FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT
Balance
"HELPING TO BALANCE THE SCALES"
December 2015

International Women Human Rights Defenders Day

By **Genevieve Sukhdeo**

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement staged a LIVE Talk show on Sunday, 29th November 2015 to commemorate 'International Women Human Rights Defenders Day.'

Hosted by FWRM's Executive Director Tara Chetty, the talkshow featured Noelene Nabulivou of *Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality*, Naomi Navoce of *Pacific Disability Forum (PDF)*, feminist activist and former FWRM Executive Director Virisila Buadromo and trans* activist Sulique Waqa of *Haus of Khameleon*.

Said Tara Chetty, "We were pleased to host this talk show on the opening night of *Nothing Less Than Equal*, Fiji's first Film Festival to raise awareness on the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. The talk show was a tribute to local women's human rights defenders (WHRDs) who have contributed tremendously to the progress of women's rights at the national and international levels."

"The talk show concept sought to encourage women in all their diversities to engage with the WHRDs, particularly young women present on the night."

The talk show was part of the opening night for the *Nothing Less Than Equal Film Festival,* which was coordinated by the *Fiji Women's Rights Movement, UN Women, UNICEF* and the *UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*. Opening night commemorations were co-funded by the European Union (EU), the British High Commission, the Embassy of France and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA).

Chargé d'affaires, Johnny Engell-Hansen, says the EU is adamant that a collective effort is needed to address the issue of Gender-Based violence.

"Gender-based violence is rooted in and reinforces gender inequalities and it cannot be understood outside the social structures, gender norms and roles that support and justify it. Gender-based violence harms women, families, communities and societies. It is a human rights violation and one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based inequality. The elimination of violence against women involves challenging the unequal division of social, political, and economic power among women and men, and the ways in which this inequality is perpetuated through institutions at all levels of society," said Engell-Hansen.

The opening night also showcased the IWDA short documentary *Dance Selina* featuring Fiji's very own Mei Milli, a graduate of FWRM's Emerging Leaders Forum, along with a brief selection of FWRM's GIRLS Digital Stories, followed by the Feature Film *I AM A GIRL*.

EUROPEAN UNION IWDA INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AGENCY FWRM FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

From the Director's desk

Greetings from FWRM!

Starting on 25th November, FWRM has stood strongly in solidarity with feminists around the world for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. As we reflect on this year's theme "From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All!" we reflect on global progress more than twenty years on from Beijing World Conference of Women and its Platform for Action.

While there has been some progress made, today we live in a fiercer world for most women. Today it is much more difficult to advocate for bodily autonomy and the full range of our sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The forward looking agenda set 20 years ago in Beijing seems almost radical in today's context where there is such strong pushback against women's basic human rights. Not only must we contend with the constant threats of violence, militarism, impacts of climate change, and low rates of women in leadership (amongst other issues) but we also continue to have our bodies used as 'political playgrounds.'

During this 16 Days, as feminist activists and women's human rights defenders, we remember all women and girls who steadfastly refused to sacrifice their education and right to dignity, in spite of enormous odds and severe persecution. Young women like Malala Yousafzai who said, "I don't mind if I have to sit on the floor at school. All I want is education. And I'm afraid of no one."

Women activists such as Wei Tingting, Wang Man, Li Tingting and Zheng Churan who as recently as March 6th this year, were detained in unknown locations in China after planning to stage events against sexual harassment in order to mark International Women's Day. Facing the risk of torture and other forms of abuse, they were denied access to a lawyer and had their human rights violated a few days shy of IWD 2015.

We also remember those who have gone before us, the 'Sheroes' who relentlessly paved the way for all feminists, young and old to carry on the great legacy that is the global women's movement. In commemorating women human rights defenders day on 29 November, FWRM would like to pay tribute to our friend Josefa "Gigi" Francisco, a leader of the South feminist activist movement, who passed away in July. She was an instrumental figure at Development Alternatives for Women in the New Era (DAWN), as well as a friend, mentor and ally to so many.

We will miss that fierce passion, and the warmth she had for her sisters in the movement. She always made me feel welcome, and a part of something that was possible. We've been thinking of those at DAWN since we heard, and all her comrades who have fought together and laughed together over so many years. We salute you Gigi. We miss you, and we will carry on your work. Moce mada.

As the year draws to a close, it's hard not to feel disheartened by all that is happening in the world around us: the people we have lost; the global refugee crisis affecting so many women and girls; the destruction of mangrove forests and climate change that threaten our island homes; and the seemingly endless war on women's bodies. But as we celebrate International Human Rights Day and the upcoming holidays with our feminist allies, our families and friends, we remember all that we have accomplished together, all that we hold dear, and our belief that another, better world is possible.

Wishing you a hopeful new year!

Tara Chetty.

Transitions

By Genevieve Sukhdeo

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement continues to grow and change, as staff move through career pathways in the organisation.

Former Fiji Young Women's Forum Co-ordinator and Programme Assistant, Mamta Sylviya Chand replaces Veena Singh as the new Young Women's Officer, while Veena moves into the role of Gender & Transitional Justice Team Leader.

This transition sees two graduates of FWRM's Emerging Leaders Forum occupy key positions within the organisation, brining their experience and involvement with the Movement over the years.

Says Veena on her recent appointment:

"Being in this role is both challenging and exciting. I feel that I am in a very good place career wise right now, however I do know I have to maintain a healthy balance of work and personal time. Reminding ourselves as feminists that self-care is relevant to the work we do, is crucial in sustaining the women's movement. This role will not only allow me to utilise my experience and knowledge on Women, Peace and Security but also merge my community development background in my day-to-day work."

Mamta has worked with FWRM since 2004 as a volunteer, intern and research assistant and was made a full-time member of staff in 2013.

She is passionate about diverse young women's issues including, but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) issues, transitional justice and democracy, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

"FWRM, especially the second lot of ELFs and the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni have molded my feminist values and enhanced my gender perspective as a young feminist activist and women's human rights defender.

"My colleagues, predecessors, feminist friends, and my parents continuously motivate me to strive for the highest standards both personally and professionally, and I am inspired to engage, empower and inform at greater levels than ever before."

Strengthening National Human Rights Institutions in the Pacific

NATIONAL Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) play a vital role in promoting and monitoring the effective implementation of human rights standards in their respective countries. To effectively fulfil their human rights mandate, there are internationally recognized principles that an NHRI must comply with, and these are commonly referred to as the Paris Principles.

NHRIs contribute to improving human rights protection mechanisms by inter alia: Providing advice and support to Parliaments, strong and dynamic civil society organizations, an alert and responsive media, a school system with human rights education programmes at all levels, and generally accredited NHRIs which have an "A" status. These are all deemed excellent relay agencies at country level to ensure the application of international human rights norms.

Fiji had its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in October last year and received a total of 138 recommendations. The State supported 112 of the recommendations and the remaining 26 recommendations were noted. For this review, there was a strong presence of the NGO Coalition on Human Rights, scrutinizing the State and making a statement at the Pre-Session.

The NGO Coalition on Human Rights comprises ten non-governmental organisations in Fiji that represent various areas of Human Rights, including Democratic Rights, Gender Equality, Rights of the Child, Labour Rights, Land Rights and Religious Freedoms. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) Regional Office for the Pacific, covers 16 countries, including Kiribati.

By Alanieta Velulu

A number of recommendations made to Fiji emphasized the importance of re-establishing the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (FHRADC), which was supported by the Fiji Government.

The Coalition in partnership with OHCHR, organised and hosted the first public panel discussion on "Strengthening National Human Rights Institutions in the Pacific." The panel discussion was held on May 20th , 2015, bringing together approximately 130 people at the Japan ICT Lecture Theatre at the University of the South Pacific. The event proved timely, as the appointment of FHRADC's Chair and Commissioners took place a few weeks prior to the event.

The discussion featured four key speakers: Human Rights Commissioner, Mr. Peceli Rokotuivuna, Ms Loukinikini Vili, the Legal and Investigation Officer from the Samoa Office of the Ombudsman, Ms. Vandhna Narayan representing the NGO Coalition on Human Rights and Mr. Ash Bowe, the Project Manager at Asia Pacific Forum.

The panellists addressed the four different topics, one of which stressed the importance of Fiji learning from Samoa and having an institution that is compliant with the Paris Principles. This was a rare opportunity for the public to understand the importance of having an independent and efficient national human rights institution from those well-versed on the subject.

Not only did the panel discussion draw attention to the various perspectives and significance of NHRIs, it also addressed the following key areas:

1. The importance of national human rights institutions that are compliant with the Paris Principles
2. The Legal framework that establishes and guides the roles and responsibilities of an NHRI
3. International and regional lessons learnt regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of NHRIs

The panel was the first event of it's kind to focus on national human rights institutions and enabled the audience to question the panellists directly, and in the presence of the Human Rights Commissioner. In their presentations, Ms. Vili and Mr. Bowe mentioned the importance of regional learning and how they are always willing to assist the Commission when needed.

Ms. Narayan addressed the need for the FHRADC to be completely independent of the State and to make the necessary changes that will allow them to perform as required under the Paris Principles.

Mr. Rokotuivuna in his presentation, addressed the relevant sections of the Constitution that establishes the FHRADC and the responsibilities they were tasked with. During Q&A, the Commissioner asked the public to be patient, and added that they would listen to the public and perform their duties within the ambit of the law.

Alanieta is a Human Rights Training Officer with FWRM

FYWF Workshop: Role of Fiji Parliament & the Local Government

By Mamta Chand

The Fiji Young Women's Forum hosted a workshop at Suva's Holiday Inn from June 19th – 20th this year, titled *"Role of Fiji Parliament and the Local Government"* with approximately 65 diverse young women from the various divisions, including Taveuni and Rabi Island in attendance.

The FYWF saw an increase in the number of new participants who attended the workshop, which consisted of Emerging Leaders Forum 6 (ELF) at 22% and Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA) at 8%. It was a productive strategy to extend an invitation to a wider affiliation of young women, in striving for inclusivity. Hence, the Forum has established itself as a strong and dynamic Young Women's Movement, advocating for young women in leadership roles at all levels.

Since the commencement and implementation of the Fiji Young Women's Forum in 2013, we have hosted 3 successful Forums emphasizing the importance of young women's political participation, and further visibilizing young women's representation at various political platforms.

To ensure their issues of concerns are tabled and addressed, the FYWF organized a two-day workshop to create awareness and provide further information, specific to understanding the roles of Parliament and Local Government.

The workshop looked at understanding the purpose of Standing Orders, Standing Committees, Select Committees and Special Committees in Parliament, along with the structures of Local Governance and the role of Local Governments within our different communities.

Through the workshop, the FYWF hopes to increase their understanding on the processes and procedures in place, in making submissions to standing committees. By having a better understanding of the processes and procedures within Parliament, we can work towards effectively lobbying for legislative change and utilize the FYWF declaration as a supporting document.

As the Fiji Young Women's Forum, it is critical for us to learn the various techniques of networking and negotiation with those who hold Ministerial positions or positions of influence.

Moreover, the mechanisms available for FYWF to engage and the importance of engagement with the Parliament and the local government were highlighted through this workshop. The young women also experienced a Mock Submission and had the exciting opportunity to visit Parliament House, where a few participants expressed a strong desire to one day sit as a member of Parliament.

FWF & FYWF: Regional Conference on Women's Leadership and Political Participation

By Mamta Chand

The Fiji Women's Forum (FWF) and the Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) was represented by Adi Finau Tabakaucoro and Mamta Chand respectively, at the Regional Women in Leadership Conference in Honiara, Solomon Islands from June 2nd – 4th, 2015.

The conference was organised by the Political Parties Integrity Commission, the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme, in partnership with the Young Women's Parliamentary Group, the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, and the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet of the National Parliament.

The discussions focussed on promoting women's equal participation in all spheres of decision making, including elections and appointment processes, as well as existing commitments with international, regional and national experiences shared by panellists from Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands.

This was an outstanding opportunity for both Forums to unite at a regional platform and advocate for Women's and Young Women's agenda; highlighting the importance of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs), and acknowledging the existing Intergenerational Gap, as well as the need for Women's Leadership at all levels. In order to enhance women's participation, it was critical to stand in solidarity with one another against the raging tides of systematic and cultural oppression.

This was positively showcased in the Solomon Islands, whereby after passionate interventions from both representatives on the HERStory of the Forums, women and young women from around the region were interested to collaborate within their networks to strengthen women's voices. Adi Finau and Mamta chaired a successful meeting with the women's group to share best practises for the development of a similar methodology based on the Fiji Women's Forum and the Fiji Young Women's Forum.

The Solomon Islands (SI) implementation of its National Policy on Women, International and Regional Conventions for Women , Strengthening the Voice and Visibility of Women in Political Leadership, Reforms of Balancing Power, TSMs, Political Parties as Game Changers, Power of the Media and Mentoring and Leadership Development were some of the topics discussed during the conference.

The discussions centered on the cultural and structural challenges that women and young women face, making it difficult for them to fully utilize their citizenship rights.

With the representation of both the FYWF and the FWF, this was hailed a positive step towards building intergenerational bridges. The support and solidarity between the representatives was influential in building key networks and actively engaging with Women's Rights Action Movement (WRAM), as well as representatives of the Solomon Island's National Council of Women (SI NCW), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Vois Blo Mere and the Young Women's Parliamentary Group. The partners were keen to adopt FYWF's and FWF's methodology of Coalition Building with diverse women's groups to advance political participation.

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Girls Digital Story-Telling

By Lillian Delana

This year, as part of their advocacy for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, the GIRLS of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement told their digital stories. During a two-day workshop held in September and with the aid of creative tools, the participants of FWRM's Grow, Inspire, Relate, Lead, Succeed (GIRLS) programme learnt to produce videos to tell their own stories.

In the 17 videos participants reflected on issues such as gender, empowerment, discrimination, and bullying. These themes were than integrated into their scripting exercise, allowing them to think and create their own messages. The girls used powerful narratives and imagery to educate the public on the societal barriers facing girls.

The stories were produced and filmed entirely by the girls themselves and were showcased at Damodar City Cinema on Friday 27th November to an audience of development partners, families, advocates and members of the public. The GIRLS also toured various schools in Suva to share their stories and educate their peers. Digital Storytelling is a powerful way to connect an audience to a story. This process allowed the GIRLS to present their story as a way of making abstract or conceptual content more understandable, which contributed greatly to their self-confidence. In their videos, you will see the GIRLS questioning the society in which we live.

To demonstrate the lessons in leadership learnt over the past year, the girls took the lead in running their own program and launching their videos at Damodar City, providing the audience with their first glimpse into the mind of the Girl Child. The GIRLS Digital Storytelling project was supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with funding from the European Union (EU), International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and implemented with the technical assistance of Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development.

"Peer Pressure, Disempowerment, Bullying, (and) Discrimination is what our society is made up of…We are the society, we kill each other with words and actions…GIRLS around the world are getting raped, getting abused GIRLS can't even go out at night because of the fear of being attacked, raped…Come on society, what are you doing? When are you going to Change?"

Abigail, GIRLS Participant.

Founding Member Re-Elected onto ICJ Board

*The **International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)** is an international human rights non-governmental organization. The Commission itself is a standing group of 60 eminent jurists (including senior judges, attorneys and academics) dedicated to ensuring respect for international human rights standards through the law. Commissioners are known for their experience, knowledge and fundamental commitment to human rights.[1] One of FWRM's key founders, Imrana Jalal was re-elected onto the Board of ICJ and provides some insight in this interview regarding her work with the Commission.*

By Genevieve Sukhdeo

1. Congratulations on your reappointment to the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and its Executive Board, which comprises 60 eminent lawyers and judges from all regions of the world. In its history, how much representation has there been from the Pacific Island region? Have there been other Pacific Island women on the ICJ Board?

Only one [Pacific Islander] previously, Sir Moti Tikaram.

2. ICJ promotes and protects human rights through the Rule of Law, by using its unique legal expertise to develop and strengthen national and international justice systems. What specific areas of ICJ work are you particularly interested in or involved with?

As a Board member/Commissioner we don't focus on any specific area as we have general oversight of all programs but I have a clear bias to gender equality I suppose.

3. What are you most looking forward to in your next term with the ICJ?

I like the fact that we have an influence over global thinking on human rights and can have some influence over trends and country responses. On a personal level my fellow Commissioners and board colleagues are brilliant and I learn so much from them. The staff are fantastic too.

4. We are currently in the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, and access to justice is a critical area when it comes to addressing violence. What steps do you think could be taken in Fiji and other Pacific Island jurisdictions to improve women's access to justice?

VAW [Violence against women] is a culturally and socially sanctioned crime against a third of the world's women. People shake their heads when they are told this statistic. They just don't believe it, but it is true. Our social norms condone the practice, frown on reporting and prosecuting it, and expect women to grin and bear it in the interests of family cohesion. Actually, family cohesion works better when men get help with dealing with their problem. You don't beat a woman you consider your equal, so VAW is a consequence of gender inequality. The prevalence rates of VAW are simply sobering. World Health Organization (WHO) research from 2013 states that the global prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence among all ever-partnered women is more than 30%. The prevalence was highest in the WHO regions of Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia (includes South Asia), at 37%. South Asian countries have a higher rate than Africa. Overall, 1 in 2 ever-partnered men who were interviewed in six countries across Asia and the Pacific as part of a recent UN study on men and violence reported ever having used physical and/or sexual violence against a female partner, and nearly a quarter of the men interviewed reported perpetrating rape against a woman or girl in their lifetime, with the majority of them not having experienced any legal consequences. In 2014, the BBC reported that every 5 minutes an Indian woman reports domestic violence. There has been a 134% increase in reporting in the last decade, leading to the passing of new legislation in 2005. The highest rates are in the Pacific Islands. A UNFPA study of lifetime physical or sexual violence committed on a woman by a partner demonstrated a prevalence range from 40% in Tonga, to 68% in Kiribati. In Samoa the rate was 46%; in Vanuatu, 60%; in Solomon Islands, 64%; and Fiji, 67%. In our developing member countries, the highest prevalence rates are in Kiribati, while the lowest is in Georgia. In Tajikistan, one in 5 women report gender-based violence (GBV), but in some provinces it is 58%. The increase in the reported numbers is more likely due to increased sympathy, better reception by the police, and the large numbers of women's organizations that have mobilized around VAW. What has really pushed many countries into passing laws and training health, justice, and law enforcement officials to deal with VAW more effectively is not the injustice done to women or the violation of their basic human rights, but the economic costs. The gathering of prevalence data has enabled costing studies which show that the economic costs of VAW are simply staggering.

5. What scope is there for women human rights defenders, feminist lawyers and feminist organisations to advance women's rights through legal processes and justice systems in our region?

A lot, as they have proven already!!

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Commission_of_Jurists

Photo courtesy of United States Institute of Peace

Pictured from left to right, Jason Gluck, Michael Dafel, Moninne Griffith, Michelle Reddy, Richie Maitland (Photo courtesy of US Institute of Peace)

LGBTI Rights Gender Minorities Seek Constitutional Protections

By Michelle Reddy

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) Fiji citizens have historically been marginalized and continue to be victims of stigma, violence and discrimination, often specifically because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. There are also marginalized groups of women such as young women, lesbians, bisexual women, trans*women, trans-masculine/non gender-conforming people, for whom justice is undeliverable or severely constrained because of criminalisation and/or social stigma and sexual or gender based violence.[1]

While the inclusion of LGBTQI Rights in the non-discrimination provision of the Bill of Rights can be seen as a positive aspect of the 2013 Constitution, an examination of Fiji's Constitutional Transition reveals the hard struggle LGBTQI activists and movements have had to endure to get meaningful Constitutional Recognition. In the midst of Fiji's continuously volatile political life, the LGBTQI Community remains resilient in their grasp of Constitutional Recognition and witnessing substantive realisation of civil and political rights.

I was fortunate to have participated at a discussion cohosted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in May. The panel of activists from South Africa, Ireland, Fiji and Grenada reflected on their experiences —strategies, challenges, successes, and failures that provided insights and lessons on ways for LGBTI communities to achieve constitutional recognition and rights that until recently seemed improbable. Newly appointed Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LBGT Persons, U.S. Department of State, Ambassador Randy Berry also contributed to the panel discussion.

While only a few countries now protect LGBTI rights in their constitutions, the inclusion of those protections has increasingly become an indicator of the strength and consolidation of democracy. Constitution-building processes in various countries have opened a social and political space of tolerance and equality within which gender minorities are continuing to claim their rights.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement along with LGBTQI groups and activists such as Amithi Fiji, DIVA for Equality Fiji, Drodrolagi Movement, Haus of Khameleon, House of Colours, Pacific Rainbow Network, Patriots, Rainbow Women's Network and Strumpet, is currently collating a case study on Fiji LGBTI Rights & Constitution Building Processes.

Editor's note: The case study for the IDEA Workshop will be published and launched later in 2015, so be on the lookout for it.

1 UPR Submission, LGBTQI CSOs in Fiji, 2014

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The Forum representatives met with WRAM and other Solomon Island's women's groups working to advance women to leadership roles. The discussions explored the possibility of the SI women's group forming a coalition and supporting each other, as the group has not been able to confront present intergenerational challenges. As such, it was agreed that the best methodology was to bring together YWPG and WRAM to start engaging with other women's groups.

Samoa and Bougainville shared with the other participants that their countries have adopted some TSMs by way of reserved seats, with the former being of particular interest, as the initiative appears to have come from their Prime Minister. Fiji's recent elections was regarded a success, since women achieved 16% of Parliamentary seats and we now have a female Speaker of the House.

It was a privilege to have attended this conference, as we were given the opportunity to listen, share and learn about best practices from other Pacific Island women and young women leaders. It is critical for the advancement of women's political participation, that we are aware of the on-going structural challenges and recommendations from other countries.

Mamta is FWRM's Young Women's Officer

My Piece

By Nandni Vandhana

I was looking for an avenue, a space where I could do something with my journey of life. I was at a place where I wanted to advocate issues that I believe in, so when a friend suggested that I join ELF 6 [the 6th Emerging Leaders' Forum], I grabbed the opportunity with both hands to see where it would lead.

The first day was important, firstly to understand what this group was about. I for one was very excited and at the same time overwhelmed with the other young women that turned up. Secondly, I was looking forward to seeing familiar faces that shared my passion to speak for those less fortunate and the minorities.

I am extremely happy to be part of this group of young women from various backgrounds, every time I step into a meeting; I am fueled with a sense of appreciation for this space, and at the same time acknowledge the power within this space.

I am grateful for the flow of information and the hands-on advocacy work carried out by the group. I have been able to learn in an in-depth way, the topics of feminism and feminist values and how "We are not trying to be a man in anyway."

My brother says, "He is a Feminist." It makes me better understand that feminists are people who are calling for equality in the social, economic and political spheres and nothing less. I now speak with renewed confidence in what I believe in and try as much as possible to apply these values in all aspects of my life; at home, work, school, with friends and so on.

The topics that have really intrigued me over the past few months have been:

- Women and the environment, and the decision-making structures when it comes to women having a say during natural disasters, Climate Justice
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights particularly interests me because now I understand the systems of information facilitating women to have access to adequate health services and treatment
- Also access to information is limited, as is training of medical personnel. There is a need for gender mainstreaming in all sectors of development to ensure sustainability for future generations.

One of the challenges would be the twenty or more opinions that you are faced with during discussions and the challenge is then to come to a conclusion, as there are very strong, independent young women in the group! Constructive criticism and feedback is helping us to acknowledge views and standing firm on one's decision.

I have been able to forge strong bonds of friendship with all the young women in the group, which have grown even stronger. We often find ourselves meeting up regularly apart from ELF meetings and retreats to catch up and I call this my support group.

I am glad to be part of the program. To be surrounded by other ELF graduates who share similar views is an amazing feeling. I belong and I know this is exactly where I am supposed to be.

Nandini is part of FWRM's Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF) programme. This year's 'young feminists in training' is called ELF 6.

IDAHOT 2015

By Kris Prasad

INTERNATIONAL Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) has become an important rallying event, offering an opportunity for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) community to reach out to a wider audience.

Celebrated on May 17th, this year's IDAHOT event in Suva was *#IDAHOTFiji Unplugged*, an evening of creative arts and expression with members of Fiji's LGBTIQ community and their allies.

The event was organised by the following feminist and queer groups: Diverse Voices in Action for Equality (DIVA), Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA), Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), Drodrolagi Movement (DroMo), Oceania Pride, Rainbow Pride Foundation, Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) and Haus of Khameleon (HoK) with the partnership and support of the School of Language, Arts and Media (SLAM) and USP Counselling Centre at the University of the South Pacific.

The objectives of *#IDAHOTFiji Unplugged* were to promote and raise awareness on homophobia and transphobia and to allow LGBTIQ people the freedom and space to express themselves through creative means.

More than 180 people attended the event (with some people standing or sitting) as members of the LGBTIQ community performed poetry, spoken word, skits, rap, songs and dance highlighting stigma, violence, discrimination, along with stories of celebration and survival in the community.

It was heartening to note the active participation from young women, especially the Emerging Leaders Forum 6 and the ELF Alumni. The organisers hope to publish some of the original pieces in a zine or video.

FWRM and Family Court launch FLA Brochures

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Family Court of Fiji jointly launched a new set of Family Law Act (FLA) Brochures at the Judges Common Room on August 7th in the presence of members of the judiciary, development partners, fellow civil society organisations and the media.

The brochures, published in English, iTaukei, and Fiji Hindi, explain various aspects of the Family Law Act in a simple, easy-to-understand format. There are eight brochures, each describing a different aspect of the Act and related Family Court services.

Says FWRM Executive Director Tara Chetty, "A significant portion of our work is to ensure that women, particularly marginalised women, receive the crucial information they need in accessing legal institutions and services."

"We are delighted with the opportunity to partner with the Family Court of Fiji once again in publishing these brochures, which will help families better understand how the law applies to them."

By Genevieve Sukhdeo

FWRM had published similar brochures in 2007, which were used by the Family Court, but had become outdated following amendments to the Family Law Act. The new brochures are updated, redesigned, and now available in all three major Fijian languages.

The Movement has a long history of promoting access to justice, as the organisation has been actively involved in pursuing legislative reform and policy change for the past 29 years, most notably the successful lobby for Fiji's Family Law Act passed in 2003.

"The Movement is grateful to the Family Court for this collaborative venture. The organisation is hopeful that through this partnership, these brochures will empower those women often left in highly vulnerable situations, to seek proper redress through the Courts for security, protection and justice."

The Family Law Act Brochures were officially launched by the Honourable Chief Justice and Head of the Judiciary Anthony Gates. Also worth noting was the presence of the Hon. Minister for Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation, Rosy Akbar who expressed a keen interest in assisting with the dissemination process of the FLA Brochures, particularly at the Fiji Women's Expo.

The media coverage on social media, print, television and radio also generated interest by FBC's Shammi Lochan to invite FWRM's Executive Director on the Aaina talkback show. Plans are also underway to print more brochures for further distribution.

Public Lecture on Implementing the Fiji Constitution

By Genevieve Sukhdeo

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement in partnership with the Citizen's Constitutional Forum (CCF) and the University of the South Pacific School of Government, Development and International Affairs (SGDIA), convened a Public Lecture on Implementing the Fiji Constitution: Challenges and Opportunities.

The event took place on Wednesday 7th October 2015 at the Japan-Pacific ICT Centre with Professor Cheryl Saunders, a Comparative Constitutional expert as the keynote speaker. The objectives of the public lecture were to:

- Create an avenue for targeted advocacy for key stakeholders and members of the public on implementation of the Constitution.
- Enable greater people's participation in the democratisation process and promotion of active citizenship.
- Develop discussion and understanding of constitutional content on fundamental areas including the Bill of Rights, public accountability, land rights/access, and nation building.

The panel comprised local professionals offering different perspectives on the topic, and contextual relevance namely, Reverend Akuila Yabaki, FWRM's Executive Director Tara Chetty, Lawyer Jon Apted and State representative Attorney General Aiyaz Saiyed-Khaiyum.

There was much engagement from the audience with queries regarding protections for the LGBTIQ community, government accountability and Temporary Special Measures. It was concluded that the lecture was a good start to the Constitutional Public Lecture Series and encouraged members of the public to openly critique and debate on the supreme law of the land.

MEDIA RELEASE

"Strong women, strong nation!"

Dili, Timor Leste – Five women parliamentarians1elected in the elections held late last year and five representatives of women's rights organizations 2 from Fiji are currently visiting Timor Leste. The exchange facilitated by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development (APWLD), Feto Iha Kbiit Servisu Hisamuk (FKSH), Caucus Iha Politika and the Fiji Women's Forum aims to enable women parliamentarians to exchange experiences, share approaches to transformative leadership, collaboration and solidarity as well as increasing women's political representation and participation. "I am happy to be here with my fellow women parliamentarians and women's organizations, talking about how we can all work together", said Assistant Minister of Health and Member of Parliament, Veena Bhatnagar.

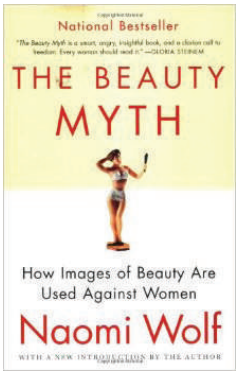
Timor Leste has one of the highest rates of women's representation in national parliament in the world. Women parliamentarians, through the parliamentarian caucus, have also found ways to collaborate across party lines to advance legislation that focuses on women's rights. "I am inspired to see how women parliamentarians in Timor Leste speak in one voice through the women parliamentary caucus," said Member of Parliament Jilila Kumar. This model of leadership is particularly critical in countries or communities transitioning to democracy and dealing with the legacy of conflict.

The exchange also spoke of the importance of a strong movement advocating for gender equality and women's rights. Leader of the Opposition, Ro Teimumu Kepa shared, "political will and proper budgetary allocation is necessary to advance both the representation of women and mainstreaming gender equality, and this is where a multi-sectoral approach, from ministries to civil societies and women's rights organizations working in cohort to bring about a change in mindset to effect the needed transformation."

Following the exchange a number of parliamentarians will remain in Timor for a meeting of the Pacific Island Women's Caucus where they will discuss critical regional and global issues requiring solidarity across countries; this includes the recent adoption of Agenda2030, the new Sustainable Development Agenda and the critical Paris meeting on Climate Change beginning next month.

Interviews with some participants can be arranged on request. Contact Diyana Yahaya at +66803492011 or Gizela de Carvalho at +67078136315.

Revisiting 'The Beauty Myth'



By: Naomi Wolf
Review by: Jennifer Armstrong (Huffington Post)

I just finished re-reading Naomi Wolf's The Beauty Myth, which I haven't actually read since college women's studies class. It was pretty new then -- I distinctly remember Wolf visiting Northwestern's campus to fire us all up about the idea of Third Wave feminism -- and it certainly spoke to me, as a budding feminist and beauty product enthusiast. But revisiting it now, 20 years later, evokes an all-too-common feeling I get when reading old feminist texts: Holy shit, nothing has changed. Or, actually, things have only gotten worse, in this case -- I couldn't help wondering what Wolf would make of bikini waxes (perhaps they'd warrant their own chapter, as they did in the book I co-authored, Sexy Feminism) or "vaginal rejuvenation." At one point she evokes the spectre of sewed-up labia as a possibility in a terrifying future. Welcome to that future.

If you're not familiar with this book, first, I recommend reading it immediately. If you're a woman, it will change your life; you will realize you are not irrational, or crazy, or silly. There are compelling reasons you find yourself comparing your wrinkles to other women's on the subway, or secretly delighting in shots of celebrity cellulite, or spending your whole paycheck at Sephora. Those reasons are systemic, cultural and hell-bent on patriarchy.

Yeah, it's a little depressing, but awareness is the first step. And at the end, Wolf outlines some great ways for us to take action against the Beauty Myth -- which we must continue to do so that our daughters will look back at us and laugh: Why did you think you had to lose another ten pounds? I'm recording some of those ideas here in handy list form, both to remind myself, and in hopes that anyone else might join me:

1. We can wear lipstick without feeling guilty. We are not the problem here.
2. We must figure out how to celebrate female culture without mixing it up in the repressive demands of patriarchy. Any ideas, anyone? I think something like Lilith Fair, seriously, was a great start. I went to every one of those things in the '90s -- we need some of that energy again. (No, that attempted revival a few years ago was not quite the same.)
3. "Just as the beauty myth did not really care what women looked like as long as women felt ugly, we must see that it does not matter in the least what women look like as long as we feel beautiful." We need to figure out how to make ourselves, and all women, feel beautiful.
4. We need to stop, as Wolf says, "debating the symptoms more passionately than the disease." (Most of us in the feminist blogosphere are guilty of some version of this at some time.) "The real issue has nothing to do with whether women wear makeup or don't, gain weight or lose it, have surgery or shun it, dress up or down, make our clothing and faces and bodies into works of art or ignore adornment altogether. The real problem is our lack of choice." Here's what that means to me: We need to stop being complicit in making beauty compulsory for all women. We need to stop judging all other women's looks, forever, period. I can think of no reasonable exception to this rule.
5. We need to figure out how to give ourselves, and all women, a strong sense of identity that has nothing to do with our physical appearance. We must embrace the idea that all of us can be sexual and serious. One does not preclude the other.
6. We must ignore anyone who tells us we're not beautiful as a reflex reaction to not liking what we're saying. That means you, Internet trolls. We need to speak up against anyone who uses what women look like, wear, or weigh to discredit what they're saying.
7. We need to tell others about the destructive powers of the Beauty Myth.
8. "Let us refuse forever to blame ourselves and other women for what it, in its great strength, has tried to do."
9. We must tell our stories. The Internet is great for this.
10. We must try to resist the idea that we must "age youthfully," that we must embrace the seductive idea that 40 is the new 20, or whatever. I personally don't want 40 to be the new 20 -- that sounds exhausting to me. I want very badly to be cool with my wrinkles and gray hairs. I think older women are beautiful; I really do. I hope I can remember that as I get older and inevitably freak out.
11. We must "look directly at one another, and find alternative images of beauty in a female subculture; seek out the plays, music, films that illuminate women in three dimensions; find the biographies of women, the women's history, the heroines that in each generation are submerged from view; fill in the terrible, 'beautiful' blanks."
12. This also means we need media literacy, to help ourselves and others see through the images that are fed to us by beauty advertisers. (That means the editorial copy and TV shows that run next to those ads, too.) We have the power, especially with blogging, to speak out against any images that reinforce the Beauty Myth. Women inside mainstream media can help, too, though they're often hamstrung by those advertisers. Whatever we can sneak into mainstream media is a victory.
13. We must develop and attend to our own sexuality, rather than deriving it from these false images.
14. We must eroticize equality. How? Probably more female-made porn and erotica, for starters.
15. We could stand to see each other naked more. You might resist that locker-room scene, but seeing other women's bodies, in all their non-standard, non-pornified variations, is a revelation.
16. We need to join with other feminists to fight these battles. We can't fix any of this alone.
17. We need to hang out with women of all ages. Part of what the Beauty Myth does is to pit us against each other and make us afraid of aging. The more older women you know, the less scary aging gets. And the more younger women you know, the more you're helping. We need better role models than the ones media handpicks for us.
18. We need to talk about the pitfalls of being "beautiful" as much as we talk about the problems with being deemed "ugly." This has not historically gone well, of course; remember that woman who wrote about being "too beautiful"? (Summary: Everyone was all, "She's not all that.") While our society certainly makes it easier to be "beautiful" and "thin" than what it deems "ugly" and "fat," women who are regarded as paragons of attractiveness are derided, taken less seriously and treated as empty objects. They're always accused of getting something they didn't deserve, and accusing themselves of such. They're also terrified of losing the advantage they have -- of growing older or plumper.
19. We need to stop seeing each other as competition. It's so rare that we're actually competing with another woman for, say, the same man. Why do we feel like we need to compare ourselves to every other woman then? I love Wolf's ideas about going out of our way to compliment other women, flirt with them, celebrate their beauty.
20. We can resist the urge to objectify men as patriarchy has objectified us. That's a no-win.
21. "A woman wins by giving herself and other women permission -- to eat; to be sexual; to age; to wear overalls, a paste tiara, a Balenciaga gown, a second-hand opera cloak, or combat boots; to cover up or to go practically naked; to do whatever we choose in following -- or ignoring -- our own aesthetic."

This was originally published on SexyFeminist.com.

Suffragette

by Jess Denham (The Independent)
Directed By: Sarah Gavron

The dramatic new trailer for upcoming women's rights movie *Suffragette* has been released, starring Carey Mulligan, Helena Bonham Carter and three-time Oscar winner Meryl Streep.

Sarah Gavron's drama will be the first ever full-length film to tell the inspirational and heart-breaking story of the early feminist movement's foot soldiers, who risked their jobs, homes, children and lives in the fierce fight for equality.

Mulligan's character Maud is at the center of *Suffragette*. A working wife and loving mother, her world is turned upside down when she secretly joins the suffragette movement and becomes an activist, radicalised by fugitive Emmeline Pankhurst.

"All my life I've been respectful, done what men told me, but I can't 'ave that anymore," Maud says defiantly in voiceover, before the clip cuts to Pankhurst giving a powerful speech calling on the movement to "defy the government and define their own destinies".

"We do not want to be lawbreakers," Pankhurst declares. "We want to be lawmakers. Never surrender, never give up the fight".

Cue lots of smashed windows, cries of "Votes for women!" and the explosive outbreak of anarchy.

Pankhurst became a political icon after forming the Women's Social and Political Union to fight for female liberation in Britain. She led the suffragette movement, vandalising 10 Downing Street and employing militant tactics to encourage change after peaceful protesting proved futile.

Pankhurst, who died in 1928 aged 69, was named one of the 100 Most Important People of the 20th century by Time in 1999. She was described by the magazine as a woman who "shocked society into a new pattern from which there could be no going back".

The vote was extended to all women aged 21 years and over just weeks after she died.

Gavron has directed *Suffragette* from Abi Morgan's script. Both women worked with Streep on The Iron Lady in 2011, in which she played another important female – former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Suffragette is the only film in history to shoot at the Houses of Parliament. It opens in cinemas nationwide on 30 October this year and will kick off the BFI London Film Festival on 7 October at Odeon Leicester Square in London.

About us

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural non-governmental organisation 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 in Fiji, 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

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