



FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2007

No excuse for violence

INTERNATIONAL Women's Day (IWD) this year couldn't have come at a more appropriate time for Fiji.

The theme for this year's event on March 8 was "Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women". The theme refers to the exemption from punishment for violence that is perpetrated against women, an issue which FWCC Coordinator Shamima Ali says they have been raising for the past 22 years.

Ali says the issue is of dire concern at this time in Fiji's history, when the country is once again experiencing instability.

"Our experience as well as global experience has shown that whenever there is a conflict or political instability such as what we are currently experiencing in Fiji, violence against women is exacerbated and it is not considered an issue of concern thus many perpetrators are excused for their behaviour."

Ali says legislative reform on the issue of violence against women was often sidelined when other issues are considered more important on the national agenda.

FWCC has been conducting community outreach and awareness programs for women in the lead up to IWD.

This year, however, the FWCC did not hold its annual "Reclaim the Night" march to mark women's day because of the inappropriate national climate.

Ali says the centre would continue to call for an end to violence through other means.

Meanwhile, more than 100 people turned up to visit the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Open Day on March 8, which was International Women's Day. (See photos next page)

Visitors got a chance to meet the staff, watch educational videos, view our library services, collect community education materials - and see the new headquarters at Gordon Street.

In Nadi, the FWCC centre there joined with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement to launch its "Picture This!" photography project. In Nausori, the women's wing of the Fiji Teachers Union and the Fijian Teachers Association invited the FWCC to speak to members. The Adi Cakobau School Old Girls Association invited the FWCC to address its members in an event on the evening of IWD.



Shamima Ali receives her Woman of Courage Award from US ambassador to Fiji Larry Dinger at the US Embassy in Suva on March 6

Woman of Courage award

FWCC Coordinator Shamima Ali has been awarded the "Woman of Courage" award by the United States government.

The award was presented to Ali - who is also a Fiji Human Rights Commissioner - by US Ambassador to Fiji Larry Dinger to coincide with International Women's Day in March.

Dinger said the award recognises Ali's "brave defence of freedom and human dignity in Fiji", her advocacy of women's rights over the many years" and "fearless stance on behalf of human rights and democracy in recent months."

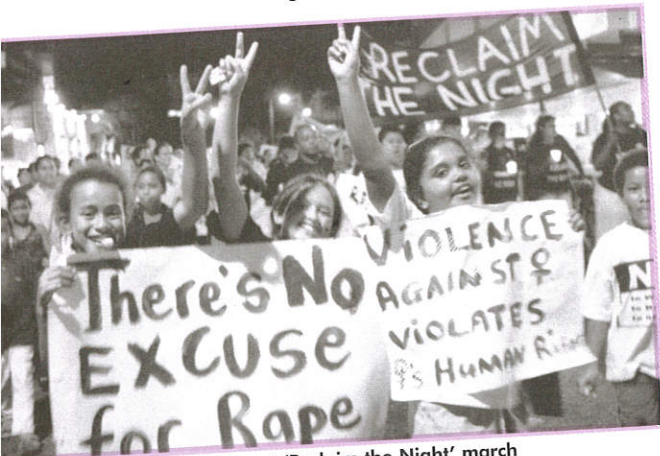
In a letter accompanying the award, US under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs Paula Dobriansky, praised Ali's contribution to "furthering the cause of freedom, justice,

peace and equality."

Ali dedicated her award to Alanieta Rabaka, the mother of 19-year-old Sakiusa, who died after being detained and allegedly subjected to brutal treatment by soldiers, for her bravery in telling her story.

Ali said while she was happy to be recognised for the work she's done, she acknowledged that there were other women whose work also deserved such recognition.

US embassies worldwide nominated 82 women for the awards. The concept for the International Woman of Courage Award began with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who often spoke of the courage of women fighting for equality and justice around the world.

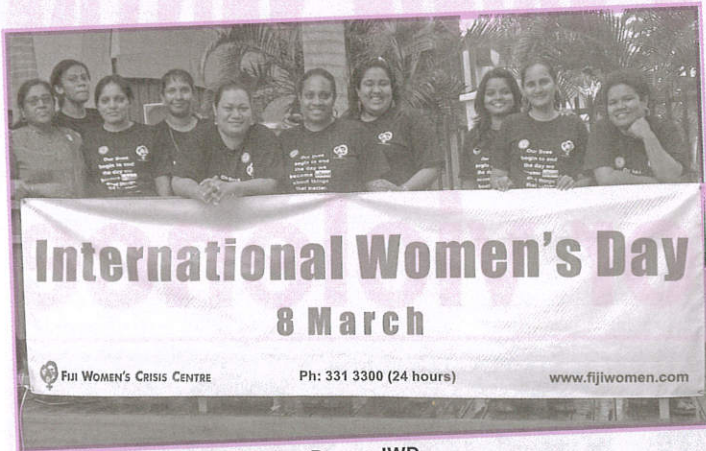


Children join in a past 'Reclaim the Night' march

MOVIE PREMIERE

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre will be hosting the Fiji premiere of *Provoked*, a film about battered-wife syndrome, starring Aishwarya Rai and Naveen Andrews, on Thursday April 5, 8pm. Tickets on sale at FWCC, 88 Gordon Street at \$10.

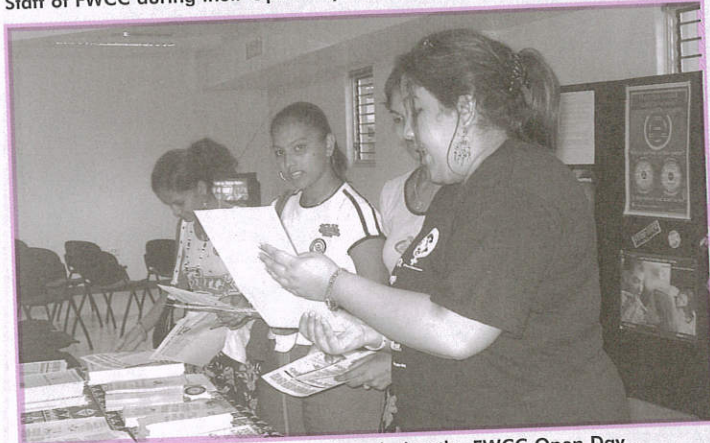
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EVENTS



Staff of FWCC during their Open Day on IWD



Edwina with pupils from Namaka Primary School at the launch of the FWRM Picture This! project in Nadi



Sharon Khelawan talks with housewives during the FWCC Open Day



Students of Dateline Commercial School turned out in force for the Suva Open Day



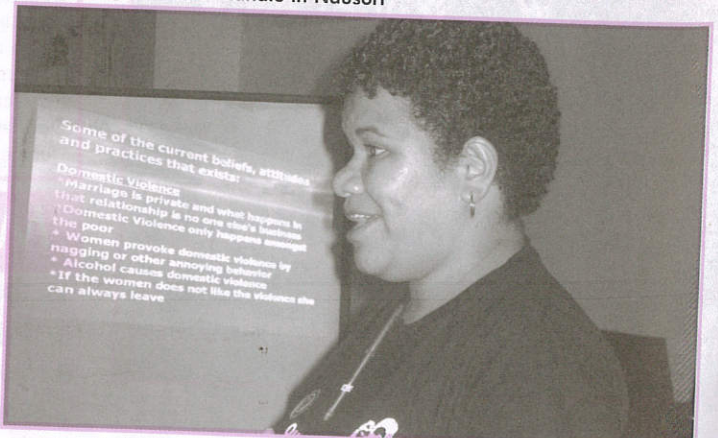
Members of the ACS Old Girls Association invited the FWCC to give a talk on IWD



Mrs Kumar (Nausori High School), Edwina, Govind Singh (COPE) and Tevita Koro'i, FTA light the IWD candle in Nausori



Shamima with some of the Fiji Islanders who attended the IWD breakfast meeting organised by UNIFEM Auckland. (Photo: Raewyn Nevin, UNIFEM Auckland)



Lanieta of FWCC makes a presentation at the ACS Old Girls Association evening meet

Ali tells Auckland crowd of impunity

SHAMIMA ALI, FWCC's coordinator, addressed an audience of more than 500 people on International Women's Day in Auckland, New Zealand.

The IWD breakfast, organised by UNIFEM Auckland, was held at the Ellerslie Convention Centre where Ali spoke on the global theme "Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women".

Ali highlighted the difficulties faced by women in Fiji and the Pacific in accessing appropriate justice for violence perpetrated against them.

Ali, also a Fiji Human Rights Commissioner, began by relating the story of a 19-year-old woman who was brutally raped and then later forced into dropping the case and marrying the perpetrator. The victim's father pleaded with the judge to dismiss the case as the attacker had agreed to marry his daughter.

"Imagine the ordeal of rape and then entering a justice system which fails you; being surrounded by family members who fail to support you and living in a community which encourages violence against women by their judgemental attitudes," Ali said in her Auckland speech.

"Violence against women in whatever form is too often a crime which goes unpunished at various levels in Pacific communities as it is in the rest of the world.

"Violence against women is very real, it is an everyday occurrence and it continues to provide barriers for the development of Pacific women and Pacific nations.

"Violence against women and children is prevalent throughout the Pacific region across all ethnic and socio-economic groups. FWCC's national research on domestic violence and sexual assault found that 80 percent of survey respondents had witnessed violence in their home."

- 66 percent of women surveyed reported that they had been abused by their partners;

- 30 percent of these suffered repeated physical abuse;

- 44 percent reported being hit while pregnant.

- 74 percent of female victims did not report violence to the Police or seek medical attention.

Both FWCC and police records show that 95 percent of perpetrators of domestic violence are male.

For women who are beaten in the home or for those who are raped or sexually assaulted, very often the responses from family and community members is one based on judgemental attitudes and traditional beliefs about a woman's position in our society. Women are often asked: "Why did you answer back, what were you doing out at that time of the night, you really should be have been at home looking after the kids...etc."

Ali told the audience: "Generally there is a shift in terms of tolerance of violence against women and immediate reactions often demonstrate this as people show their shock and disgust at an uncle who has raped a 15-year-old or a father who sexually molested his own child.

"However, when the victim/survivor chooses to pursue the case through the justice system, family members step in to protect the reputation of the offender and put pressure on the victims not to 'tarnish the family image or break up the family'. So where does a 15-year-old turn to if she has been impregnated by her father's brother through rape and her extended family refuse to have anything to do with her or her family, her father is ashamed of the 'disrepute she has brought to the family' and her mother is so disempowered herself that she cannot provide adequate support to her daughter?"

She also described how the justice system has



Shamima, centre, with Aryana Khadem, UNIFEM Auckland President, left, and Lorna McIntosh, a past UNIFEM New Zealand National President at the Auckland breakfast (Photo: Raewyn Nevin, UNIFEM Auckland)

failed so many women who have been traumatised by rape and violence.

"Many countries in the Pacific, have legislation in place which enables women to report cases of violence perpetrated against them and the justice system has somewhat improved but sentencing remains inconsistent and processes still leave a lot to be desired."

Ali's month-long stint in New Zealand included meetings and speaking engagements with various organisations.



Thumbs down!

On the day set aside to celebrate women around the world, the Fiji Times - in an editorial - poured cold water on the achievements women have made so far and reinforced the stereotypical idea that women's place is in the home. The editorial also implied that the work of the women's movement is only for the benefit of a few and failed to acknowledge the quiet work carried out by various women's clubs and groups across the country everyday.

Fiji Times editorial, March 8, 2006

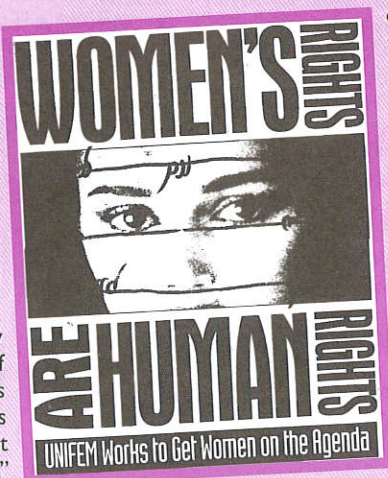
Prostitution a complex problem

RECENTLY, media discussion has focused on whether prostitution should be legalised to reduce its negative effects on the community.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre believes that prostitution encompasses a whole range of issues and cannot be addressed overnight.

"Firstly, we are of the view that prostitution is a form of violence against women as it is a violation of women's bodies so ideally it is something that we would like to get rid of," says Shamima Ali, Coordinator of FWCC.

But she points out that it is not an easy thing to do. "For those who end up in prostitution, their situation is compounded by a whole range



of factors - their lack of access to education, generational poverty conditions, lack of access to adequate housing and lack of viable employment opportunities, amongst other things. They then turn to prostitution because of a lack of options and opportunities throughout their life and prostitution becomes a means of survival."

The FWCC believes that to be able to curb prostitution, there must be sound economic policies in

place which offer better opportunities for women.

"This is an issue that we have consistently raised over the years and in particular what we need to look at is the kind of microfinance

activities being offered to women and the support structures that go with it," says Ali.

Another aspect of prostitution that needs to be addressed is the demand for prostitutes' services. "We are so quick to point at the behaviour of women who are being prostituted but what we fail to look at is the users of these prostitutes and therefore we certainly need to address male behaviour," says Ali.

"We haven't seriously questioned why there is an increasing demand for prostitutes in this country, why there is an increasing demand for younger girls and boys - these are questions that need to be asked because controlling the demand can also mean controlling the problem."

The FWCC will continue to support prostituted women and men who seek the centre's support.

"We are aware that some of them are physically assaulted, some are sexually harassed and victimised by law enforcement officers or others and we provide them support if they need this from us."

Focus taken off impunity

SOME time during the planning for International Women's Day by the government agencies involved, the focus seems to have shifted.

This should have been the most appropriate time for the government to embrace the global theme "Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women".

Instead the theme was changed to "Empowering the Girl Child Through Education" - not that educating girls is not important.

However, ending impunity for violence has wider implications for Fiji's women and girls, especially now. Sentencing of violent criminals has been inconsistent and community responses to violence against women have been less than satisfactory.

Apart from the theme-change, two of the biggest events - in Suva and Labasa - to celebrate women on their day had men as chief guests.

IWD has always been about women's rights, justice, peace and equality - something we must never forget.

SCC invite

THE Suva City Council invited the FWCC to conduct a one-day session on gender relations and sexual harassment for councillors and staff late last year. The session was conducted by Shamima Ali.

The invitation was extended by the Mayor Ratu Peni Volavola and signifies a heartening step towards gender equality in our local governments.



Suva councillors listen to a FWCC presentation

Community Education

FEBRUARY 2007

- **Fiji Police Academy** - Constables Qualifying Course: Gender, Domestic Violence
- **Fiji Teacher's Union** - Child Sexual Abuse, Child Rights

MARCH 2007

- **Senior Citizens** - Role of the Centre, Domestic Violence, Child Sexual Abuse, Rape
- **Nadi College** - Role of the Centre
- **Maharishi College** - Role of the Centre
- **Nadralla Village** - Role of Centre, domestic violence, child sexual abuse

Calendar of Crimes

DECEMBER 2006

- **5th** - A 23-year-old man of Lautoka is jailed for two-and-a-half years for trying to indecently assault a six-year-old girl at home.
- **30th** - A magistrate ordered that a Suva man's behaviour be monitored for three months after he pleaded guilty to bashing his wife.

JANUARY 2007

- **4th** - Police question a 20-year-old man over allegations of raping a 22-year-old woman. The alleged incident happened on New Year's Eve in Navua.
- **5th** - A man is given a suspended sentence for assaulting his wife while she was asleep at home.
- **8th** - The Suva court was waiting for a report from the Saint Giles Psychiatric Hospital regarding the mental condition of a man facing a charge of attempting to rape his sister-in-law.
- **8th** - Police are investigating complaints against a primary school teacher who was alleged to have impregnated his 13-year-old niece.

• **10th** - Two men who allegedly raped a woman were granted bail with sureties of \$500 each by a Suva magistrate.

• **15th** - Police were looking for a man who allegedly raped a 21-year-old mother at knifepoint before robbing her of \$2.40.

• **15th** - Police were investigating the case of a 20-year-old tertiary student who was raped at knifepoint while she was asleep with her family.

• **18th** - A serial rapist who had been on the run for several months is jailed for 10 years for raping a nine-year-old girl. The man in his mid-40s, pleaded guilty before Suva Magistrate Aminiasi Katonivaliku to three counts of rape.

• **18th** - A 60-year-old man jailed for seven years for raping his 6-year-old relative appeared at the High Court in Suva to appeal his sentence and conviction.

• **19th** - An employee of a bus company pleads guilty of five counts of defiling a 14-year-old relative.

• **25th** - Two secondary school students, aged 17 and 18, appear in court charged with defiling an underage schoolmate.

• **28th** - A 35-year-old man charged with raping a 5-year-old girl is granted bail of \$5000 by a magistrate.

• **30th** - A Fiji woman married to a man from the Central Province in Papua New Guinea is abducted and brutally raped by seven

criminals in Port Moresby.

• **31st** - Three men who raped a 15-year-old girl are each jailed for five years by the High Court in Lautoka. The men all pleaded guilty before Justice John Connors.

FEBRUARY 2006

• **2nd** - Six youths charged with raping a 12-year-old girl are granted a \$400 bail in Suva.

• **2nd** - A man from Namosi appears in court charged with raping a 21-year-old woman he met along the road.

• **3rd** - Two men appear in the Suva Magistrates Court for allegedly raping a 25-year-old woman.

• **3rd** - The court rules a 19-year-old has a case to answer after the prosecution submitted its evidence in a trial of two counts of indecent assault involving a 10-year-old girl.

• **5th** - A 24-year-old man who was alleged to have abducted a young girl appeared in court.

• **5th** - A taxi driver faces trial for allegedly indecently assaulting a student after the court ruled that there is case to answer.

• **13th** - A father is convicted of the rape and sexual abuse of his handicapped 17-year-old daughter several years ago on several occasions.

• **13th** - A 40-year-old man who allegedly raped and indecently assaulted his two daughters appears in the Lautoka court. He faces eight counts of rape and seven counts of indecent assault.

• **20th** - A Nadawa man who admitted raping his 11 year-old stepdaughter twice last year told the Nasinu Court he committed the offence because he had a crush on the victim.

• **23rd** - A 44-year-old training manager appeared before a magistrate for assaulting his wife. The man of Nadawa pleaded guilty to the charges of assault causing occasionally bodily harm. He assaulted his wife when she questioned him if he was having an affair. She sustained injuries and he was fined \$200.

• **23rd** - A 48-year-old carpenter was found guilty of assaulting his wife. The Suva was found guilty by Magistrate Josia Waqavolavola and would remain in custody until he is sentenced.

Five years jail for rapists

THREE men who raped a 15-year-old girl last year were each jailed for five years by the High Court in Lautoka yesterday. Another man who tried to rape the same girl was jailed for three years while a fifth was jailed for two and a half years for aiding and abetting the attempt.

Rapist gets 10 years

THE courts have once again expressed its feeling towards men raping women. And Magistrate Aminiasi Katonivaliku sentenced Viliame Baxter, 36, to 10 years imprisonment for raping a 9-year-old girl. Baxter was charged

Wife sends husband to jail

A MARRIED woman agreed with the Magistrates Court in Suva to give her husband a custodial sentence yesterday, after her husband was convicted for assault. Saitasa Natuwawa, 47, pleaded guilty to assault occasioning actual bodily harm before Magistrate Aminiasi Katonivaliku. Police Constable Alkasi Prota said the husband had been charged with assaulting his wife. The court heard that Natuwawa had previously



• AND MORE