



# FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE

## NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2007

# Women's rights, human rights

**F**OR 16 days every year beginning in mid-November, women around the world organise events to highlight the devastating and extensive effects of violence against women.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign is an event that has brought many changes in legislation and policy but such results are unachievable without considering the wider context of human rights.

Recently the FWCC has been criticised for its stand on national human rights issues, with critics suggesting that the centre restrict its public statements to issues related directly to women.

"These critics are missing the point," says Shamima Ali, FWCC coordinator. "While primarily a women's organisation, the FWCC works within the wider framework of human rights."

Responding to critics, Shamima says for women to ultimately achieve equal status and fair treatment, their rights cannot be lobbied in isolation of the various other human rights.

"Women's rights are human rights, the FWCC has always maintained," says Shamima.

She says the FWCC's charter is based on universal human rights principles and the centre has always spoken out against issues such as police brutality, prison conditions and corporal punishment in schools.

And this year, like in 2000, the 16 Days Campaign has even more significance for women's human rights defenders because of the coup and its effects on women.

Shamima says since the coup, women's issues, such as persistent discrimination, have been relegated to the "backburner" as the politicians in power deal with other issues

deemed more important nationally. Women almost invariably are affected the most in times of national crisis.

They are usually the first ones to lose their jobs or be put on reduced hours. The industries most women work in too are affected – such as tourism and the export industries. The prevailing atmosphere encourages machismo leading to increased violence against women in many forms.

Women who are self-employed as market vendors or handicraft sellers are also affected because with lower earnings people don't spend as much as they normally would.

The cycle comes full circle and if the women are also the main income earners in their family, their spending power would have decreased because of the rise in food prices.

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## 31 in regional training



Participants in this year's Regional Training Program held in August.

**THE ANNUAL** Regional Training Program for women's rights advocates, NGO workers and members of the disciplined services from across the Pacific was held in August.

Some 31 people attended this year's four-week training program. For the first time in the 12 years since the program began participants from Tokelau and the Marshall Islands attended.

There were eight participants from Fiji

including FWCC staff, three police officers, a prison officer, a male advocate from Ba and a member of the Anglican Church.

The RTP involves four weeks of intensive training for women and men working in the area of violence against women and children - those providing counselling support, lobbying and advocacy and community awareness on these issues.



## Voice of reason

**THE FWCC** has been a consistent voice of reason through Fiji's turbulent times:

• In 1987, FWCC founder Shamima Ali was arrested protesting against Sitiveni Rabuka's coup.

• In 2000, the FWCC was vocal in its opposition to George Speight's takeover of the government and the 56-day hostage crisis. The FWCC also visited the communities terrorised during the upheavals – Muaniweni in Naitasiri and areas of the northern division – to document human rights abuses.

• After the military coup in December 2006, the FWCC spoke out for a return to democracy and an end to human rights violations by the military.

RTP REFLECTIONS

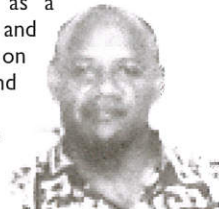
Sergeant **HARRY PENE** from the Fiji Police Force Academy: "The training has made me more aware of violence against women, gender issues and the work of NGOs in the Pacific."



**JULIA RAIBEVU**, a counsellor at the Fiji Prisons Service: "The training broadened my knowledge on gender inequality in Fiji and the Pacific. I am able to make the linkages between gender, violence against women and the law. "The training has empowered me and changed my perspectives on how I see other women."



**SAVENACA NABEKA**, Ba male advocate: "The training was empowering. I am better able to work as a human rights defender and community counsellor on violence in the home and child abuse.



"I will organise more awareness programs in my village."

About the 16 Days Campaign

**THE 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence** is an annual event that began in 1991 to highlight the devastating and extensive effects of violence against women and lobby for change at all levels of society. The 16 Days Campaign originated at the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership in 1991.

It is held from November 25 which is International Day Against Violence Against Women to December 10, which is International Human Rights Day. The intention is to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasise that such violence is a violation of human rights.

Other significant dates also fall within the 16-day timeframe: November 29 – International Women Human Rights Defenders Day; December 1 – World AIDS Day; and December 6 – the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre. (The Montreal Massacre occurred on December 6, 1989 when a deranged 25-year-old anti-feminist man entered the École Polytechnique in Canada and killed 14 women with a semi-automatic rifle.)

The 2007 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence dedicates this year's theme to overcoming challenges and obstacles that hinder the progress of activists, networks and organisations that campaign to end all forms of violence against women. In collaboration with others, the 16 Days Campaign seeks to help dismantle barriers posed by social attitudes and policies that condone and perpetuate gender-based violence.

This year's campaign focuses on demanding and securing adequate funding for work against violence against women.

This year's global theme is "Demanding Implementation, Challenging Obstacles: End Violence Against Women."

Calendar of Crimes

JULY

- **2nd** - A man appeared in court charged with attempted rape.
- **9th** - The court has issued a bench warrant for the arrest of a 41-year-old man who failed to appear for sentencing for assaulting his wife.
- **24th** - The Nadi Magistrates court sentenced a farmer to two years' imprisonment after he pleaded guilty to indecently assaulting a nine-year-old.
- **31st** - A 40-year-old man admitted to severely beating his wife before forcing her to have sex with him and taking explicit photos of her.
- **31st** - Two secondary school students appeared in court for allegedly raping a 13-year-old schoolmate. The students aged 18 and 17, of Suva, pleaded not guilty.

AUGUST

- **11th** - An 18-year-old, who indecently assaulted a girl while she was walking home with her father at night, was to have been sentenced.
- **11th** - A former prisoner who was released from prison last year was remanded in custody on a charge of rape.
- **13th** - A grandfather denied indecently assaulting his 19-year-old grandson while he was asleep.
- **16th** - A habitual peeping Tom was jailed for six months for spying on a 13-year-old while she was having a shower.
- **25th** - An unemployed Nadi youth was released on an \$800 bail on charges of confining an underage girl for a day and having sex with her.
- **28th** - A 22-year-old Lautoka cane-cutter was given a suspended sentence after he pleaded guilty to two counts of indecent assault

Rapist jailed for nine years

A MAN who raped a 16-year-old girl in the bushes after he lured her with the help of her two friends was jailed for nine years yesterday.

She said they were happy with the court's decision and hoped such cases could be dealt with in a similar manner. The court heard...

and insulting the modesty of a woman. SEPTEMBER

- **3rd** - Police in Savusavu investigated the rape of a 12-year-old mentally challenged girl at a village by her 50-year-old granduncle.
- **4th** - A businessman and a tertiary student have denied the rape of a 19-year-old girl. The alleged incident happened while the pair was drinking with the girl.
- **9th** - A security officer was jailed for five years after he pleaded guilty to raping a 17-year-old student.
- **14th** - A court refused a 37-year-old man's application to re-examine an American tourist who accused him of raping her.
- **15th** - A van driver fled from court orderlies after he was found guilty of

Wife basher jailed

MELINA NAIVALUWAQA

A casual dock worker was jailed for six months after he assaulted his wife. Nadi Magistrate Laisa Laveti sentenced Noa Raura, 45 of Legalega, Nadi to nine months after he pleaded guilty to one count of assault and his suspended case was activated by the court. Raura told the court that he had been having difficulties with his wife for the past ten years and he could not stand to live with her any more. He said he had not stood to her

for the past ten years and I cannot stand her any more. That is why we have been having domestic problems and most of the time she does not listen to me," he said. Magistrate Laveti warned him this was not the first time he had been in court for a similar offence and that he was given a suspended sentence for a similar offence last year, which would now be activated. "I have no other choice but give you a custodial sentence because you already have a pending suspended sentence, which I will activate for you. You will now have to spend time in prison," she said.

Vaciseva Marawa said Raura returned from work at about 9am on Saturday when his wife confronted him and asked him where he was the previous day. "He did not like how the wife was asking him because it was not the first time she had been asking him like that. He did not like it and accused started punching her," Const. Marawa. His wife reported the matter to police after she received serious injuries as the result of the assault. Magistrate Laveti activated the suspended sentence and sentenced him to six months for the case yesterday.

raping a 13-year-old girl. The 24-year-old was remanded in custody after an appeal by the prosecutors against his acquittal in the magistrate's court. ● **20th** - A 43-year-old man has been remanded in custody for sentencing on a charge of raping a 12-year-old female relative at home. He was charged with one count of indecent assault and one of rape.

● AND MORE

# The forgotten victims of migration

**IN RECENT** years, a growing number of Fiji-Indian girls have been abandoned or separated from their husbands abroad because of domestic violence, according to Fiji Women's Crisis Centre information.

The phenomenon of failed migration marriages has left a swathe of women deeply traumatised. For the most part, the wider society doesn't know about such a phenomenon, while the communities from which affected women come from pretend it doesn't exist.

It is common to find Fiji-Indian men now living overseas advertising in the daily newspapers in their homeland for a partner. But it is also common to find the women who get involved in these relationships abandoned or separated from their husbands in a foreign land. Sometimes these women are talked into fixed marriages and the hopes of a better life quickly turn into a nightmare.

The nightmare comes in the form domestic violence from their husbands and, sometimes, in-

laws, emotional abuse and financial struggle.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has counselled several Fiji-Indian women who had married former Fiji citizens and were later subjected to ill-treatment in many forms.

In some cases the husbands turn out not to be financially stable as they had claimed before marriage.

Sometimes, these women find themselves dumped in a strange and hostile environment without support.

The perpetrators – who married their wives in Fiji – take advantage of the fact that they are out of reach of the jurisdiction of the Fiji courts, while the victims often do not have the emotional support or resources to fight back and bring their abusive husbands to justice.

Sometimes women face confinement in their homes without finances. This results in mental and physical trauma – and shattered dreams. These duped women have to struggle with the twin troubles of emotional scars and the practicalities of being abandoned. Sometimes they have to deal with pregnancy and worried about bringing up their children alone.

Often the women's families back in Fiji pressure the girl to continue living in a relationship despite the violence, so they do not lose their permanent residency status and also so that the chances are not jeopardised for younger siblings wanting to migrate for a better future.

Even if the women do return to their families in Fiji, the psychological trauma does not end. She is blamed, rejected by the family and sometimes by the wider society because of the cultural stigma of being a divorcee.

Often she suffers anguish, low-self esteem and depression and needs regular counselling and empowerment. In many cases she is unable to remarry and often has to support herself and her children.

Increasingly such women, who mostly come from rural and peri-urban areas, descend into poverty and get caught up along with their children in sexual exploitation, street-dwelling, infanticide – and sometimes suicide.

Sometimes the children caught in the middle of a damaging relationship are told to choose between either parents. If they accompany their mothers back to Fiji they often end up in a single-parent family and have to cope with the hardship, as well as jibes from extended family.

To deal with this growing phenomenon of Fiji-Indian women who are victims of migration marriages, requires action at every level of government.

For a start, the perpetrators should be made to pay maintenance at an amount that would allow the victims to regain some dignity and lead a normal life. To combat this, the FWCC believes it is imperative that awareness programs be launched, especially in the rural areas, which seems to be where most of the victims come from. The cultural, social and legal aspects of migration marriages need to be disseminated widely through the local media.

The FWCC believes this is a matter that needs urgent attention because an increasingly large sector of society is being left damaged by their experiences and forgotten.

## Jacqui's four months of learning

**MY FOUR-MONTH** placement with the FWCC took me inside Suva's courtrooms, documenting cases of violence against women and children with the centre's counsellors, among other events.

I observed Edwina Kotoisiva conduct Community Education workshops with post-graduate nursing students, Suva's business sector and local church groups all wanting to be informed about violence against women issues facing Fiji's women today. I worked with the research unit to trace sexual assault and child abuse cases to enhance work practices, maintain data records and lobby for change.

During August, I attended the Regional Training Program (RTP) organised by the FWCC in collaboration with various local NGOs.

The program's human rights framework aimed to engage participants in feminist discourse: violence against women issues and gender relations strategies for change, legal literacy, counselling, HIV/Aids, global issues impacting women and developing media campaigns, radio production were a few of the topics covered in this intense four-week training for NGO workers across the Pacific region.

The program's Male Advocacy training exemplifies some of the strategies for change the FWCC is pursuing. During her talk Shamina moved participants with her passion and wealth of experience. She shifted perceptions on gender equality and challenged tradition and cultural practices.

At the end of the intensive training, a Tokelauan dance and Papua New Guinean poem collectively summed up the RTP experience, the knowledge gained, new skills learnt and friendships made.

In late August I took a trip to Pacific Harbour for a five-day staff retreat. It was a gathering of FWCC staff members from across Fiji, a time for the centre's women to collectively share experiences and attend counselling and research workshops. There was open discussion and reflection on the current political climate. Human rights experts stressed the human rights violations throughout Fiji that continue to undermine a return to democracy. A rare opportunity for



Jacqui De Villiers says goodbye to FWCC.

me was to hear former judge and Vice-President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi and human rights lawyer Imrana Jalal's thought-provoking workshop on human rights that concluded an eventful week.

I will sadly miss the women of FWCC - their warmth, spirit and unquestionable commitment to women's rights throughout the Pacific.

I take with me the inspiration to work with the same conviction and dedication I witnessed daily as a member of staff. My experience with FWCC has enriched my professional and personal values beyond my expectations.

● *Jacqui De Villiers is a Bachelor of Community Welfare, International Social Development student at the University of Western Sydney. As part of her graduating requirements, Jacqui completed a four-month attachment with the FWCC at the end of August. Jacqui is an Australian but her mother is from Fiji.*

# Staff reflect at retreat

**FIJI WOMEN'S** Crisis Centre staff and a colleague from Tonga spent five days reflecting on their year and refreshing themselves for the work ahead.

Twenty-eight staff from the Ba, Labasa, Nadi and Suva centres and a staff from the National Centre for Women and Children in Tonga attended the retreat at the Lagoon

Resort in Pacific Harbour, Deuba. The retreat was held at the end of August.

A colourful, vibrant and eventful program was put together for this year's five-day event at which staff unwound, shared experiences, went through refresher courses and heard some of the country's top human rights professionals speak.



Susana dresses up for the Indian theme night at the retreat.

## Uhatafe learns

**SUSANA UHATAFE** from the Tonga National Centre for Women and Children attended the FWCC annual retreat in August.

She described the event as fulfilling, saying she would take back her knowledge and experience to share with her colleagues in Tonga.

She highlighted the "transparency and accountability between the staff, the importance of teamwork, good management and the ease with which staff of different cultures and backgrounds integrated."

Susana said she hoped the relationship and mentoring provided by the FWCC to her Tongan organisation would continue.



FWCC staff at the Deuba retreat.

### Staff profile

**NAME:** Wilma Eileen  
**POSITION:** Project Officer/Counsellor, Ba Women's Crisis Centre



Working at the Crisis Centre has made me realise how much women have been abused physically, emotionally, sexually and verbally, within their own homes and in society. The intensity of the abuses is sometimes unimaginable. I am privileged to be part of the FWCC in terms of counselling, empowering, supporting, educating and most of all, making a woman realise that there is hope. One of the most satisfying parts of my career, is to see a woman have a smile on her face after a counselling session.

### COMMUNITY EDUCATION

#### JUNE

- Fiji School of Nursing - Sexual assault, domestic violence
- Leadership Fiji - Gender and poverty
- Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF program) - Rape, sexual harassment
- Pacific Children's Program - Role of the centre, Women of Courage, child sexual abuse
- Nukubolu District School, Labasa - Child abuse and child sexual abuse
- Naleba Bhartiya School, Labasa - Child abuse and child sexual abuse
- Coqeloa Sangam Primary School, Labasa - Child abuse and child sexual abuse

#### JULY

- Holy Trinity Pre-school Week - Child sexual abuse
  - Salvation Army Women - Domestic violence
  - Namoli Methodist District, Ba - Role of the centre, domestic violence
  - Naduna Arya Kindergarten School, Labasa - Child sexual abuse, role of the centre
- OCTOBER**
- SPC Community Education Training Centre - Gender issues
  - Kalabu Circuit Carnival - Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Child Sexual Abuse
  - Postgraduate Dip in Legal Practice - Domestic violence and restraining orders.

### Thumbs up!

**THUMBS UP** to Magistrate Ajmal Khan for jailing a rapist for nine years. Maciu Kotoisavusavu, 27, had just completed a four-year sentence for manslaughter when he was charged with raping a 16-year-old girl.

The girls two friends helped Kotoisavusavu lure the girl and Magistrate Khan ordered police to lay charges against them as well.

The man had 11 previous convictions and was released from prison last year.

## Lani attends PNG training

**LANIETA MATANATABU**, a research officer at the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre in Suva, attended a regional feminist advocacy training event in Papua New Guinea in July.

The training, organised by the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) Pacific and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), was held from July 16-21.

Lanieta was one of 28 participants from Fiji, PNG, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

The weeklong training raised issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, political restructuring and social transformation, the political economy of globalisation, and political ecology and sustainability.

Of all the issues discussed at the event, Lani says it was an eye-opener studying the widespread effects of globalisation.



Lanieta and Rosie from Fiji (second and third from back), with PNG colleagues at the DAWN/FWRM conference. Jill Bosro (PNG) seated in front of Lani was attached to FWCC for one year in 2001.

### 2 for Thai training

**TWO FIJI** Women's Crisis Centre staff attended a regional training course in Thailand from September 29-October 6.

Sera Bogitini of the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre and Reshmi Singh of the Nadi Women's Crisis Centre attended the eight-day training.

It was organised by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD).

The Feminist Legal Theory and Practice training is a significant activity of the APWLD. The training seeks to challenge the traditional notion that law is neutral, objective, a rational set of rules, unaffected by the perspective of those who possess the power inherent in legal institutions.