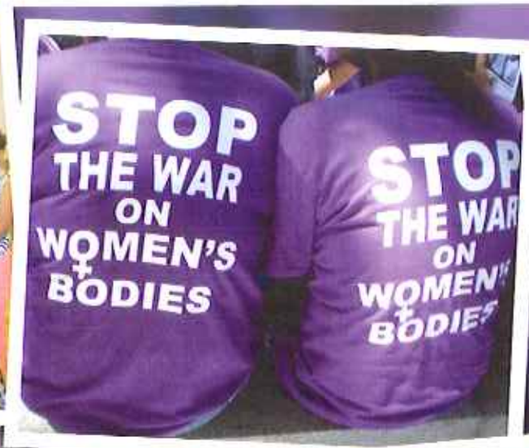
The Fiji Women's Rights Movement dove right in at this year's AWID Forum: The Power of Movements, held in Cape Town, South Africa, from 14 to 17 November. In collaboration with our partners the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, FWRM hosted a session on intergenerational and interregional movement building, entitled Tok Talk: Nourishing an Asia Pacific Women's Movement. The session was selected among hundreds of applicants for a place at the 11th AWID International Forum on Women's Rights and Development, because it attempted to bridge the Asia and Pacific divide, as well as the intergenerational one.

Tok Talk was run as a 'talk show', with FWRM's Tara Chetty hosting the hard hitting guests 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki of Tonga, Fathima Burnad of India, Paulini Turagabeci of Fiji and Ashnawati Ajub of Indonesia. The show also used short video clips and built a relaxed atomosphere that included snacks and decorative touches from around our region to spark an interactive discussion with the 'in-studio audience'. The audience and guests looked at questions such as: How can younger and older feminists collaborate to address the diverse challenges of our region? Is it really age, or is it class, socio economic status and location that most affect power-sharing in our movement? These questions will also form the basis of a collaborative FWRM/APWLD DVD project, also named Tok Talk, that has been shot before, during and is continuing after the meet.

FWRM staff also took part in other international panels. Executive Director, Virisila Buadromo was part of the Global Fund for Women grantees panel and examined the unique challenges facing women human rights defenders in Fiji. Young Women's Officer, Michelle Reddy, who is a graduate of the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) Training Institute (2007), was a facilitator of the DTI graduates' Feminist Families panel. This multilingual session examined what families mean to feminists, and what comprises a 'feminist family' – a discussion that will continue amongst the DTI network that includes Communications Officer, Tara Chetty (DTI 2003) and former Young Women's Officer, Anna Padarath (DTI 2005).



South Africa meeting rejuvenates Pacific feminism

By **Lisa Lahari**

FROM the south of Auckland to the southern Highlands of PNG, women of the Pacific can claim an historic moment at the 11th AWID International Forum at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in South Africa.

They gathered to make up the biggest AWID Pacific Delegation ever, comprising 3% of the more than 2,000 delegates at the meet. But as many attendees commented, from regions such as Africa, South America and Asia, it was the "loudest three per cent" they had ever come across. The representation and talking spaces by the Pacific at this event was encouraging for the younger Pacific women who were there.

Fiji's Iara Chetty, Paulini Turagabeci and Michelle Reddy, Tonga's Ofa-ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki and Papua New Guinea's Maya Popul are amongst those keen to close the gap between the new generation of Pacific feminists and older women from the region who formed the early awareness of women's rights as a social movement for change.

"I would hope that the movement for us back home anyway would be about mentoring young women because I think that's the future for women," says Popul, who is a board member for the YWCA in PNG. She says there's a need for older women to give of their knowledge very generously to younger women, "and to just have that culture of encouragement in there. Yes, there are a few barriers in there unfortunately but once we start embracing the mentoring of young women we'll know what it means to grow a movement, and make it move on."

Fiji Women's Rights Movement Executive Director Virisila Buadromo sees the energy from the younger delegates as a positive part of the undercurrent of change running through gender equality work in the Pacific.

"We're rejuvenating Pacific feminism. Currently, it needs some rejuvenation and nourishing and it's important that young women get involved in this process," says Buadromo.

"If we're going to have any kind of movement in the Pacific; to be part of any change that's social; the women's movement and the feminist movement need to have solidarity."

Tara Chetty, who as been with FWRM for the past three years, joined FemLINKpacific's Veena Singh-Bryar as a participant at the Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX), which was convened just prior to the AWID Forum. FemLINKpacific head, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, was a facilitator and part of the global women's media training initiative targeting young women during AWID 08, to actively shape input into the AWID program aimed at helping young women share their stories using a range of media.

Based on her experience at the last AWID in Bangkok three years ago, where Chetty says delegates from the Pacific met up during the meeting, and only while in the conference, she has used the internet to prepare delegates, share information and support AWID international committee member Noelene Nabulivou. Together with DAWN's Yvonne Underhill-Sem, FWRM's Michelle Reddy and Virisila Buadromo, they managed a strong online discussion group of Pacific delegates to South Africa sharing information, programme and arrival details and ideas well in advance of arrival.

That networking and organising commitment to keep those in gender activism in the Pacific aware of others in the same field is welcomed by Buadromo who says it has helped broaden the Pacific presence at this event – where Pacific delegates can talk about rights for women without the usual backlash.

"Unfortunately, in the Pacific, feminism is still considered the f-word -- people still identify themselves as women's rights activists or defenders. They have all these different sorts of identities – and have to make the journey towards realising we are all working in one direction in their own time."

Part of that journey involves claiming Pacific spaces at conferences such as AWID, and putting the rest of the world on notice that the Pacific advocates have arrived.

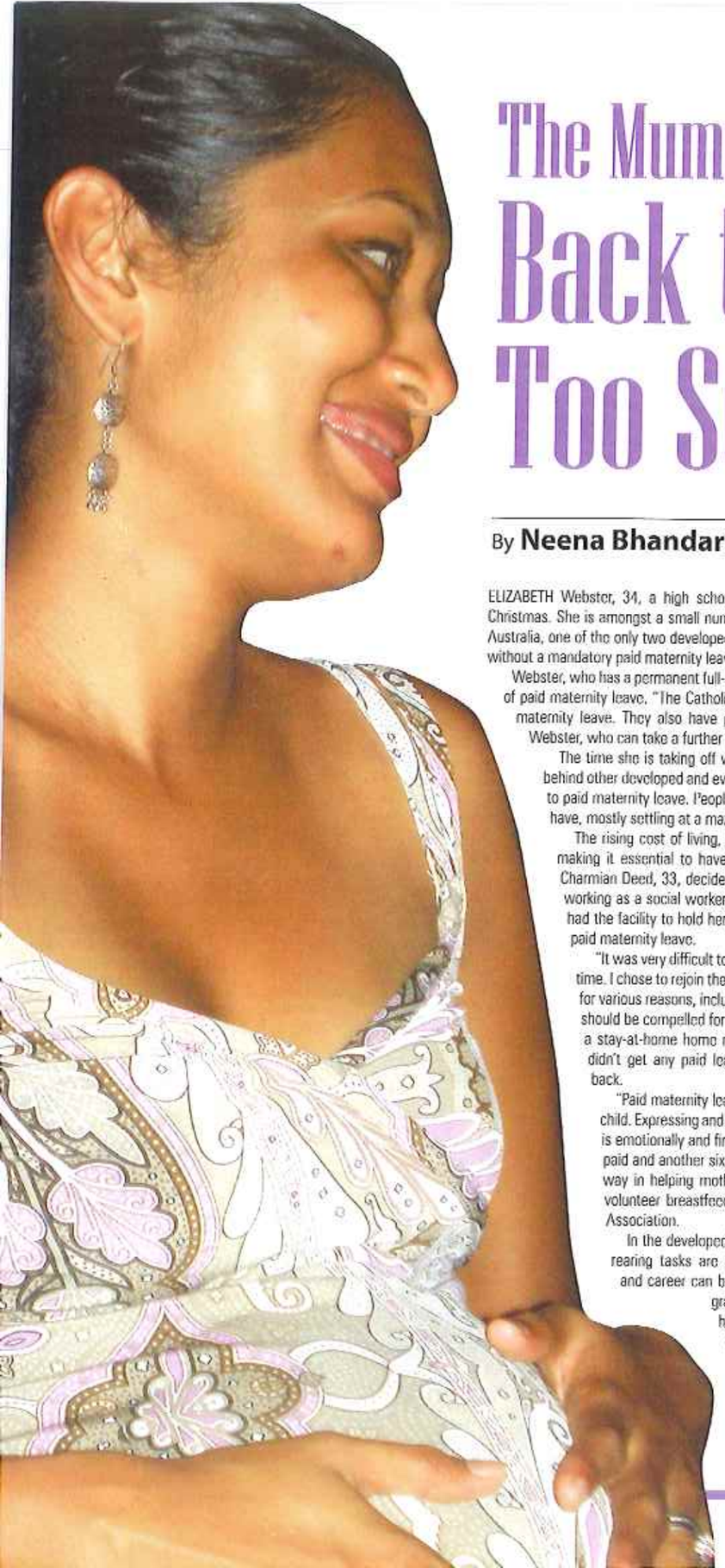
United Nations ESCAP adviser Vanessa Griffin of Fiji, who is part of the AWID board of Directors along with New Zealand's Marilyn Waring, says the higher profile and numbers for Pacific women at the global event meant a Pacific impact on the programme of events and speaker panels.

She said the AWID forum provided a chance for the Pacific delegates to "think and reflect; and connect with what's important in the Pacific from your priorities."

The overall 'power of movements' theme at the forum allowed women from the Pacific to talk about what movements mean for them, what movement building is, and how it can be done; in the same ways that women from other regions of the world came together to discuss the same issues.

"Having a large number of Pacific women allows you to think about that together because that is quite rare to have so many in one place such as this," said Griffin.

The Pacific profile was further lifted with the announcement that New Zealand's Brigid Inder was the new chair of the AWID Board, which was celebrated with flowers and the usual Pacific gusto at the closing plenary. Earlier, Cook Islander Lynnsay Rongokea-Francis, currently based in Thailand as the Regional Coordinator for the Asia-Pacific forum on Women, Law and Development, had also raised Pacific voices during her slot speaking as part of the small select panel at the morning plenary. Pacific-led panels or Pacific speakers on international panels were a feature of the daily programme of parallel sessions and the Pacific space doubled as a daily meeting point for the conference – a successful strategy Pacific delegates hope will be utilised at the next AWID meet. The AWID international forum on Women's Rights and Development is held every three years. For more details, visit www.awid.org .



The Mummy Returns: Back to Work Too Soon

By **Neena Bhandari** Women's Feature Service

ELIZABETH Webster, 34, a high school teacher, is expecting her second baby around Christmas. She is amongst a small number of mothers entitled for paid maternity leave in Australia, one of the only two developed countries in the world, besides the United States, without a mandatory paid maternity leave policy.

Webster, who has a permanent full-time job in a Catholic school, is entitled to 14 weeks of paid maternity leave. "The Catholic Education Office has been the forerunner in paid maternity leave. They also have provision for a two-week paternity leave," states Webster, who can take a further 14 months of leave without pay.

The time she is taking off will affect her seniority. As Webster says, "We are behind other developed and even many of the developing countries when it comes to paid maternity leave. People are reconsidering how many children they should have, mostly settling at a maximum of two."

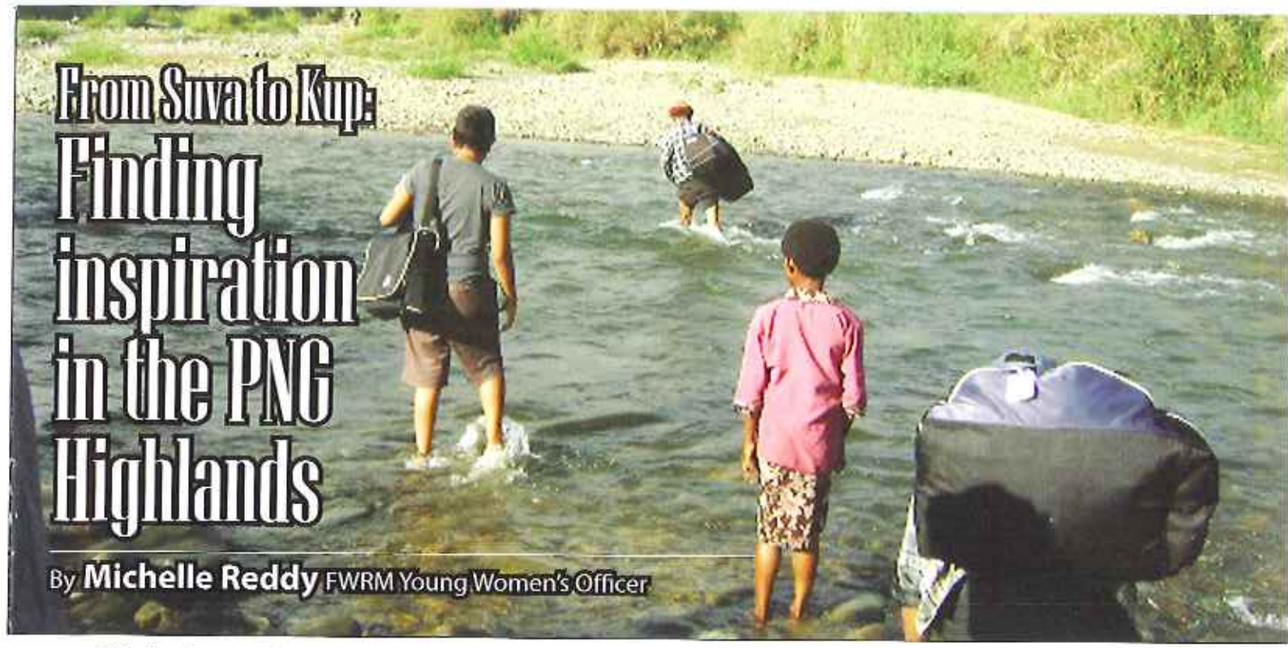
The rising cost of living, home mortgages and current lifestyle choices are making it essential to have two incomes for survival. When Brisbane-based Charmian Deed, 33, decided to have her first baby seven years ago, she was working as a social worker in a non-governmental organisation (NGO), which had the facility to hold her position for a year, but there was no provision for paid maternity leave.

"It was very difficult to cope. My husband was studying and working part-time. I chose to rejoin the work force when my daughter was five months old for various reasons, including postnatal depression, but I don't think women should be compelled for financial reasons to make a choice between being a stay-at-home home mother and quitting the job," says Charmian. She didn't get any paid leave when her son was born two-an-a-half years back.

"Paid maternity leave is important for bonding and breastfeeding the child. Expressing and storing breast milk and leaving the baby in childcare is emotionally and financially draining. In my opinion, at least six-month paid and another six months half-paid maternity leave would go a long way in helping mothers breastfeed their children," says Charmian, a volunteer breastfeeding counsellor with the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

In the developed world, where a large part of household and child rearing tasks are still performed by women, juggling motherhood and career can be challenging. "Today, many families do not have grandparents nearby to help. I have chosen to stay at home as I don't want to be away from my children and face paying a significant proportion of my salary on childcare," says Charmian.

Recent national research conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) found that only two per cent of mothers were in paid employment with a baby under one month old; 11 per cent, or one-in-10, women



From Suva to Kup: Finding inspiration in the PNG Highlands

By **Michelle Reddy** FWRM Young Women's Officer

Michelle and a group of Kup women cross a river – part of daily life in the PNG Highlands.

KUP, in the Simbu province of the highlands of Papua New Guinea, is a long, long way from Suva City. It's a remote and mountainous region, where it gets chilly enough to grow broccoli and the history of tribal warfare is very, very recent. On the way up, which involved a couple of planes and a long and bumpy truck ride, I kept thinking about the number of times I had talked about this trip - about how the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) would collaborate with Kup Women for Peace (KWP) to begin groundbreaking leadership training for Kup's young women.

It was as a graduate of FWRM's Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF) that I first heard about KWP and the amazing women who helped set up the organisation. Last year, I had the privilege of meeting two of the founding members, Mary Kini and Agnes Sil, at the DAWN Pacific/FWRM Regional Young Feminist Advocacy training. Meeting the two inspiring women made my visit to Kup, as an ELF graduate and current Young Women's Officer, especially poignant.

Kup is known for its history of tribal fighting, which came to an end following the peaceful invention made by KWP founding members. This is a role that KWP continues to play through its work as peace-makers and as community development implementers. KWP's interest in establishing a young women's programme in their community is based on the need to engage girls and young women in KWP's vision of peace for Kup and the highlands region. KWP approached FWRM to assist in the design of a programme specific to the needs of Kup. This conversation began with a scoping visit to Kup in 2000, which finally resulted in a workshop held in Kup from the 15th to 19th September 2008. This was the first of three training sessions to be held between 2008 and 2009.

While FWRM's own ELF training programme was designed for young urban Suva-ites, we worked with the Kup women to develop a programme suited to the rugged mountain terrain and their vision of peace for the highlands. And so, after a long and complicated series of chopping and changing via email, phone calls and radio telephone conversations between Suva and the mountains of PNG, a programme was negotiated and approved.

This first training focused on the principles of transformative feminist leadership. By the end of our week together, the Kup girls and young women saw themselves as leaders in their vision of a future of peace. But they had found it difficult to identify as leaders to begin with because, as was clear from discussions during the training, leadership has always been associated with men. This perception is also the case in Fiji and many other Pacific Island countries. I found this view in Kup very interesting, particularly because of the amazing role models in the leadership of the founding members of KWP.

Some of the barriers to taking on leadership, as identified by the participants, included custom not allowing them to speak or make any public decisions, lack of knowledge and opportunities to formal education, traditional laws that promote men and impact negatively on women such as marriage and bride price, girls and women used as compensation during times of tribal fights, and young women having low self esteem.

"This the first time that the girls have ever been asked or given the chance to think of themselves and what it is that they want for themselves. Because we have always been taught and worked as a community it is hard for the girls to explore themselves, their self esteem and what it means to be a young woman leader if they ever considered themselves as such."
Monica Sil, 17-year-old participant.

Despite living so far apart, I felt that young women from Fiji do share common experiences with our Kup sisters: The restriction on our freedom of movement, the perception that we are to be seen but not heard, the negative impact of tradition and custom, patriarchal attitudes and the gender stereotypes present in so many Pacific Island countries.

However, even with these similarities, the strategies we employed are vastly different to ensure that Kup's particular contexts are taken into account. For example, the young women in Kup have to walk long distances in what can often be a hostile and violent environment. One strategy they have developed to deal with this is to work with both men and women in their awareness campaigns. This means their travel is safer, as their male colleagues accompany them on their advocacy missions from community to community. The existence of relatively safe transport in Fiji, as well as the vibrant civil society that has brought about some level of acceptance of women's issues, means that young women are able to access avenues where their voices are heard in public forums, civil society as well governmental forums, the media and other fora.

"In terms of my personal development, I realized the many things that we take for granted like running water, food, transport and education. You learn to appreciate what you have but most importantly you embrace the challenges that young women in Kup face and strengthen solidarity of making a positive change in some way."
Shabina Khan, FWRM Human Rights Training Officer.

The experiences of the young women in Kup are extremely valuable for other young Pacific Island women, particularly in dealing with conflict. KWP's success in peace building and community development, strengthening the capacity of young women to invigorate the organization, as well as successful collaboration with their Fiji sisters, adds to the overall strengthening of the Pacific women's movement and further builds solidarity amongst Pacific women.

It is our duty to ensure that these rights are a living reality - that they are known, understood and enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. It is often those who most need their human rights protected who also need to be informed that the Declaration exists - and that it exists for them.

Ban Ki-moon
UN Secretary-General

Celebrating human rights

THE NGO Coalition on Human Rights, chaired by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, celebrated International Human Rights Day this year with a lot of shouting, a lot of walking, and even a bit of music. On Wednesday, 10th December, 2008, the Coaltion, colleagues, friends, and members of the public celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with a march through Suva City, from the Suva Flea Market to the Civic Centre. Around 90 women, men and children marched to the rally in front of the Civic Centre, shouting "What do we want? Human Rights! When do we want it? Now!". Another favourite was "Hey, hey, ho, ho, militarism's got to go!".

The rally began with some music from the Four Boys, before NGOCHR Chair and FWRM Executive Director spoke to the gathered crowd about the role of women human rights defenders in our long history of human rights activism in Fiji. Rev. Akuila Yabaki of the Citizen's Constitutional Forum, Tupou Vere of the Pacific Concerns Resources Centre, Peter Waqavonovono of the Young People's Concerned Network, and Shamima Ali of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre also shared their thoughts and vision for Fiji at the rally.

Unfortunately, the other UDHR celebration, a Kite Festival scheduled for the previous Saturday had to be cancelled due to forecast bad weather. FWRM had received an overwhelming response from the public for this event, so it will be held in 2009 instead.

had returned to work by the time their child was three months old; 22 per cent were back at work when their child turned six months old; 44 per cent were at work when their child turned one; and 54 per cent had returned to work by the time their infant was 18 months.

About five per cent of women return to work within days or weeks of leaving hospital. The report's author, AIFS Research Fellow Jennifer Baxter, says, "If paid leave is either not available or available for an insufficient time, some mothers may return to work sooner than desired."

According to a recent research conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), only one-third of Australian women have access to paid maternity leave and they are mostly educated, professional, higher-paid women working in large companies or in the public service. Women in social work and less-skilled or less-secure work usually don't get any paid maternity leave. This, however, may change as pressure mounts on the Kevin Rudd-led Australian Labour Government to incorporate a tax-payer funded parental leave scheme in the 2009 budget.

Recently, the Productivity Commission, the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians, proposed a tax-payer funded parental leave scheme. Under the scheme, mothers would be able to take 18 weeks paid maternity leave and fathers, two weeks, or vice-versa. Both would be paid at the minimum wage rate of AUS$544 (US$1 – AUS$1.55) a week, to a maximum per couple of AUS$11,854 before tax, with their employer paying superannuation.

The government-funded leave will be on top of any existing employer-funded scheme and must be taken within six months of giving birth. To qualify, a parent must have worked at least 10 hours a week for 12 months prior to their baby's birth. It is estimated about 140,000 mothers will meet the criteria each year.

However, up to 40,000 working women would not be eligible because of the hours they worked. Like stay-at-home mothers will be eligible for a maternity allowance worth up to AUS$6,800 pre-tax. Overall, the proposed scheme would cost the government an estimated AUS$400 million a year once the Baby Bonus of AUS$5,000, which costs AUS$450 million annually, was rolled into the reforms.

Baby Bonus was introduced in 2004 to improve Australia's population growth.

While introducing the scheme, former treasurer Peter Costello urged Australian couples to have "one for the husband, one for the wife and one for the country". The scheme has come under fire, with critics saying the amount is being misused to buy luxury goods and even alcohol and in playing poker. Some young girls have been tempted to have babies just for the bonus, but find they can't look after their children and end up being supported by government welfare.

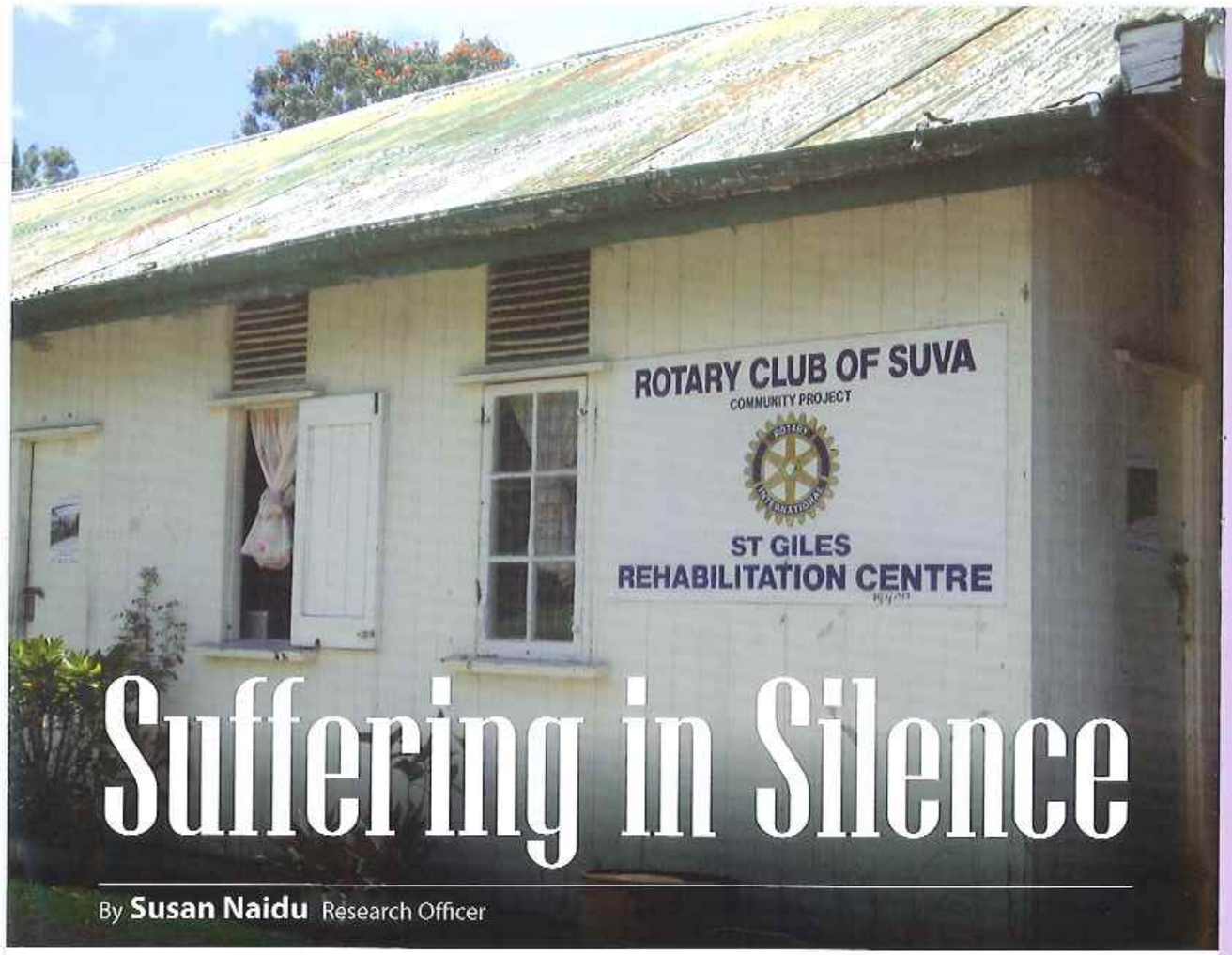
As of January 1, 2009, families with a combined income of AU$150,000 a year or more will no longer be eligible for the Baby Bonus. Also, instead of a lump sum of AUS$5,000, the bonus will be paid in 13 fortnightly installments of about AUS$385. About 16,000 families are expected to lose out after a new means test is introduced.

According to a news poll commissioned by the National Federation of Australian Women, 80 per cent of men and 76 per cent of women would support a paid maternity leave scheme in which costs are shared by government, employers and employees, with support particularly strong among 18 to 24 year olds.

With Australia formally becoming party to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick is calling on the government to use this occasion to remove its reservation about paid maternity leave under CEDAW, which Australia ratified in 1983.

However, with the coffers drying up as a result of the global financial downturn and the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook pointing to a AUS$40 billion decline in forecast government revenue, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard has hinted that paid maternity leave may be deferred.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been involved in the long and hard lobby for maternity protection for Fiji's women workers. Many of the progressive provisions suggested in FWRM's submission to lawmakers were included in the Employment Relations Bill (2005). The ERB was about to be passed in the Senate, Fiji's upper house of Parliament, when proceedings were interrupted by our most recent military coup on December 5th 2006. However, while Fiji's women may one day soon have legal maternity protection – of 84 days full-paid maternity leave – our most developed neighbouring country has consistently denied women this right. For Fiji this is a good example of what not to do, and a unique opportunity for advancing women's human rights further in our own Pacific Island nation.



Suffering in Silence

By **Susan Naidu** Research Officer

ST GILES hospital, Fiji's only psychiatric facility, records an average total of 5382 outpatient contacts every year, almost half of which are females.

Women's physical health, which is usually exacerbated by poverty, inadequate nutrition and unsafe water, also contributes to poor mental health. Inadequate nutrition often goes hand in hand with poverty and lack of proper nutrition puts girls and women at greater risk of physical and mental illness, both in the short term and further into their lives. Discrimination bars women from accessing adequate food, education, employment, pay, safety and health care making them more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, psychological distress and psychiatric disorders.

In Fiji sixty-one per cent of rural dwellers living below the basic needs poverty line are women. Reports from St. Giles hospital indicate that most patients are from rural areas. Eighty per cent of patients are from the province of Rewa, with Ba at six per cent.

Gender norms and traditional beliefs that create social obstacles and inhibit women's roles increase the mental health risk factors. Additionally, family instability, dysfunctional relationships in the family, extra marital relationships and death of spouse are some of the factors leading to familial conflict and domestic violence, which in the long run perpetuate mental health problems among women.

Incidence of delusional disorders, dementia, bipolar affective disorder, mania and depression are high amongst women. Even more worrying, attempted suicides are consistently higher among females here in Fiji.

"Good mental health positively impacts on all arenas of an individual's life - physical health, spiritual, financial, and psychological - and is necessary for us to cope with stress and daily stressors, as well as to be able to contribute effectively to our communities," said Dr Odille Chang, head of St Giles Hospital.

"As WHO [the World Health Organisation] has said: 'There is no health without mental health'."

Women carry the care giving burden of the family and this can lead to a greater vulnerability to mental illness. Women in Fiji do more informal, low status and sometimes dangerous work, often without even minimal pay, in the family business or farm – all while meeting their responsibilities at home, thus carrying double or triple loads of work.

Chronic poverty, sexual discrimination, no access to healthcare or education for herself and her children, exclusion from community participation, unfair labour practices and overwork all contribute to poor mental health. It becomes very difficult for girls and women to develop self esteem and good mental health when their lives are considered less valuable than the lives of males. Infant mortality is also a source of great psychological stress for women who may repeatedly see their children sicken and die.

Approximately 1 in 12 women experience mental illness or emotional disorder related to their reproductive cycle. This includes depression, panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder and psychosis.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that governments must provide basic health care for women through better access to health care, family planning and health care during pregnancy. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action also states that women have the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The enjoyment of this right is vital to their life and well being.

It is clear that the mental health of women must be considered in the context of their lives and cannot be achieved without the full realisation of women's human rights.

COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CONSULTATION:

TOWARDS ACTION AND PROTECTION

We the participants of the Women Human Rights Defenders Consultation "Towards action and protection", held in Suva, Fiji, from 2-5 December, 2008,

RECOGNISING that Women Human Rights Defenders are activists, community workers and others who work courageously in many different ways to defend our human rights; that Women Human Rights Defenders include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender activists, who are targeted for who they are as well as what they do; and that both women and men can be women human rights defenders,

RECALLING that Women Human Rights Defenders are often unacknowledged for the important role that we play in the promotion and protection of human rights; that we are particularly vulnerable to specific types of violations against us in the course of our work; and that these include family and community based abuses, sex and sexuality based abuses, and other forms of violence and human rights violations by the state and non-state actors,

Affirm & Recognise

1. the fundamental importance and indivisibility of the principles of participatory parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, human rights, the independence of the judiciary and the achievement of social justice for all;
2. the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as we mark its 60th Anniversary;
3. that grants of immunity for human rights violations lead to an environment of impunity whereby perpetrators of human rights violations are not held accountable;
4. that a free and independent media, including alternative forms of media, such as community-based media, has a fundamental role in the defence of human rights.

Commit

5. to continue to promote & protect human rights for all and to condemn all human rights violations;
6. to uphold the human rights principles of universality, inalienability, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, as well as the underlying principles of inter sectionality & well-being, under all circumstances;
7. to further implement human rights in our respective organisations;
8. to form, strengthen, mobilise & expand a network of Women Human Rights Defenders for well-being, solidarity & protection;

Call on Fiji's interim regime

9. to cease all human rights violations;
10. to uphold the rule of law and to take concrete action for the urgent return to participatory parliamentary democracy;
11. to respect, protect and fulfil human rights in accordance with its obligations under international human rights law, in particular the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and to recognise the indivisibility of social, cultural, economic, and civil and political rights;
12. to cease the militarisation of state institutions and return immediately to civilian rule;
13. to respect and acknowledge Women Human Rights Defenders and their work;
14. to take effective actions to sanction state and non state actors who violate human rights, including the rights of women human rights defenders, and hold perpetrators accountable;
15. to respect freedom of expression and cease the repression of the media.

Call on elected governments of Fiji

16. to respect, protect and fulfil human rights in accordance with obligations under international human rights law, in particular the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and to recognise the indivisibility of social, cultural, economic, and civil and political rights;
17. to implement human rights through legislation and policies;
18. to uphold the rule of law and participatory parliamentary democracy;
19. to respect freedom of expression and cease the repression of the media;
20. to take effective actions to sanction state and non state actors who violate human rights, including the rights of women human rights defenders, and hold perpetrators accountable;
21. to respect and acknowledge Women Human Rights Defenders and their work;
22. for the legal and formal recognition of Human Rights Defenders, in particular Women Human Rights Defenders, and their work;
23. to reform policies and laws that violate human rights and pose risks to Women Human Rights Defenders;
24. to provide opportunities and financial support for solidarity and networking for Women Human Rights Defenders.

Call on the international community, including agencies of the United Nations

25. to pressure Fiji's interim regime to cease all human rights violations, uphold the rule of law and to take concrete action towards the urgent return to participatory parliamentary democracy;
26. to pressure the state of Fiji to comply with its obligations under international human rights law;
27. to provide opportunities and financial support for solidarity and networking for Women Human Rights Defenders;
28. for international action regarding Fiji to be determined in consultation with local civil society.

Defending those who defend our rights

THIRTY local activists, advocates and community workers gathered in Suva from 2nd to 5th December to discuss their roles as women human rights defenders. The four-day consultation was held at the Forum Secretariat, facilitated by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. The consultation ended with a communiqué that drew on the real-life experiences of the diverse group of participants, who came from organisations such as the Poor Relief Society, the Citizen's Constitutional Forum, AIDS Task Force of Fiji and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

"This year marks an important anniversary for the people of the world, as it is the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which came into being on 10th December, 1948. To honour the event, FWRM is focusing on those who put themselves on the line to defend and protect our human rights," said FWRM Executive Director, Virisila Buadromo.

"Many activists may not recognise themselves as women human rights defenders, but their daily human rights work puts them at risk – whether of physical harm to themselves or their families, in particular sexual violence, or other types of harm such as damage to their reputations or livelihoods."

Women Human Rights Defenders are remembered every year on 29th November, which is part of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. The 16 Days Campaign begins on 25th November and ends on World Human Rights Day, December 10th.

"At the consultation we heard from women and men who do amazing work to further human rights in their communities – work that is largely unacknowledged. The four-day meet was an empowering experience that will help equip the women human rights defenders to continue with their important work," Buadromo said.

The workshop ended on the second anniversary of Fiji's most recent coup, December 5th. To mark the day, and as a preview to World Human Rights Day on December 10th, the participants held a press conference and released their communiqué.

"We call on Fiji's interim regime to uphold the rule of law and to take concrete action for the urgent return to participatory parliamentary democracy," participants said in the communiqué, which was presented at the official close of the consultation.

"The communiqué also calls on the interim regime to cease the militarisation of state institutions and return immediately to civilian rule, as well as cease all human rights violations," said Buadromo, who spoke at the presentation and press conference.

Participants highlighted that Women Human Rights Defenders are often unacknowledged for the important role that they play in the promotion and protection of human rights

"We are particularly vulnerable to specific types of violations against us in the course of our work; and these include family and community based abuses, sex and sexuality based abuses, and other forms of violence and human rights violations by the state and non-state actors."

Women Human Rights Defenders are activists, community workers and others who work courageously in many different ways to defend our human rights. Women Human Rights Defenders include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender activists, who are targeted for who they are as well as what they do. Both women and men can be women human rights defenders.

For more information on women human rights defenders, visit the global campaign at http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/

Between their realities and ours

By **Susan Naidu** Research Officer

RURAL women are knowledgeable and endowed with skills, talent and creativity. They are hard working producers who are not poor but impoverished.

Sixty to seventy per cent of the world's poor are rural women who are mothers of more than half of the new generation. Rural women are primary managers of the earth's natural resources. Over half of the world's population still live in rural areas and are responsible for more than half of the world's production from farms and from community based enterprises or micro enterprises.

In Fiji, rural women have the highest incidence of poverty at sixty-one per cent which is twice as much compared to the incidence of poverty among women living in urban areas. These women are largely unrecognized and voiceless. They remain poor because of socio-economic and cultural structures that keep them entrenched in poverty.

But despite these challenges, rural women in Fiji have taken proactive measures in the battle against poverty. Rural women are not only becoming self sufficient and economically empowered but have also started mobilising to gain recognition and make empowered, informed decisions.

The recently established Nausori Rural Women's Association is already making inroads towards the economic empowerment of women. Since its inception on 2nd September this year, the association has carried out various workshops and skills building programmes with its members.

With 28 members, including economically marginalised women, the association aims to empower women through education, information and communication to enable them to make informed decisions in all aspects of life.

The women's collective intends to promote skills on club management, public speaking, and equip women with small business or micro-enterprise skills, as means to gain income to improve their socio-economic condition. They also promote self-care through an emphasis on physical fitness and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

The association convened a skills development training to empower and boost the morale of its members. Based on the training needs assessment, the members undertook training in back yard gardening, composting, floral art, food preparation, presentations, preparing healthy balanced school lunches, health and diet tips, making clothing and care for elderly.

It is significant to note that rural women are beginning to understand and value CEDAW. Sharda Segran, President of the Nausori Rural Women's Association, participated in a capacity building workshop on CEDAW with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement earlier this year.

With the knowledge acquired at the training, Segran was able to educate members of her association about CEDAW, making special reference to Article 14, which recognises rural women.

Article 14 of CEDAW says that governments should ensure that rural women have full participation in the development process, including the right to organise, access to credit, appropriate technology and equal treatment in agricultural reform, and also to family planning and social security and adequate living conditions.

Members of the association are proud to have been given special recognition at the international level, and are enthusiastic about the practical application of CEDAW to their lives.

Through this, they believe they will be able to create a new society based on justice, love and respect for human dignity.

Rural women:

- There are at least 1.6 billion rural women, mainly farmers, who represent more than a quarter of the total world population.
- Women produce on average more than half of all the food that is grown: up to 80 per cent in Africa, 60 per cent in Asia, between 30 and 40 per cent in Latin America and Western countries.
- Women own only 2 per cent of all land, and receive only one per cent of all agricultural credit.
- Only 5 per cent of all agricultural extension resources are directed at women.
- Women make up two thirds of all illiterate people.
- The number of rural women living in poverty has doubled since 1970.
- Rural communities have much higher unemployment rates than urban areas.
- Transportation is a primary concern for rural women
- Rural women earn less than those in urban centres, a pattern that is also true for men

Rural Women in Fiji:

- Rural women have the highest incidence of poverty at 61 per cent which is twice as much compared to the incidence of poverty among women living in urban areas
- The highest incidence of poverty is amongst women workers in the Northern Division at 68 per cent, while the Western Division has 36 per cent.

A Day in the Life of a Woman Farmer

4.30 am	Wakes up first in the family
4.50 am	Makes breakfast for the family
5.30 am	Iron clothes for her children, washes and dresses them
5.45am	Feeds her children
6.00 am	Sends children to school and has her breakfast
6.30 am	Washes dishes and clothes
7.00 am	Goes to farm and picks crops
7.15 am	Sets table to sell her crop
7.30 am	Works in her farm while selling crops
10:00 am	Gets ready to leave for market
10:30 am	Goes to market to sell more crops
10:45 am	Sells crops while she waits for her kids to return from school
4:30 pm	Kids return from school and have light snack at the market
4.45 pm	She packs up and rounds up her days takings
5:00 pm	Returns home with her children
5:15 pm	Takes kids to pick more crops from farm
6:30 pm	Comes back home and prepares evening meal
7.30 pm	Washes herself and participates in family devotion
8:00 pm	Has dinner with family
9:00 pm	Washes dishes and cleans up after the dinner
9.45 pm	Puts her children to bed
10.00 pm	Goes to bed last in the family

Financing for Development:

AFTER almost seven years since the Monterrey Conference in March 2002, the United Nations has convened the review of the Monterrey Consensus, the Financing for Development's (FfD) final document. The review conference took place in Doha, Qatar from 29th November to 2nd December 2008, preceded by the Global Civil Society Forum that took place from 26th to 27th November.

Among the outcomes of the negotiations, the most celebrated was the commitment to call a conference at the highest level on the financial crisis inside the United Nations. The biggest trade-off was regarding the need to reform the multilateral trading system that had appeared in the text proposed by the General Assembly president, and was erased in the final text.

Background of the Financing for Development process

From the moment the FfD process was launched in 1997 until the final conference took place in Monterrey, Mexico in March 2002, several changes shaped the environment leading to movements' changing perspectives about opportunities to set a new financing for development framework.

Feminist networks such as the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) that stayed in the process until the end realized with great disappointment that the FfD process up to Monterrey provided much less than it originally promised.

The aim of the Doha conference was to review the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus (final document of first FfD Conference that took place in Monterrey in 2002). The Monterrey Consensus was a weak text in regard to development and gender equality, being in many ways a reaffirmation of the earlier Washington Consensus framework, with a focus on trade liberalization, foreign direct investment and national reforms towards "good governance" (in order to attract foreign capital) as main sources of development financing. Therefore, it emphasized what developing countries could do for their own development through state reduction and further liberalization. Further, it legitimized private capital's role in development without addressing the instabilities caused by the free flow of capital.

In that sense, there was a fear that the FfD Doha conference could be more of the same. In many ways it was, but in others it surprised. It gained a different momentum because it took place in a moment when the financial crisis is at the centre of governments' agendas. While a private club of developed and emergent countries have signalled their intent to address the situation inside G-20 (group of 20 countries) initiatives - such as last November's meeting in Washington and expected meeting for April 2009 in London - some other South countries as well as civil society groups have been mobilizing towards having the debate on the revision of the financial architecture inside the UN. These have been referred as G-192 (the total group of countries of the United Nations) instead of G-20, as a more inclusive space for a "Bretton Woods II" to take place.

In a way, the Doha FfD conference was a move towards G-192: after difficult and surprising positions in the negotiations of the text and with the United States trying to block it, language was agreed on a conference on financial crisis and its impact on development inside the UN! This is still ambiguous language that may mean a focus on the impact on development rather than on the financial crisis, so it means civil society has a lot of work ahead to help it to be on the right track. The modalities of the conference will be discussed by the General Assembly and Secretary General at the latest in March 2009.

Fighting the fight without losing ourselves

From page 1

removing the limitations created by the patriarchy so as we may know and be ourselves, so as we may be free to choose. A feminist can choose to change her name to that of her husband, retain her own name or hyphenate; can choose to work part time, full time or not at all – these decisions should not impact upon one's feminist identity. We, as a movement, will continue to fight the limits imposed by the patriarchy, whilst identifying and remaining true to ourselves in making whatever personal choices we wish.

Within a movement where women have suffered so much to promote change, there is also an element of martyrdom. This extends to the human rights activism, so as a women's rights activist can feel it doubly. When colleagues were arrested at a protest, one seasoned feminist responded, "They are real activists now"; others have asked, "Have you been thrown in jail yet? I'll really respect you then". Calculated risks are often necessary in our work, but incidence of extreme risk to one's personal safety is not a necessary initiation or pre-requisite to recognition as a feminist or human rights activist.

Linked to this "martyrdom" is the expectation that we dedicate ourselves, mind, body and soul, to the cause. This, coupled with the immense sense of personal responsibility that many activists feel to remedy a world full of wrongs, resulting in us taking on more and more work because we feel that a cause cannot be left unaddressed, can leave us overworked, mentally and physically exhausted, and out of touch with our inner selves. This exhaustion is exacerbated by the trauma associated with our work by direct trauma or "stories that stick", the guilt that we feel when we are happy, because we know that so many are not so lucky, and, for those of us whose work is motivated by anger, being overwhelmed by that emotion and having it invade our self and lives. As Jane Barry writes, what's the point of the revolution if we can't dance?[3] To ensure that the movement is sustainable, it is now recognised that we must care for ourselves, through reasonable working conditions, including being safe, paid a good wage with annual leave and being provided for in our retirement, taking time for ourselves – and that means for ourselves, not only for our families, and nurturing our mental, physical and emotional health.

The Women of Courage conference at the Omega Institute, New York, offered the concept of "mamisma" as an avenue forward for the movement, enabling us to move away from anger and vengeance, to ensure that self-care is accepted as a necessary component of feminism and to integrate flexibility into the definition of a feminist. Harriet Rubin, who coined the term, described mamisma as "femininity defined by mature and maternal qualities". I prefer Isabel Allende's understanding of the concept – "the wild mother energy, the passionate, loving energy of the mother; love at its very best - warm and reassuring". Mamisma is about drawing from passion and love in working for the well being of all in our world. In imagining a world where mamisma prevails, Elizabeth Lesser has marvelled that the news headlines would not reflect war, but read "Orange Alert! Danger! Our schools are failing our children! Red Alert! The ice caps are melting!" Mamisma engulfed this conference, where Elizabeth Lesser spoke of the forgotten spiritual and emotional intelligences; Christiane Northrup shared her "how to guide" on loving oneself (which included flirting with yourself in the mirror before leaving the house); Tara Brach offered her insight into Buddhist meditation; Queen Afua told her story of self-healing whilst imparting on us strategies for our own healing; Cambodian, Loung Ung and Chilean, Isabelle Allende shared their stories of surviving mass human rights violations, yet drawing from love and passion in their lives and work.

Participants at the Women of Courage conference were asked to reflect on the question, whose shoulders do you stand on and whose ankles do you hold? The women's movement brings together women from all walks of life; our movement's strength comes not only from what we share, but how we differ. We must value what each of us bring to this movement, supporting and valuing each contribution, if we are to move toward our vision of veritable freedom of choice in all respects.

[3] Jane Barry and Jelena Dordević, What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance?, available online at http://www.urgentactionfund.org/assets/files/WtPoRevolution/UAF-Book%201-WEB.pdf

From the Director's desk

HAPPY holidays from Knollys Street and welcome to the final issue of Balance for 2008!

This quarter has been "Go! Go! Go!" for the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. In November, three FWRM staff members and an Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF) graduate went to Cape Town for the Association of Women's Rights in Development's (AWID) 11th Forum. This year's theme of "Movement Building" drew more than 2,000 women and men from around the globe. FWRM collaborated with our regional sisters and partners, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), hosting a session entitled "Tok-Talk - Nourishing an Asia Pacific Feminist Movement." The session was a success and the Pacific delegation which included 50 or so women made a big impact at AWID – with our interventions and our presence. While we were the largest delegation that has ever attended an AWID forum – we were also described as the loudest and most visible 3%. This really was the result of the hard work of a Pacific working group which included FWRM together with the AWID organisers to ensure that more Pacific women attended the forum, either as session hosts or participants. I would like to take this opportunity to also thank AusAID, NZAID, International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), Global Fund for Women and UNIFEM for their financial support and to Noelene Nabulivou and Yvonne Underhill-Sem for their guidance and advice. (See pages 8 and 9)

Coming back energized from AWID, FWRM went straight into hosting a three and half day consultation for women human rights defenders (WHRDs). This was our contribution to the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The consultation, which was the first of its kind for local WHRDs, was an opportunity for about 20 defenders to talk about their work as well as the challenges they face professionally and personally. Particular emphasis was paid to self care of WHRDs – personally, I found it fulfilling that WHRDs saw this as a substantive issue that needed just as much attention from the state, our organisations and even ourselves. It became clear that many of the WHRDs shared and agreed with my sentiments -"What's the point of the revolution if we can't dance?" (see pages 4 and 5)

This quarter also saw the production of eight brochures simplifying the Family Law Act, with the financial support of the Asia Foundation and the assistance of the Fiji Young Lawyers Association. The brochures will be distributed in January.

Finally, I would like to welcome our new staff members: human rights researcher, Roshika Deo and our new finance and administration officer, Ekta Singh. (see story, this page)

From all of us at FWRM, we wish you safe and happy holidays!

In Solidarity,
Virisila Buadromo

FWRM welcomes new staff

Roshika Deo

Ekta Singh

THE Fiji Women's Rights Movement welcomes two new staff members, bringing the Movement to a total of nine full-time staff, and several rotating volunteers – the biggest we've ever been! Roshika Deo, a graduate of our own Emerging Leaders' Forum, joined us as Research Officer (Human Rights) in September. This expands FWRM's research wing, as Roshika joins fellow Research Officer (CEDAW), Susan Naidu. Our second addition, Ekta Singh, just joined FWRM this month as the new Finance and Administration Officer, to further professionalise the Movement's accounts management.

Roshika is completing her law degree at the University of the South Pacific and comes with close to five years experience as a Legal Executive for a private law firm. She is a member of the ELF Alumni network and is also part of the FWRM Young Women's Working Group. She has been actively involved in voluntary community work through the Rotaract Club of Suva since October 2005, including a stint as Rotaract President for the 2007-2008 term.

"Being passionate about human rights and development work, I am lucky to have been given an opportunity to be able to make a contribution through FWRM," Roshika said.

Ekta has extensive experience, including accounts work at A.Mishra & Co. and Datec. She is currently working towards a Diploma in Business Accounting at the Fiji Institute of Technology. Ekta is a Suva girl, who grew up in Flagstaff, just a short walk from FWRM's home at 21 Knollys Street.

"I chose to work with FWRM because the accounts position helps with my studies, but also because I wanted to know more about this organisation and its good work towards women's human rights," said Ekta.

For more information, contact ekta@fwrm.org.fj or roshika@fwrm.org.fj .

Gender needs to be taken into account in the Financing for Development process, to ensure changes are reflected in the realities of women's lives in the Pacific and the developing South.

Unexpected outcomes and much work ahead

Gender equality

Apart from a few other references, two very good paragraphs on gender make the Doha text far more gender-sensitive than the Monterrey Consensus. These paragraphs were retained in the final version:

Preamble: Paragraph 4: We recall that gender equality is a basic human right, a fundamental value and an issue of social justice; it is essential for economic growth, poverty reduction, environmental sustainability and development effectiveness. We reiterate the need for gender mainstreaming into the formulation and implementation of development policies, including financing for development policies, and for dedicated resources. We commit ourselves to increasing our efforts to fulfil our commitments regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Chapter on Mobilizing domestic financial resources for development, Paragraph 19: Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to achieve equitable and effective development and to foster a vibrant economy. We reaffirm our commitment to eliminate gender-based discrimination in all its forms, including in the labour and financial markets, as well as, inter alia, in the ownership of assets and property rights. We will promote women's rights, including their economic empowerment, and effectively mainstream gender in law reforms, business support services and economic programmes, and give women full and equal access to economic resources. We will further promote and reinforce capacity-building of State and other stakeholders in gender-responsive public management, including, but not limited to, gender budgeting.

Trade

This was the biggest trade-off to the victory won in Doha. Important references made at in the General Assembly proposed text (that EU and G-77 - the powerful developed countries - had agreed to accept) were erased:

Paragraph 22: . . . The multilateral trading system in its current form requires further reforms to act more in favour of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries. Progress in reforming the system is particularly important at a time when systemic impact of the financial crisis is likely to have adverse effects on international trade. . .

Paragraph 23: . . . a major reform of the international trading system is required . . .

Feminists in the process

Diana Aguiar from IGTN Global Secretariat, Gigi Francisco, DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) Global Coordinator and IGTN Asia Co-coordinator, Nicole Bidegain from IGTN Latin America and Luisa Antolin from WIDF (IGTN Europe) were in Doha doing advocacy as part of Women's Working Group on FfD.

IGTN co-convened with AWID, DAWN, WIDF, Women's Working Group on FfD and Action Aid, a workshop in the Civil Society Forum called "Women setting the agenda: Women's Human Rights, Right to Development and FfD". The session took place on 27th November and addressed the centrality of gender equality to the FfD agenda, by building upon women's movement proposals to all FfD chapters. At the session, organizations drafted a Women's Statement on FfD that was later distributed at the official conference as well as circulated through women's networks.

Analysis courtesy of the International Gender & Trade Network. For more information, visit www.igtn.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 reforms and attitudinal changes.

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

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

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

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: _____

Fiji Women's Rights Movement
Ph: (679) 3313156 Fax: 331 3466
website: www.fwrm.org.fj
Email: info@fwrm.org.fj
Mail: GPO Box 14194, Suva, Fiji Is

LOOKOUT!

FLA Brochures

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement, with the support of the Asia Foundation and assistance from the Fiji Young Lawyers' Association, has released eight brochures based on the Family Law Act. The easy-to-read colourful pamphlets detail basic procedures and essential information on areas such as divorce, property settlement, maintenance, child protection, and parenting arrangements. You can get copies of the brochures from the FWRM office at 21 Knollys Street Suva or email us at info@fwrm.org.fj

Picture This!

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement will be celebrating International Women's Day with our Young Women in Leadership Programme by revisiting our Picture This! workshop and exhibition. Picture This! is a creative way to celebrate our day, and this year we will again focus on girls between the ages of 10-14 years. This project brings participants together to snap their ideas onto film, using disposable cameras, and then discuss their favourite shots with the other girls. A selection of the best pictures will be displayed on International Women's Day, March 8th 2009, in Suva. For more information on this initiative please contact the Young Women's Officer, Michelle Reddy, on 3313 156 or email michelle@fwrm.org.fj .

Transitional Justice Consultations

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement will be carrying out district-level transitional justice consultations between January and April 2009. The consultations are targeted at community and civil society groups and aim to stimulate discussion and create awareness on the issues of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. For more information contact Human Rights Training Officer, Unaisi Valenitabua, on 3313 156 or email unaisi@fwrm.org.fj .

Call for contributions to Balance

In January, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement will be issuing a formal call for contributions to our quarterly newsletter, Balance. Chances are, if you're reading this, you already have some good ideas about the type of content you'd like to see in the newsletter – and you might even want to write something yourself! To send in your thoughts, ideas, suggestions, articles, poetry or pictures, contact Communications Officer, Tara Chetty, at tara@fwrm.org.fj .

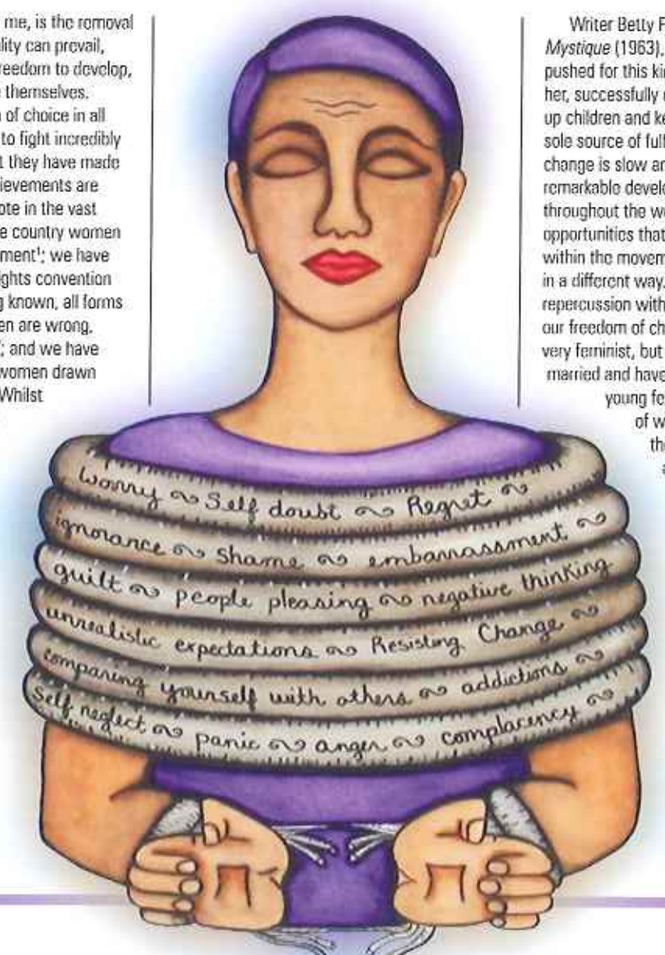
FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
FWRM
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
DECEMBER 3/2008

Fighting the fight without losing ourselves

By **J. M. Evans**

THE core goal of feminism, for me, is the removal of patriarchy so that true equality can prevail, giving all people the genuine freedom to develop, to know themselves and to be themselves. The vision is veritable freedom of choice in all respects. Feminists have had to fight incredibly hard for the achievements that they have made toward equality and these achievements are immense. Women can now vote in the vast majority of countries and in one country women comprise the majority of parliament[1]; we have our own international human rights convention recognizing what we have long known, all forms of discrimination against women are wrong, illegal and must be eliminated[2]; and we have chipped away at the vision of women drawn through gender essentialism. Whilst continuing to work toward the myriad of challenges that remain, now is a time also to reflect, rejuvenate and celebrate.

In this reflection, I want to explore the obstacles to achieving this vision of veritable free choice that we may place on ourselves, or feel are placed on us, as feminists. First though, I want to recognise and thank all those who have paved the path before me to allow me to now sit here and ponder these thoughts. Their sacrifice, commitment and achievements are overwhelming.



Writer Betty Friedan, through *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), together with all those who pushed for this kind of change before and after her, successfully challenged views that bringing up children and keeping the home are women's sole source of fulfillment. Although attitudinal change is slow and gradual, we can feel this remarkable development to varying degrees throughout the world. Amid the widening opportunities that this presents us, some within the movement feel pressure to conform in a different way. This is one unintentional repercussion within the movement that limits our freedom of choice. The phrase, "it's not very feminist, but what I really want is to get married and have children" has been uttered; a young feminist at an amazing gathering of women in a beautiful part of the world whispered, almost ashamed, "I miss my husband"; the debate over one's surname post marriage is littered with "shoulds", not "wants". Feminism is not about us breaking from the traditional mould to conform to a new mould; it is about us

Cont'd on page 3

[1] The Rwandan elections of 15 September 2008 saw women win 45 of the 80 seats, making Rwanda the first country in the world where women hold the majority in Parliament.

[2] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979, New York.