SISTERS - IN - LAW

The right of a woman to be autonomous (to her) is a prerequisite which has been conflated with male sex...

Dunnleavy (in testimony at the ECHR in 1994) said: "Women's legal rights are at the heart of reproductive rights."

Women now boast thirty odd lawyers in their own right, all 33 with university qualifications. In a couple of years this number will almost triple, with the first law graduates from the University of the South Pacific to join the profession. There lies a mixture of advantages and some concerns both for the profession and women lawyers in general. The number of women in the legal profession has increased largely in recent years and the need to form ourselves into some sort of organization is becoming more evident more recently.

Women lawyers hold major positions in their own right, and have made their marks in the profession, many younger and some older members see the need to build networks and support systems with such members and indeed look to creating themselves a place within the profession and society in general. The common theme amongst all groups is "equality". Social justice and responsibility, human rights, constructive and innovative changes generally.

"The law as it is practiced and applied in Fiji is not women-friendly. They certainly require some innovative and creative applications and rigorous interpretation of statutes and regulations to advocate and promote their interests and concerns. In the area of domestic violence, sexual assault on women, sexual abuse of children, maintenance and custody of children, inter alia the laws and enforcement thereof are profoundly inequitable to women given the fact that women anywhere in the world have very special needs and difficulties in the welfare system of gender analysis both on the micro and macro levels of society.

Whereas changes do not happen overnight, it is a promising beginning at least that the profession is taking on the role of women lawyers in the drafting of the sustainable development bill on environmental law in Fiji. Anwita Prasad is a senior lawyer and was a member of the Fiji Law Reform Commission. She was a contributor to the The Fiji Bar Association's report on environmental law in Fiji. She is also a member of the Fiji Law Reform Commission. She is a contributor to the The Fiji Bar Association's report on environmental law in Fiji.

Director of the Fiji Law Reform Commission, Florence Venta (from left) - a woman "first" in the legal profession with otherগুলোর সাথে F LCDWLS' book launch.

GENDER APARTHEID WORSENS IN AFGHANISTAN

The Taliban regime has continued its campaign of brutality and repression against women and girls. The regime has imposed strict controls on women's movements and has curtailed their access to education and work. Women are barred from attending schools and universities, and are subjected to stricter controls on their daily lives. The Taliban has also imposed a strict dress code, requiring women to wear traditional clothing at all times.

The regime has also arrested and tortured women who have opposed its policies. Women's rights activists and human rights organizations have condemned the Taliban's treatment of women, and have called for international action to bring the regime to justice.

The United Nations has urged the Taliban to respect women's rights and to ensure their participation in political and social life. The United States has also expressed concern about the situation of women in Afghanistan and has placed economic sanctions on the Taliban regime.

The International Community has also called for an end to the oppression of women in Afghanistan, and has urged the Taliban to respect human rights and to engage in dialogue with the Afghan people to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.
LAUNCH OF BOOK: LAW FOR PACIFIC WOMEN

On March 9th, 1998, the book "Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook" written by Muriel Nalau and published by FWM was launched by the Prime Minister of Fiji, Shiveni Rabuka, at the residence of the British High Commissioner in Fiji, Michael Dibden.

The launch was an auspicious affair attended by over 300 people from various sectors of the community in Fiji and guests traveled from overseas countries to be at this significant occasion for the Movement and the author, Muriel Nalau.

Members of the diplomatic corps, Government officials and representatives from the private sector, civil organizations and the media came together to celebrate the event with staff and members of the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement.

FWM Coordinator Gita Hoing Lee welcomed guests in a speech and said that the book was an important step in raising awareness about women’s rights and issues. She emphasized the need for women to be empowered and involved in decision-making processes.

The book launch was held in Fiji to demonstrate the importance of women’s rights and the need for legal reforms to protect women’s interests. The book was described as a valuable resource for women’s rights activists and organizations in the Pacific region.

CAMPAIGN FOR SACKING OF WOMAN MINISTER

By Zaynoup Eldin

Tokor: “Women don’t make a man.” Inezay Saygun, Minister responsible for women’s affairs said these words years ago. Some women who have started a campaign to call for Saygun’s resignation believe she has not changed since that time.

Halina Guner, one of the founders of the Jam Susaga Women’s Association says, many previous female politicians who received the same treatment went through a similar process and valued women’s concerns while they were in office. “Inezay Ayed, herself stated that she learned how to see things from the man’s standpoint after the election day,” Guner added.

The campaign started last week after an interview with Saygun, conducted by the daily Sabah’s correspondent, Noor Daud. Saygun’s words on women and feminist issues caused a large amount of controversy and were not welcomed not only by women but also by many men.

Saygun’s approval of the virginity test and her pressure on women to present the test a “necessity” as well as her draft that requires equal prison sentences for men and women, caused tension among the various groups. Some of Saygun’s comments were as follows:

"Implication will be discussed. They will be humiliates publicly. "It’s about women’s human rights and freedom."

As an advocacy tool, this handbook will assist in identifying areas for legal reform, it will assist the advocating lobbying for the amendment of the Citizenship Act which discriminates against women. She spoke about FWM’s projects and the activities the Movement implements such as its education and awareness programs. She then called for the Permanent Arbitration for women who have been victim of gender-based violence.

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FWRM Holds Strategic Planning Meeting

FWM staff and Management Committee members will be convening at the Centre Resort in Pacific Drukprints on the weekend of May 9th and 10th to discuss directions in which the Movement will move towards for future sustainability. The meeting is being held in response to FWM’s difficulty in securing funding for projects and recurrent costs such as rent and salaries. UNDP’s Fund for NGOs strengthening officer Joe Taylor will be facilitating the meeting where the participants will review the previous year’s activities and discuss future plans.

Fundraising Drive!

FWM will be holding a fundraising evening at the Fiji Arts Club on Selbourne St, Suva on May 20th, 1998. The evening will feature a play called "Play Anonymous" presented by Fiji and Pacific playwright Larry Thomas. The play is a story of a woman facing family problems and depicts a mother in Fiji trying to cope with everyday challenges. Tickets are on sale at the FWM office at $10. Wine and cheese will be served.

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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & FIJI TODAY

Clearly, it makes more sense to prevent illness than to search for cures after people become ill. Pesticides, fungicides and herbicides remain in the soil and in vegetable material for many years after they are used and make their way into our bodies through the food chain. Once in the body, they lodge in fatty tissue such as female breast, mother's milk and the cells of the developing fetus. This is why organically grown foods are becoming increasingly popular overseas; they do not poison you. There are also many articles appearing on organic control of pests and weeds and the use of natural organic fertilizers. We need to develop similar processes suited to Fiji's situation.

Chlorine is highly toxic material (H3) and combined with carbon creates arsenic compounds found in many pesticides, dyes, paper, plastics. They cause hormone disruptions, infertility, birth defects, impaired development and they affect our metabolism, cause behavioral and neurological changes, immune suppression and cancer. 177 different organochlorides have been identified in human fatty tissue, blood, mother's milk, semen and even in exhaled air from humans.

This is why the incinerator at the Nadi Airport is so dangerous; it burns plastics from places housing everywhere in lethal chlorine compounds. Radiation: the fallout from weapons tests all over the world include strontium 90, plutonium, uranium, radium, and thorium; all substances stored in our bodies. This applies even to people in tests conducted. Human eggs and sperm are universally contaminated. The results are cancer, miscarriages and infant deaths; genetic diseases, physical deformity and mental retardation.

The military is the single largest polluter and causes 10-30% of all environmental degradation. The US Public Health project found a large increase in breast cancer in women living near nuclear facilities. And the USA, France and Britain, countries who have callously exposed us also live in supposedly clean and healthy island environments to radiation, for forty years.

Air quality: fumes and carcinogens come from smoke stacks and industrial emissions. There is a good bumper sticker from Greenpeace: "This car emits carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, benzene, dioxides and neurotoxins. They cause respiratory diseases, cancer, song and global warming. They are particularly dangerous to children."

Aren't you happy to live in Fiji? There may be fewer cars and houses than in other countries, but there are just as dirty, and no one in authority knows what to do anything about it. The companies involved lead free petro oil, after all, not at the behest of Government. Think of how much money it would save the country if the owners were forced to clean up their act. Perhaps we can take down the number of every bus and truck spewing black smoke and publish the list in the newspapers weekly - numbers and the name of company.

"Organic food is becoming increasingly popular overseas; they do not poison you."

for legal reforms to be able to ask pertinent questions in respect of the law and its application, he said.

He further spoke about Government's commitment to women saying that the new Constitution to be enacted in July, 1998 will effectively remove those discriminatory citizenship provisions which have long been a symbol of discrimination against women in Fiji.

"All these demonstrate our collective will in Fiji to move towards a society of the kind that I am committed to as your Prime Minister, a society which serves all citizens, as individuals and as communities, irrespective of gender, race, religion or economic status. We are equal in law and in our fundamental rights and freedoms."

In keeping line with Government's commitment to the Plan of Action adopted at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing, the Ministry of Women has identified priority areas for follow up action by Government which will be undertaken in close coordination and collaboration with women's NGOs that are actively engaged in promoting the interests of women, children and the family," he said. He added women's NGOs for their support in the work they have done and which was collected in the book and said that the collective efforts of civil organisations were contributing in a significant way to the increased awareness of the various areas of concern of NGOs.

He also gave acknowledgements to the early efforts of women's groups who have had to work in situations where their disadvantaged positions are usually accepted and defeated as the cause because such conditions exist in the countries of定制和传统。 "They established a Fiji National Council of Women to provide a united front in facing women's concerns to Government," he concluded by saying that as the Prime Minister, he was committed to encouraging the establishment of women's own bodies and also in his party to stand for the forthcoming general elections. "I ask one who will to see a big increase in the number of women candidates and if I am Prime Minister again, I will make sure that a reasonable number of my appointees to the Senate are women because I recognise that women make up half of the populace."

FWMW collective member Vini Sateo ended the evening with a speech thanking guests for attending the launch in particular the leaders of FWMW who have made it possible for the Movement to continue its work towards improving the status of women in Fiji.
ON THE BOOK - LAW FOR PACIFIC WOMEN

The book "Law for Pacific Women," written by FWRM (Fijian Women's Rights Movement) and launched in 1998, is the first comprehensive book ever to be written about women and the law in the Pacific. It covers a wide range of issues concerning women and their legal rights. It is filled with rich and varied content and is designed to be accessible to women of all ages and backgrounds. The book is divided into various sections, each focusing on a specific area of law. The sections cover family law, personal law, and human rights law, among others. The book is written in clear and concise language, making it easy for women to understand their legal rights and the laws that govern them.

NEW RAPE LAW SIDES WITH VICTIMS - PHILIPPINES

No longer will a rape victim be blamed for bringing the wrong place at the wrong time. In a new anti-rape law signed by President Ferdinand Marcos last 13 September 1977, rapists are made criminals instead of simply being private citizens. This means that other than the victim, authorities can now press charges. Moreover, the law is "anti-restraint," says lawyer Zenaida Reben, "the victim does not have to be subjected to humiliation anymore."

In the past, rape was defined as a violation of a woman's chastity by a stranger from the public road code of the 18th century. If a woman was considered promiscuous, it was easy to convict a court that she had consented to having sex. If she was a prostitute, she might be arrested for breaking the law. However, an accused can still be charged if he violated the victim. The present law is saying rape is not a violation of a woman's chastity. It is a violation of a person, says lawyer Zenaida Reben of the Women's Legal Assistance Group.

Under the new law, a rape can charge her husband with rape if she thinks he was involved. It also defines the crime to include penetration with foreign objects as well as non-consensual anal and oral sex. The law is designed to remove the possibility of lesser charges for rapists. "Insertion of metal or anything should be grave or worse, especially if it leads to death," lawyer Reben lamented. The new law will presumably cause pain to pedophiles.

The book is a valuable resource for women seeking to understand their legal rights and the laws that govern them. It is a must-read for all women, especially those who may be facing legal challenges. The book provides valuable insights into the legal system and the rights of women, making it an important tool for advocacy and awareness.

FWRM HOLDS BUDGET TALKS

FWRM convened a meeting to discuss Government's 1997 Budget at the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) office in Suva. The meeting was attended by stakeholders from various organizations and government departments. The meeting was held to discuss the implications of the budget on women's rights and to ensure that women's issues are taken into consideration. The attendees discussed issues such as education, health, and women's participation in decision-making. The meeting was a valuable opportunity for stakeholders to share their perspectives and to ensure that the budget is gender-sensitive.
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CHILD ABUSE & CHILD ABDUCTION

By Steve Pedra

The level of violence in society and domestic violence are public issues. Cases of violence have been of concern for a long time. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement have been instrumental in highlighting the problem of domestic violence and particularly, violence against women. Child abuse, violence and child abductions have also been given attention in order to tackle the issues of violence against women and child abductions.

US AIDS RESEARCH IN POOR NATIONS RAISES OUTCRY

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg

Washington - For the past two years, the United States has been conducting experiments on pregnant women infected with HIV in Africa, Thailand and the Dominican Republic in which women are given drugs that can prevent transmission of the deadly AIDS virus to their babies and some receive only dummy pills.

The studies are so controversial that even some government's own scientists have questioned whether they are ethical. Now one of the nation's most prestigious medical journals has thrown a harsh spotlight on the research, with an editorial that lobbies the government to ban the notorious Tuskegee experiment, in which poor black men suffering from syphilis were left untreated.

The AIDS studies involve 12,211 women in seven countries and are paid for by the National Institute of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in order to help develop a cheap, effective method for preventing transmission of HIV to babies. The research is based on one of the most dramatic discoveries of the AIDS epidemic: that women who take the drug AZT during pregnancy can cut the risk of transmission by two-thirds.

But the drug, as used in the United States, costs about $1,000 per month, so public health officials want to know if there are less expensive ways to AZT to achieve the same benefit. Half the women in the experiments receive AZT, varying levels that differ from the amounts used in the US. The other half gets the dummy pills.

As a result, critics say more than 1,000 infants will catch the AIDS virus, infections that the children's chances of survival could be improved. "We have turned our backs on these mothers and their babies," complained Dr. Peter D. The Lancet, an advocacy group that has condemned the research.

Federal officials concede that the use of dummy pills is the only way to get a quick, reliable result and that it is not depriving women of therapy they would have otherwise received, since the AZT is not available in the Third World. But some critics suggest that this argument is reminiscent of deceptive tactics employed by the Tuskegee experiment, in which researchers watched the course of syphilis while saying that the subjects of the study were being given treatment. The same criticism was made in this case.

Some of the arguments that were made in favor of the Tuskegee study many years ago are similar to the arguments in the AZT studies in the Third World, the Lancet's Angel, the executive editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, said in an interview this week.

International Women's Day Activities Update

March was a busy month for FWRM staff and members. The month marked the internationally acclaimed International Women's Day celebrations. It was topped off by the lobbying and advocacy efforts in the hope of creating more public awareness on issues concerning women and children in Fiji. Under the theme "Girls Can Do Anything," FWRM launched its activities centered on the theme "Girls Can Do Anything" and continued to the last issue. FWRM participated in activities organized by other women's groups such as the National Council of Women, Fiji YWCA and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

NOW in conjunction with the Pacific Concerns Resource Center organized a seminar on women in the Colombo Track and Hawaii (SSTR and WEER) officers respectively participated in a half-day IWD celebration which included panel discussions and displays. FWRM took part along with PCRC and other NGOs.

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Media & Campaign Activities

Five women employed in male-dominated professions were interviewed and their stories appeared in the last issue of Balance as well as in the local newspaper, Fiji Times. We thank Sudie Yee Shaw, male-dominated professions face issues in Fiji. A Girls Can Do Anything advertisement produced in conjunction with Masuma Ilhaz was televised for two weeks drawing encouraging comments from members of the public.

Solei Fong, Uruilina Karan, Avenika Nawanalevu and Tuioloni for their contributions to the "Girls Can Do Anything" campaign.

WEER project officer Rejiali (right to the camera) was invited by the Fiji Institute of Technology to discuss the setting up of a creche for staff and students. This project was funded by the NZDOA and opened by the NZ High Commissioner Susan Shimmer who made a reference to FWRM's campaign Girls Can Do Anything in her speech.

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Reclaim the Night
On March 17th, FWHR in conjunction with the NGO Coalition on Human Rights organized a reclaim the high street march that became one of the largest in the country with the participation of other organizations. The event was well attended with many different groups participating. The march began at Albert Street and ended at Albert Park where speeches were made and a rally was held.

Panel Discussion on Human Rights
Roxanne attended a panel discussion organized by FWHR in which notable speakers such as Professor Avindra Ramnauth, Professor Vijay Shenkar, and the University of the South Pacific, Fiji Law Reform Commission’s Dr. Chadwick, and the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCS) were involved. The discussion centered around the participation of women in political and social life.

UNESCAP Workshop
On March 19th, FWHR attended a UNESCAP workshop held in conjunction with the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCS). The discussion focused on the participation of women in the political and social life.

Seminar on Family Law
On March 20th and 21st, FWHR attended a seminar on family law organized by the Fiji Law Reform Commission. The seminar was attended by legal professionals and human rights activists. The seminar focused on the participation of women in the political and social life.

School Visit
On Friday, March 27th, FWHR visited the classroom of a primary school in Suva where the students were taught about human rights and the participation of women in the political and social life.

It is difficult to change these because there are those who have acquired power over others by traditional means and are not interested in losing that power or in changing the system. Some traditional cultural outlooks must change to suit the present condition and philosophy of life embodied in the Christian principles of living and sanctified by international laws and conventions on human rights.

FWHR: In your studies in the Pacific, can you give some examples of how human rights have been applied and evident in the Melanesian and Polynesian cultures? Perhaps you can illustrate on the Kula system as an example, where women are the dominant gender in the traditional Kula system, in which women own the land and control the decision-making processes.

UNESCAP: In the Fiji situation, it is difficult to accept change leading to the erosion of their power and position.

Those who have benefitted through the existing colonial structures and other remaining shackles of colonial mercantilism find it difficult to accept change leading to the erosion of their power and position.

I do not support such views. Such views only come about when people are so much concerned about their own rights that they do not recognize the rights of others to live and enjoy rights that have been made available to them.

I am sure the poor would request in this regard and be helped to develop their own little business.
HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL ATTAINABLE

Professor Asenel Ravanu, QILFI from left speaking at the FWRM

"It was overwhelming with the support and the number of people who turned up, not only women but also non-white people. It was a very exciting and inspiring event for all of us, and it was a great honor to be a part of it," said one of the participants.

Professor Ravanu discussed human rights and its context in the Pacific culture. Some excerpts from the interview with FWRM.

"What are your views on human rights and how is it applicable to indigenous context (if it can be applied that is)?"

"Human rights are not just for individuals, but also for entire communities. They are the building blocks of a just and equitable society."
CUT FLOWER INDUSTRY FLOURISHES ALONG WITH WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Eileen Burness spoke to women at a Women in Business seminar on the institution of the New Zealand High Commission last month. At the seminar, women discussed ways of accessing loans, grants and training. In 1995, Ms Burness, famous for her occult garden tours for tourists in the western division, led several tours to visit their own flower businesses through funding from the Fiji Development Bank and below are excerpts from her presentation to participants:

“We are all locals and when we tried to get loans, it was very difficult. After we started, we formed a cooperative because we have what we call a home and garden tour. We get a fee paid for. And when we went to the bank, they all said you have to get your husbands approval. I found out about the New Zealand Loan Scheme at the Fiji Development Bank and a minimum of $1000. The women received $10,000 to grow orchids in their back yard. I also had to work on training so that the women learn how to conduct their business and grow orchids properly. The NZ Embassy helped me and funded the workshops and we had up to 400 women at the workshop. I now have twenty women growing 2,000 - 5,000 orchids growing in their backyards.

By this time, the horticulture was also into the picture as well and they are the orchid growers. By this time, there was a lot of advertising on the radio and television about the New Zealand Business Council and I was inundated with telephone calls from women in the Suva area wanting to enroll in classes. This isn't too good for orchids because it's too wet and we decided on orchids. The Fiji Women's Investment Board helped me to start to run a distance-free plant nursery and the Fiji Association of Women Graduates helped to get me the material for the art we started the Teacher's Project. The second workshop also funded by the NZ Embassy was on how to grow orchids and a consultant was also brought in to teach women on growing orchids.

The Department of Agriculture finally approved that my first shipment of orchids be brought in from Holland. I now have around fifty women from Nadi to Nausori wanting to do arrowroot. But it is a hard and work and we decided on orchids. The NZ Aid Scheme has come to our aid and women are able to cover this text business for the first time with the help of the NZF and since the FDB staff are now helping us. As long as the grant is done, it's good because it gives you a fair chance and the other women coming up with similar problems. We have to do away with the idea of a monopoly and aid should be given only to women when you have 400 women who want to learn to grow their own orchids. We hope to hold another workshop this year with consultants from Australia and New Zealand teaching women how to do accounting and manage small business.

FWRM Staff Appointed to Labor Advisory Board

A staff member of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) has been appointed an independent member of the Labor Advisory Board. Mrs. Ena Taguekaiwai was appointed by the Ministry for Labor and Industrial Relations. The term is effective from 1st of April, 1996 to 30th of December, 1996. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement has been a leading advocate for women workers' rights and the appointment is in recognition of FWRM's role in gender advocacy in the area of women's employment in the formal and informal sectors.

FROM THE DESK: We hope you enjoyed this issue of Balance and we are again seeking your response to some of the issues covered so far. Please forward letters, contributions to Balance and membership requests to the Coordinator, FWRM, P.O. Box 14194, Suva, Fiji. We can be contacted on telephone (679) 313166 or Fax: (679) 313466. Subscription rates: Fiji - F$5, South Pacific Member Countries - F$10, Australia & New Zealand F$15, Asean & America F$20, Europe & Sub-Saharan – F$25

Balance April '96