FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
VOLUME 4.2-4.3 SEPTEMBER 2007

Lutua: 'I will not be moved'

The recent industrial action by nurses in Fiji brought to the fore the diminutive Kuini Lutua (pictured) and her determination as general secretary of the Fiji Nursing Association to get fair treatment for her members.

Lutua was eventually arrested with a busload of her members for picketing outside the Government Buildings.

"I knew what my members wanted and I wasn't going to be moved," she told *Balance*.

But where did this firebrand unionist come from, and why does she care so much about a profession she was never a part of?

Interest in women's issues was stirred in Lutua by the late Amelia Rokotuivuna, legendary as the straight-talking feminist who was jailed several times for her activism. She was Lutua's role model through school. A leadership prize at Dudley High School, automatic membership to the Young Women's Christian Association, was what entrenched the stirrings of an awareness of women issues, from home to the workplace, and how these were being addressed.

Lutua's first job was with the Bank of New Zealand but then she joined the Reserve Bank of Fiji or the Central Monetary Authority, as it was known then; she is one of the bank's pioneer staff. Lutua had never been a union member nor did she believe in the union movement, but she was stuck in a rut – she had reached the highest position (and salary) one could without a degree.

"Until then, because I would get increments during the year, sometimes twice, I never saw the need to have a union," she told *Balance*.

So she joined the union. She even became its secretary; future Reserve Bank governor Savenaca Narube, who had just started as a research officer, was her president. The union pushed for a job evaluation and one of the positions that was evaluated was hers.

"It dawned on me then that unions, which were then generally viewed as trouble, could really be beneficial if you knew what to do," Lutua says.

"Industrial action is part of what we can do, allowed to do under the law. The stereotype was that if you were a unionist, you were a dangerous person."

"But a good trade unionist can always use negotiations and a good employer will always use the trade union as part of their development and it always works if they work together."

Her natural flair as a unionist was honed with formal training in Australia.

"I looked at it then in a broader context; the training helped me to see that we work with employers to improve work conditions which will contribute to the lives of people who receive the services offered. We, the trade union, existed to ensure fairness right up to contributing to policy making," Lutua said.

"The training made me more vocal in negotiations. As part of the bank employees' union, we looked at working conditions in general. The other area of course for me was ensuring that women's voices were heard in all this noise."

In 1998, Lutua asked the bank for a year off to allow her to complete her degree; she had been painstakingly working through a degree in business studies. In 1999, she was asked, along with other senior staffers, to reapply for her position as restructure fever hit the Reserve Bank. It was a requirement by the World Bank that the government of the day endorsed, they were told.

"But that was too much to ask," she said. "To ask me to reapply for a position I was doing very well in was downgrading."

So as union spokesperson, she marched into the governor's office (Ratu Jone Yavala) and expressed...

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From the Director's Desk

Greetings from Knollys Street!

And welcome to our new home here at number 21. FWRM staff have all settled in well, and are enjoying the added space and security the move has given us. The last few months have been a period of relative safety and calm, as we have been able to focus on implementing our projects, after the disruptive and dangerous days following the coup in December last year.

I'd like to thank all our many friends and colleagues who have shown us such support during these difficult times.

On a much happier note, the Movement is delighted to welcome two new junior members to the fold – Raina and Laila (see story, this page). We congratulate Naeemah, Ranjeeta and their families, and take their new arrivals as a sign of hope and renewal. These daughters remind us what we are working towards, and why it is so important that we continue to help make the lives of women better in the future.

This was also an opportunity for FWRM to showcase our progressive maternity protection policy, and I am happy to report that it all went smoothly. We hope that others will take this as an example that the slightly more limited maternity protection within the proposed Employment Relations Bill is easily achievable.

Happy reading!

In solidarity,
Virisila Buadromo

Full maternity rights for staff

THE Fiji Women's Rights Movement put its 'money where its mouth is' this year, with two staff enjoying their maternity benefits at the same time. All FWRM staff are entitled to full maternity protection, or 84 days paid maternity leave, for all children.

Programme Manager Naeemah Khan and Administrative Assistant Ranjeeta Chand are now back at work, but are also entitled to two 90-minute nursing breaks per day as breastfeeding mothers. The Movement firmly believes that if a tiny organisation of seven staff was able to sustain two fully paid staff on maternity leave (about one third of FWRM's workforce), then local businesses and large corporations can do the same.

Maternity protection in the new Employment Relations Bill covers women for their first three pregnancies. This provision has not been welcomed by employers, particularly those in the garment and tourism sectors, who believe it will cost too much. However, FWRM has shown by example that full maternity rights can be realised in any workplace.

The Movement has lobbied for many years for full maternity protection as a basic labour right, as prescribed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and in line with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As a society, we all have the responsibility of producing and caring for the next generation – this burden should not fall on women alone.

FWRM had double celebrations in March with the birth of Ranjeeta's daughter Raina and Naeemah's daughter Laila. Raina and Laila have not only brought joy to their families, but have proven that maternity protection is a just and workable clause. ■

Ranjeeta with Raina (left), and Naeemah holds Laila (below).

Fiji nurses' advocate Kuini Lutua speaks to local journalist Matelita Ragogo.

■ *from page 1*

...their disappointment before 15 of them resigned. They had worked out a redundancy package and, while some found work and others were recalled on downgraded, lower salaried positions, Lutua returned to school; she got her degree in 1999 before completing post-graduate studies in management and public administration.

Lutua also took three Women in Politics units at USP which rejuvenated her interest in gender issues. In 2000, as a student, she followed the nurses' industrial dispute which was referred to arbitration after a week's strike action.

On September 11, 2001, Lutua started as the new Fiji Nursing Association general secretary. The salary was not what she was used to but this was something she "felt" for.

She was conscious of initial resentment because she was not a nurse as her predecessors had been. So Lutua went out and met with her members, drinking kava with them if she had to, until the nurses began to confide in her and eventually, had full confidence in her as a trade unionist.

Her experience and academic background pushed her to train her staff to make presentations to decision makers to ensure that their perspective as nurses was reflected in national policy development and implementation.

Lutua's first 'industrial action' involved student nurses. Between 1998 and 2001, mass resignations by nurses being recruited overseas made a panicking state over-recruit student nurses, but without expanding facilities or raising the budget. The student nurses got their demands in two days, through arbitration: an improved budget, eight tutor positions were created, menus were improved and a bus was provided for nurses' transport.

In 2003, there was a civil service job evaluation, with recommendations expected to be implemented in 2004. Some recommendations were implemented – but only for policemen, prisons officers and soldiers, largely male-dominated professions. In 2005, Lutua led her second industrial action, but only cost of living adjustment (COLA) dues were paid.

Negotiations never stopped though and in April 2006, the FNA signed a Memorandum of Understanding and a Partnership Agreement with the Laisenia Qarase-led government "to rectify" the remaining issues.

"When the agreements were implemented only for the police, the army and the prison officers, that's when I started arguing that this was blatant gender discrimination," explains Ms Lutua.

"It has never been political and will never be. Our struggle has been about the State honouring contracts it had signed with the nurses."

Lutua and a team from the Association were preparing to make a presentation to a cabinet sub-committee about a Bill on radiation, when they were informed of the military takeover on December 5.

The interim regime imposed a five percent salary cut across the board for civil servants and then reduced the retirement age to 55 years. This meant the most experienced nurses were sent home, in the face of an acute nurses' shortage. And then the interim administration decided it would withdraw the MOU signed between the FNA and the Qarase government.

"That's why we fought and are still fighting," said Lutua.

"This is an agreement protected by law and must be honoured. You can shelve it but not withdraw it, you can't."

Naturally, Lutua was disappointed when Labour minister Bernadette Ganilau refused to exercise her powers and refer the nurses' case to arbitration.

"I have the utmost respect for nurses. It is a vocation that demands so much but gives back so little, except the satisfaction of knowing they have given the best nursing care needed," she said.

"There are a lot of women out there, educated and holding positions whose capabilities are not fully realised and whose work are hardly given the recognition it deserves, and I speak also of the women who hold positions in the upper echelon of the civil servants – we need to change that."

In the world today, there is a reported shortage of four million nurses. Fiji's nurses are highly marketable and with their good reputation, the Cook Islands began recruiting nurses here in earnest two months ago. Those who get contracts in the United Arabs Emirates get two free flights home per year and most have managed to take their families across.

New Zealand and Australia are traditional recruiters but Saipan, Nauru and Palau have also started poaching our nurses. Although such recruitment drives are very good for nurses, the local health systems are left with recently graduated nurses whose lack of experience should not be taken lightly, she warns.

"This is not like an army where numbers matter. In the health sector, experience is what matters. That is why we are constantly bringing up issues of migration and compulsory retirement at 55," Lutua said.

"Senior, experienced nurses are relied upon by doctors, especially those who have just graduated.

"When we do not have a reliable health system, the ordinary people are the worst hit and the repercussions spreads over time. We must not allow our [nurses] to leave; the nation needs them for its very survival."

■ ***Matelita Ragogo***

Girls say no to violence

Six months on, and the celebrations for International Women's Day continue at the Fiji Women's Rights Movement as we prepare for the Suva showing of our annual Picture This! exhibit. Since 2006, FWRM celebrates IWD with the creativity of young women and girls. For Picture This! 2007, FWRM went to Nadi, in the West of Fiji, where a group of adolescent girls were given disposable cameras to explore the IWD theme: **Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women and Girls**.

At the Picture This! workshop in February, held at the Nadi Women's Crisis Centre, Shamima Ali of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre discussed the theme and local photographer Adi Nacola gave basic photography tips. Each girl's best photograph was enlarged and framed, and the Picture This! exhibit was launched by Edwina Kotoisuva, FWCC Deputy Coordinator, on a wet and humid International Women's Day at the Nadi Women's Crisis Centre. Kotoisuva described the theme as meaning simply *"that we should not let people who hurt women and girls get away with it."*

A Picture This! participant calls for an end to impunity for violence against women.
Picture: Adi Nacola

Speaking to the girls, their families and friends at the launch, she said, *"Many of us might hear about violence against women and girls in our communities and sometimes we hear about it in our schools, and for some of us violence against women is a very real part of our lives – we may see our mothers getting beaten up, we may hear about a cousin of ours who was raped or we may experience some of these forms of violence in our homes, schools or neighbourhoods.*

"Violence against women and girls includes domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, incest and sexual harassment. It does not have to be physical – sometimes it can just be words. The way men or boys pass comments on the streets or make gestures which sometimes make us feel uncomfortable. Violence against women and girls is like bullying. People who bully others do it because they know they can get away with it – they have the power to do it. Violence against women and girls happens BECAUSE we're women and girls – because very often people around us believe that because you are a girl or because you are a woman, you are not allowed to do certain things – like a woman is not supposed to answer back when a man tells her off, or if a girl walks down the street or pass a group of boys, she is supposed to be shy and put her head down and not carry herself with confidence. Sometimes we think that these are just little things but the things we consider "little things" which are unfair can grow into much bigger things where women are treated very unfairly. That is why groups like the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre exist in Fiji.

"Impunity for violence against women is when people who hurt women and girls get away with it. They may get away with it for various reasons. Sometimes, people who do these things to women and girls get away with it because people around him might support him and think that the girl is lying. Just imagine if a girl from your class were to go and tell someone that their teacher has done something really bad to them or their uncle has hurt them in some way – most people around you might say that she is lying and it is easier to believe a grown man than a little girl.

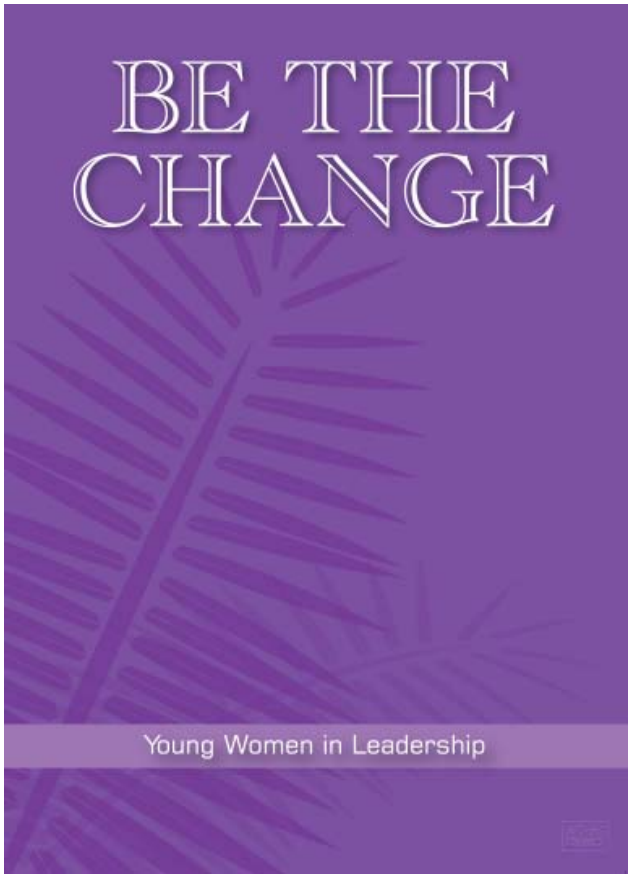
"I am here today to tell you that any type of violence against women and girls is wrong. It is against the law and it can be reported to the Police, and organizations like the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre can help women and girls who are going through these things.

It is refreshing to share this International Women's Day with the young women of Nadi and all your friends and family and community who have joined you here today. International Women's Day 2007 means a lot for us in the women's movement in Fiji and to be able to share this moment with you gives us nothing but hope and confidence for all the work that we continue to do in Fiji.

When I look around, I think It is safe to say that the women's movement in Fiji is in safe hands. They say that pictures speak louder than words – so while women like Virisila and myself have been doing a lot of talking in the media about these issues – your photographs tell their own story and send out a really important message to other young girls in Nadi and the rest of Fiji."

The Picture This! exhibit was on display at Prouds Nadi, before moving to Suva where the pictures will soon go on show downtown. Picture This! was made possible with the support of our partners the New Zealand High Commission and Caines Jannif Limited. ■

Young women call on leaders to "listen!"



IT'S had a long journey: from an inkling of an idea sitting in a room in Bangkok, through a national election and a military coup, to finally becoming reality in eight minutes of music, voices, colour and vision.

The idea for the Fiji Women's Rights Movement's *Be the Change: Young women in leadership* DVD was first sparked off by other young women filmmakers at the AWID Forum in Bangkok in 2005. The *Be the Change* project is about young women using the creative medium of video to speak to national leaders and decision-makers.

These young women, graduates of the FWRM Emerging Leaders' Forum, were trained in the use of camera equipment, scripting, shooting and editing, so that they could go out in the community and shoot their own stories. In the video, the young women filmmakers examine issues around leadership, including some of the barriers and opportunities for young women accessing leadership roles.

There were also some major barriers to getting the DVD itself off the ground. In 2006, early Fiji national elections pushed the project back to mid-year. Shooting was well underway, with a focus on sexual and reproductive rights, when political tensions flared in November and the project had to be out on hold. The December military coup and its aftermath of human rights violations kept the project on ice until March 2007.

This time, the young women threw out their original script and focused in on leadership – a quality they saw as greatly lacking in the actions of their national decision makers.

The video had its first big outing at the 10th Triennial Conference of Pacific women. The DVD was used as a tool to speak to decision makers about young women and leadership, and to show how young woman are able leaders in the community.

In the DVD, Beatrice Mar, a university student leader, spoke about how young women are being ignored:

Do you think young women have been listened to at the national level?

"Personally, I don't think so. [There were a few women] in the elected government and in the interim [regime] there are even less – and even from those women, none of them are young women.

It's difficult just being a woman, and to be a young woman - oh my! - that's even worse because who's going to listen? If men can't even listen to older women, how are we supposed to be even heard? So I don't think we are being heard at all at the national level."

And Roshika Deo, President of the local Rotaract chapter and ELF participant, shared her vision of leadership:

"I think a leader is someone who fosters change, who challenges status quo, and who motivates people to bring about positive changes to the society. That's what I think a leader is. I don't think a leader is someone who manages people. A leader doesn't ask people to follow them. A leader basically does what he or she does best and just because that person is a leader, people follow…in the sense that there is no management of a group or compelling someone to follow someone."

The filmmakers also spoke to girls, who are becoming leaders in their schools and families. Eight-year-old Maisy Beavers had clear ideas about girls and women leaders:

"A good leader should know how to talk, but listen to. A good leader should know how to fight, but fight for their people as well. A good leader should be a girl and not always a boy.

Because…I do think that women can be good as men, because some people think that boys and man should be treated differently than girls and women and they think they are stronger and smarter, but actually they are wrong, girls are smart and strong too."

By telling their stories through the powerful medium of video, examining their lives, their relationships with national decision-making bodies and voicing their concerns over leadership in Fiji, these young women will *Be the change.* ■

'Who is a feminist?'

*"What's the difference between a women's movement and a **feminist** women's movement?"*

These were just two of the questions raised at the second regional feminist advocacy training organised by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) Pacific, held in Papua New Guinea from the 16th to 21st July.

As the week-long training began, many of the young women participants said they would never consider identifying as feminists, mainly because of the negative images the word evoked.

One participant explained that this was why she was evasive when her partner asked about the training. However by the end of the week, feminism was de-mystified and most of the women who initially shied away from the concept stood up and claimed their identity as feminists.

The training, which was held on Loloata Island off Port Moresby, was about promoting gender equity and women's participation by enhancing analysis and advocacy skills around issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, political restructuring and social transformation, the political economy of globalisation, and political ecology and sustainability.

The day spent on sexual and reproductive health and rights got participants to start visualising their bodies and how they can be sites of resistance. In one of the day's exercises, participants analysed the tragic story of a group of Tuvaluan girls who were burned alive in their dormitory.

The girls, many of whom were from far off villages and outer islands, were locked up every night in their barred dormitory in order to "protect" them from having sex, getting pregnant and "shaming" their families. There was also a strict 9pm lights-out policy, in contrast to the freedom of the boys' dormitory. The fire started when one girl, who was using a candle to study, fell asleep.

Young women from around the region face off during a lively session on Loloata Island.

Facilitators from DAWN, WAC, PANG, and FWRM enjoy a light moment between sessions at the intensive week-long training.

In the session on political restructuring, the group discussed the marketisation of governance. The roll back of the state, from the aims of providing for the people to the aims of facilitating business and investment, was clear in the Pacific's experiences of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs).

Many participants experienced SAPs in one form or the other in their Pacific Island homes. Their examples included the corporatisation of Government services such as health, education and water. It angered many participants to see that their rights as citizens were being eroded and that greater power seems to lie in the hands of corporate bodies and intergovernmental organisations, like the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

One participant explained how in her health clinic in PNG there is no

doctor and many women have to travel long distances to get any medical attention. When the state is asked for assistance, the response is always "no money". However, the state responds very differently to requests by financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other transnational organisations.

On Friday, the young women got an introduction to global trade and sustainable livelihoods. The participants had to examine a can of tuna, and draw a chart of where it came from – which began with the tuna fish and included fishing boats, canning, advertising and distribution. Many were astounded at the complex issues crammed into a single little can, such as sex workers and the fishing industry, the health and safety of women working in canning factories, and the huge fisheries wealth of the Pacific region and how that plays out in the international trade arena.

"The 2007 Young Feminist Advocacy Training was highly successful. Using examples and experiences from their own lives, the participants came to a deeper understanding of a feminist analysis of issues affecting women in the Pacific," said FWRM Executive Director, Virisila Buadromo, who was also on the facilitators.

"This is not just a one-off experience for these young women, they have formed a network, and have also developed realistic action plans to carry their feminist analysis into their everyday work."

The 28 participants came from PNG, Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. One of the facilitators, Noelene Nabulivou of Fiji's Women's Action for Change, is a graduate of the inaugural FWRM/DAWN Pacific young feminist advocacy training in Nadi in 2005. This year the training was conducted by facilitators from FWRM, DAWN, WAC and the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG).

"These regional training processes contribute to DAWN's overall project of expanding and strengthening feminist networks, while training young women in critical feminist analysis," said DAWN Pacific Regional Coordinator, Yvonne Underhill-Sem.

Participants Michelle Reddy (Fiji) and Saini Seluka (Tuvalu), together with a young woman from the Cook Islands, will attend the third DAWN global Training Institute to be held in Cape Town in November.

Two of the FWRM facilitators, Anna Padarath and Tara Chetty, are also graduates of earlier DAWN global feminist Training Institutes. The intensive three-week trainings were held in India in 2003 and Uruguay in 2005.

FWRM and DAWN Pacific are grateful for the support of our partners NZAID and Oxfam New Zealand. ■

*Lora Galova helps the group get in touch with their bodies (*above*) on the sexual health/rights day.*

*Training graduates and facilitators take in the view as they boat away from Loloata Island (*left*).*

*Participants brainstorm 'what a feminist looks like' (*below*) on day 2.*

Baguettes building solidarity

It's exciting to travel anywhere for the first time, but Nouméa in New Caledonia was particularly interesting in still being a territory of the French. French is spoken everywhere and the level of development, the French food and wine, as well as people walking down the street with baguettes under their arms, made for a distinctly European flavour. 'But where are the Kanaks?' is what we wanted to know. They were around, just few and far between in the area where the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) is located.

And the conference? Oh yes, the Conference! The 10th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, held from the 27th to 31st May 2007, was an exercise in dialogue, dialogue and more dialogue. There was sharing of stories that resonated across the Pacific community, there was frustration with conservative stances, and irritation from having to tiptoe around egos. But there was also hope from meeting gatekeepers who are working from within to address the negative aspects of their culture and religion, and encouragement from women ministers who are committed to strategies for change. The 10th Triennial was also a valuable learning experience on the need to be familiar with agreed-upon 'language' (used in UN conventions), to show familiarity with past outcome documents, and to be more organised and form caucuses around women's human rights issues to negotiate at different levels.

The young women's viewpoint was included in a plenary session on 'Building a Women's Movement', led by Virisila Buadromo of the Fiji Women's Rights Movment. This was an opportunity to use a statement written by FWRM's Tara Chetty for an intergenerational dialogue at the AWID Forum in 2005. The 150 delegates were reminded that *"when the women's movement is analyzing power structures, it needs to also be looking at power within the movement. We also need to share power and this is central to the engagement of young women. And it's something that many young women feel the movement is not doing very well at the moment."*

Young women also bring with them new ways to effect change. As Shamillah Wilson has written in *Defending Our Dreams*: *"We recognise that our moment in time is different and that it will require a combination of experience, wisdom and new-fangled ways of risk-taking to effectively start addressing the challenges facing us."*

Addressing movement leaders, who are often reluctant to hand over the reigns, young women say, *"Don't worry; you can trust us, because you've taught us well"*.

The next day FWRM partners Kup Women for Peace (KWP) from the PNG Highlands and Tonga Women's Action for Change (TWAC) collaborated with FWRM on a workshop to discuss why leaders should work with young women.

In the workshop (**pictured**), entitled 'Empowering Young Women Leaders to BE THE CHANGE', we played FWRM's eight-minute video, *Be The Change* (see *Balance* page 5). The DVD is an example of the use of young women's energy and creativity, and the technology of the times. Copies were given out to workshop participants from Tahiti, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Samoa.

Participants at the session came up with clear recommendations, calling on regional leaders to:

Recognise the particular challenges all young women deal with, and the double discrimination they face; acknowledge the contribution and rights of women with disabilities; utilise the energy and creativity of young women in the ongoing development of the Pacific women's movement; and advocate for a distinct space for young women at national and regional events, and their inclusion in all official delegations.

Overall, the 10th Triennial was an excellent experience and opportunity and FWRM thanks Linda Petersen, the inaugural Manager of SPC's Human Development Programme, for helping the voice of young women be heard at the regional level.

■ ***Anna Padarath/Virisila Buadromo***

Life in Fiji: After the coup

Nine months on, don't bother scanning the international media for coverage of life after Fiji's most recent coup because there has been precious little. That was the case until *Dateline*'s Bronwyn Adcock travelled here in July. Here is an excerpt of her piece, which aired on SBS Australia in August.

REPORTER: Bronwyn Adcock

For holiday makers, not much has changed in Fiji. After initially being scared away by last December's military take over, tourists are returning to discover Fiji is as relaxing and safe as ever. But outside these little patches of Paradise and in the lives of ordinary Fiji Islanders, dramatic change has occurred.

One night in February, only kilometres from the international airport and glossy tourist resorts, the military picked up a 19-year-old boy. It was Alanieta Rabaka's youngest son, Sakiusa who was accused of smoking marijuana. Alanieta was frantic. She called the police.

ALANIETA RABAKA: I said can you please look for my son because he is a big boy, and I know taking him in the night they would think that he's a grown up man, but he's still a very young boy.

Sakiusa Rabaka disappeared into the military barracks at 11 pm.

ALANIETA RABAKA: About five in the morning my younger son was bought in. He could barely walk. He was just crawling.

REPORTER: How did he look to you?

ALANIETA RABAKA: He was in real pain, he was in real pain. And he just said "Mum, can I have two Panadol please". I got two Panadol, I gave it to him, he went upstairs. He slept. I didn't sleep.

The next morning she saw how badly he had been beaten in the military camp.

ALANIETA RABAKA: And the other two boys that were taken in with him said that when he was unconscious, they started kicking his head. They said "Oh, he's just lying to us, he's conscious, he just doesn't want to do whatever punishment that was given to them". Actually he was unconscious and they started kicking his head and that's how he received the head injuries.

Sakiusa's brain was haemorrhaging.

ALANIETA RABAKA: I was helpless because he was in pain most of the time and there was nothing I could do.

After one month of almost constant pain, Sakiusa Rambaka died. The postmortem cited the cause of death as haemorrhage as a result of blunt trauma.

Shamima Ali is one of few prepared to speak publicly. She has helped document hundreds of human rights abuses, including people being arbitrarily sacked, intimidated and the beatings of both civilians and political opponents.

SHAMIMA ALI: In the first few months people were regularly taken in, particularly in the middle of the night, pro-democracy activists, trade unionist, lawyers who were speaking out too much.

Human rights activist, Virisila Buadromo knew she was in trouble when she heard herself named on radio by Commodore Bainimarama.

VIRISILA BUADROMO, FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT: He specifically named myself as well as one of my board members, as people who were not helping Fiji get back on the straight and narrow.

Just before midnight last Christmas Eve, Virisila was taken from her home by the military. She had run an advertisement giving out Bainimarama's mobile phone number urging opponent's of the coup to text him. She was taken into the barracks.

VIRISILA BUADROMO: They kept on asking me in Fijian, who did I think I was, you know, putting out the Commander's mobile number, publicising his mobile number, do you realise what you have done. While questioning me they had a gun which they uncocked and cocked and they put it up to my head and just saying, you know what we could do with this.

Virisila was then made to lay face down in the rain, along with six other pro-democracy activists.

VIRISILA BUADROMO: That's when they started to physically abuse us. One of the things that, which I thought was quite strange, they asked all the females, "are you pregnant?" I was like no, and I was wondering what that was about. I remember Laisa saying yes and then immediately they just, with their boots stamped on your back, on your lower back. So they did it to all three females.

REPORTER: Did they do it to the woman who said she was pregnant.

VIRISILA BUADROMO: Yeah, they did it to all of us, I thought if she said yes, they wouldn't, but they did. I didn't think they would but they still did it and that's when they started really physically assaulting us, smacking, boxing your ears, so to speak, smacking up your ears, hitting your face with their boots, kicking you in the ribs and they made us lick their boots, do really degrading things like that. Then they started to threaten our families. They knew all these details about our families and they basically said things like "You know we could kill you now, put a bullet through all your heads, put you in a drum and throw you out of the wharf of or down at the Suva harbour, no-one would know and no-one would miss you".

Virisila says she is now a lot more careful with her criticism.

VIRISILA BUADROMO: Before, I would never have thought twice about putting out a statement. I never would have thought about putting out a statement, gotta say something, whereas now, following on what happened to me, I am very aware of not the repercussions on me but my staff being threatened and another of my colleagues has been threatened recently. We have to be careful about these things. We are operating in an environment of fear, you never know.

Today the streets of Suva look remarkably normal. The special emergency regulations have been lifted (only to be reinstated in September) and the military is back in the barracks. Up at Parliament House though, nothing is happening except a little gardening. Parliamentary democracy is on hold here until at least 2009. Until then, an interim Government headed by Commodore Bainimarama is in charge.

■ ***Bronwyn Adcock, Dateline/SBS***

Be fair EU: lift the kava ban

European bans on kava products have cost the Pacific Islands more than $US1 billion in the past six years, now a regional NGO is calling for the industry to be re-opened.

The Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG), says a new World Health Organisation (WHO) report shows kava exports to Europe can be safely resumed.

"The report shows what people in the Pacific have known for thousands of years," said PANG coordinator Roshni Sami.

"That moderate use of kava is perfectly safe."

There are far more dangerous products freely available throughout Europe, like cigarettes and alcohol.

"PANG is highlighting this issue to illustrate how significant non-tariff barriers can be to Pacific products in the export market," said Ms Sami.

"The Pacific has effectively had duty free and quota free access to the EU market since 1975 yet we still export predominantly raw commodities – sugar and tuna. Part of the reason we do not have more value-added processing, and more jobs in the Pacific is because of these complex non-tariff barriers.

"The European Union is constantly lecturing developing countries that they should be creating export industries to lift people out of poverty, yet they place this giant barrier to kava exports, and what could be a big growth industry for the Pacific."

The head of the Fiji Kava Council, Ratu Josateki Nawalowalo agrees.

"There is a lot of talk about addressing poverty, and here we are, sitting on a commodity that we know is worth hundreds of millions of dollars each year," said Mr Nawalowalo.

"We really need to be campaigning hard to have the kava bans in Europe lifted, and we need to be preparing ourselves for the prospect of kava exports being a big part of industry in Fiji.

The main kava producing nations are Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu, with Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands contemplating coming on board.

The ubiquitous tanoa *or kava bowl* Picture: The Guardian

Dr Subramaniam Sotheeswaran, Professor of Organic Chemistry at the University of the South Pacific, is one of the co-authors of the recent WHO report on kava-products and liver toxicity.

He says the links between kava-products and liver injury have never been proved.

The German ban on kava-products took into account rare cases of liver injury, and a relative lack of rigorous scientific testing on the *benefits* of kava.

In principle, this means that if the benefits of kava – the way kava helps with conditions like anxiety – was proved with more rigorous testing, kava-products would have what's called a positive risk-benefit ratio.

"They are saying that major tests are required to prove that kava works to do things like calm the body. The tests they want could take decades and would cost millions of dollars to carry out," said Mr Nawalowalo.

The July 2007 World Health Organisation (WHO) report indicating kava products can be safely sold to the public – with a few important safety provisions – has yet to be heeded by European countries with market restrictions on kava.

Dr Sotheeswaran says it is completely hypocritical to ban kava products when products like alcohol and cigarettes are freely available the world over. He said the WHO recommendations on kava-products would not be nearly as difficult to match (by Pacific producers) as the current requirements in Europe.

While countries in the European Union (EU) could not be "compelled" to ease market restrictions, but Dr Sotheeswaran.said they certainly should.

"They should allow Pacific Island Countries to export kava products into their markets – following the guidelines established by the WHO," said Dr Sotheeswaran.

"It is plainly unfair not to do so."

Ms Sami said she "couldn't agree more."

"The time has come for the EU to stop destroying a dynamic export industry for the Pacific," said Ms Sami.

"The EU needs to show that it is actually a 'partner' for development in the Pacific."

A symbolic kava ceremony to urge fair trade between the EU and the Pacific is planned for Thursday, September 27. With local kava industry representatives, fair trade advocates, and EU representatives invited to attend.

September 27th is a global call to action to highlight unfair trade negotiations currently going on between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, in the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

■ *Wesley Morgan, PANG*

Remembering Bertha

Countess Bertha von Suttner
Picture: League of Nations Archives

The Austrian Countess Bertha von Suttner was the first woman to have received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905. Indeed, without her the prize might not even have existed.

A wealthy but lonely man, Alfred Nobel lived in Paris when the penniless von Suttner barged into his life as household help. Nobel fell in love with von Suttner and enjoyed talking to her about love and life, and peace and war.

He told her that by manufacturing dynamite he was strengthening the prospects for peace, a contention that the von Suttner firmly rejected. In 1889, she condemned, in verse, the arms race in her best-selling novel *Lay Down Your Arms*.

Her novel sold better than any other book in the 19th century and Leo Tolstoy compared von Suttner's technique of rallying readers to her cause to that of Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the emancipation of American slaves. But von Suttner was also lampooned for her sentimental story of Sophie, an aristocrat whose life became a pawn in the hands of death and destruction in the midst of war. Only a woman could express such anti-war sentiments, her critics laughed. But on the eve of World War I, many Europeans also looked up to her for leadership in the cause of peace.

Although they did not marry, von Suttner and Nobel remained life-long friends and the Peace Prize idea was born when she, with her husband Arthur von Suttner, accompanied Nobel on a motorboat ride on Lake Zurich in 1892 and von Suttner pleaded with Nobel to allow a fixed amount to the peace movement.

When Nobel's will was finally read out after his death in 1896, she danced with joy at the news that a cash prize would be awarded annually for peace work in the name of Nobel. Von Suttner received the prize in December 1905 and Vienna hailed her a heroine.

Her last words were, "Lay down your arms! Tell it to all." World War I, nevertheless, started soon after her death in June 1914.

> *"My armaments are defensive,*
> *Your armaments are offensive.*
> *I must arm because you must arm,*
> *Because you arm, I arm.*
> *So we must arm,*
> *We arm more and more."*
>
> From *Lay Down Your Arms* (1889)
> by Bertha von Suttner

Today, the world is awash with weapons from 60 million small arms to 30,000 nuclear bombs and an outrageous one trillion dollars a year is spent on militarism and war. Too many girls stay at home while their brothers go to school. Women lack literacy and job training, and reproductive health rights are non-existent for too many. Rape has become a weapon of war and a cause of HIV/AIDS. Women are over 50 per cent of the world's population but make up only 16 per cent of the world's senior government officials and decision-makers.

We are living at a time of extremes of religious and political movements that are seducing women as well as men to their reactionary, often violent, behaviour.

"There were no radioactive, cancer-causing, lethal nuclear bombs in Bertha's days, but there weas mustard gas and bombs dropped from hot air balloons...Bertha had no problem calling for their abolition. So, wouldn't she be at the front of the campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons and for the abolition of war today," said Cora Weiss - head of the International Peace Bureau and president, Hague Appeal for Peace - stressing on the need for a gender-aware, gender-sensitive and gender-equal human security system in the world.

The sprawling baroque villa that was once the home of the von Suttners now belongs to Victoria Glawischnig, the wife of a retired veterinarian who bought it for breeding pigs and horses a few decades ago.

Glawischnig is now busy collecting donations for the eventual restoration of the dilapidated granary that was converted into a playhouse by von Suttner for regular performances with anti-war themes.

"This is the least that an ordinary woman like myself can do to keep alive the memory of a great woman whose roof I happen to share today," she says.

■ ***Mehru Jaffer, Vienna, Women's Feature Service***

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

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

Look out !

We have moved!

FWRM has settled into our new home, the little wooden 'villa' at 21 Knollys Street, next to an empty lot just opposite the Victoria Tennis Courts. We're now closer to central Suva and main bus routes - making it easier for visiting women and students. Our phone numbers stay the same, as do our staff - so come visit us soon!

Solomon Islands

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement continues its regional involvement with the upcoming Leadership for Peer Educators training in theSolomon Islands next month. The training, from 15th to 19th October, will cover topics such as gender, feminism, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and effective lobbying strategies. FWRM is partnering with World Vision, with the support of the Australian Government.

ELF 2007

Expect another bunch of quality graduates from the Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF) - FWRM's acclaimed leadership programme for young women. This is the third run of the year-long programme, where young women aged from 18 to 25 examine themes such as the environment, international governance and feminism, as well as learning basic leadership skills like public speaking and article writing. 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 graduation is scheduled for the end of October.

Family Law

Keep an eye out for new Family Law brochures, due to be launched in November this year. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been working closely with the Family Law Court to produce the eight brochures, which will also be translated into Fijian and Fiji-Hindi. The easy-to-read, colour-coded pamphlets will detail basic procedures and essential information on areas like divorce, property settlement, maintenance, child protection, violence in the home and parenting arrangements.

16 Days Campaign

Keep an ear out for what's happening in your area for the annual 16 Days of Activism against gender violence, held from November 25th to 10th December. This year's theme is *Demanding Implementation, Challenging Obstacles: End Violence Against Women.* The 16 Days Campaign continues to highlight important issues raised in past years, including looking at VAW as a public health crisis, the intersection between HIV/AIDS and VAW, and the protection of women human rights defenders. The campaign will also promote valuable advocacy tools such as key recommendations from the 2006 Secretary General's study on VAW.

e-Balance

Don't forget to drop us a line and let us your preference - hardcopy *Balance*, e-version by email, or both. Your comments, ideas and insights on our publication are also more than welcome! Tell tara@fwrm.org.fj