreements are the latest tool for the spread of neoliberal policy and values. Trade is a feminist issue, and it's great that FWRM now has *Gender and Trade* as a focus area.

■ ***Roshni Sami, PANG***

ICRC studies women and war

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 2000 commissioned a study *Women and War*, by Charlotte Lindsay, on the fate of women in situations of armed conflict.

The study contains a wealth of information on how war affects women. Some statistics reveal interesting facts:

In the United States military, 14 per cent of active duty personnel are women.

In Sri Lanka, a third of the fighting forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are women.

In Eritrea, at least one fifth of the army is made up of women.

However, Charlotte Lindsay states in her study that "the circumstances surrounding a woman's decision to join the fighting forces vary''.

Much of the literature on women in armed conflict situations previously published has tended to focus on sexual violence, and rightly so.

But there are many more ways in which armed conflicts affect women: displacement within a country or beyond national borders, lack of access to medical care, family separation, loss of spouse (and bread earner), loss of children, maiming by anti-personal mines.

Kenyan soldier (above) Women also join armed forces in conflict zones.
Source: ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has pledged to the world community its commitment towards addressing the plight of women affected by armed conflict. The ICRC ensures that the specific protection, health and assistance needs of women and girls affected by armed conflict are appropriately assessed in its operations with the aim to alleviate the suffering of this specific group of victims.

Even though sexual violence is strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law, this nefarious practice continues to do harm to women in many parts of the world.

The ICRC continues to raise awareness among those involved in armed conflicts wherever possible.

■ *Josua Tuwere, ICRC*

This is what a Speaker looks like

Nancy Pelosi (above) is the new Speaker of the US House of Reps
Source: AP/Steven Senne

In the United States, Representative Nancy Pelosi made history on January 4th when she became the first woman Speaker of the House. After a roll call on the floor of the US House of Representatives, the new 110th Congress selected Pelosi, an Italian-American feminist and grandmother of six, as its Speaker.

As Pelosi took the Speaker's gavel for the first time, she announced, "I accept this gavel in the spirit of partnership, not partisanship."

Throughout the many speeches and events celebrating her new role, Speaker Pelosi, a self-identified feminist, emphasized the importance of her win for American women and working mothers.

In her speech before Congress, Pelosi said, "It's an historic moment for the women of America. It is a moment for which we have waited over 200 years.

"Never losing faith, we waited through the many years of struggle to achieve our rights. But women weren't just waiting. Women were working. Never losing faith, we worked to redeem the promise of America, that all men and women are created equal.

"For our daughters and our granddaughters, today we have broken the marble ceiling. For our daughters and our granddaughters now, the sky is the limit."

President of US-based Feminist Majority, Eleanor Smeal, said of Speaker Pelosi's win, "Feminists everywhere are celebrating. She gives hope to the dream of equality being realized in our lifetime."

■ *www.feminist.org*

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

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

Look out !

Picture This!

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is again celebrating International Women's Day, March 8th, with Picture This! - an innovative photography project for girls. This year, we're focusing on girls aged 10 to 14 who are based in the West. The photography workshops will be held at the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre in Nadi. The girls will learn how to compose shots, with the help of local photographer Adi Nacola, and will take creative photographs expressing the theme of IWD 2007. An exhibit of the best pictures will be launched on March 8th in Nadi.

AGM

The next Movement AGM is scheduled for the end of March 2007. Check the website for updates on a venue and confirmed date. Also, a notice will be issued in The Fiji Times and sent out on email three weeks before the meet.

ELF 2007

We're all set for another year of the Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF) - FWRM's acclaimed leadership programme for young women. This will be the third run of the year-long programme, where young women aged from 18 to 25 examine themes such as the sugar industry, the environment, tourism, international governance and feminism. ELF 2007 graduates will join the wide network of ELF alumni, who continue to engage with issues around social justice and women's rights. This year's programme is scheduled to begin in March.

www.fwrm.org.fj

Thank you for all your positive feedback on our brand new website! Please keep logging on to check out our latest press releases and activities. Send comments to tara@fwrm.org.fj

Gender advocacy

FWRM will be working closely with our network of Community Paralegals to conduct gender training among communities. This training will help empower communities to push for legislative change in the area of employment rights and sexual offences. FWRM has been part of the long-running campaign for the passage of the Employment Relations Bill, as well as reform of the Penal Code. Based on the Paralegals' recommendations, FWRM trainers will help these community-based workers conduct training in four local communities on areas such as human rights, gender, discrimination and employment. The workshops will be held from July-October this year.

We're moving!

FWRM is saying farewell to our home of five years, the little wooden house at 115 Robertson Road. We're moving on to a new premises, closer to central Suva and main bus routes - making it easier for visiting women and students. Look out for the announcement of our new address by email and on our website.

e-Balance

Let us know your preference - hardcopy *Balance*, e-version by email, or both. Tell tara@fwrm.org.fj