



Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN NOVEMBER 2016

NEW BUILDING OPENED IN LABASA ON START OF 16 DAYS CAMPAIGN



L-R: LWCC staff Sonam, Rini, FWCC Trustee Vasil Batirerega, LWCC's Teresa and Sarita, Deputy Australian High Commission Amy Crago, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Mereseini Vuniwaqa, New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade representative Foga Semisi and LWCC Project Officer Sera Bogitini cut a cake to mark the 21st anniversary of the Centre's opening.

THE MINISTER for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Mereseini Vuniwaqa, has described the relationship between the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and her ministry as a "crucial one" in the elimination of violence against women.

"It is safe to say that FWCC is a loyal friend of my ministry due to their passion and dedication," Ms Vuniwaqa said during the opening of the new premises for the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre (LWCC) on Friday, 25 November 2016, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Ms Vuniwaqa commended the FWCC for extending its facilities to Fijian women who may not be able to access the services available on Viti Levu. LWCC is a branch of FWCC.

"This will be another hallmark in the long list of great achievements of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre over the years and I wish to thank everyone who has had a role in the completion of the project," Ms Vuniwaqa said.

The opening coincided with the launch of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against

Women campaign, which starts on 25 November and runs until 10 December.

"We recognise this as a time to consolidate action to end violence against women and girls around the world. Just as importantly, it has the collateral aim to make us all realise the impact of gender-based violence, not only a woman's physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being but also its impact on every nation's ability to achieve its aim for sustainable and inclusive development.

"Human rights cannot be universal without human rights for women. Development cannot be sustainable and inclusive if half of the world's population is left behind," Ms Vuniwaqa said.

In her keynote address, Ms Vuniwaqa urged Fijians to speak out against violence against women and to report any form of abuse to the relevant authorities.

"As a Fijian, speak out against women and child abuse. Encourage silent female victims to challenge abuse, and ensure they get help. Report matters of abuse to the police and relevant authorities immediately. Encourage children to report bullying

behavior to school authorities."

"As a religious body or community-based organisation make the elimination of violence against women and children a hallmark of your religious teachings or advocacy material. You have the inherent ability and capacity to mobilise big numbers of people weekly. Use that platform to ignite relevant conversations in our communities; empower community platforms to speak out and break the silence against violence.

"As parents, raise your children with the universal yardstick of non-discrimination, of equality and of non-violence.

"As male champions, your voice carries a lot of weight in this fight

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

The new building at Naiyaca Subdivision and a vehicle were funded by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Australia Deputy High Commissioner, Amy Crago, said her

> continued on page 2



From left to right: Permanent Secretary for Women, Dr Josefa Koroivueta; LWCC Project Officer Sera Bogitini; FWCC Coordinator Shamima Ali; New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Suva, Faga Semisi; Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Mereseini Vuniwaqa; Australian Deputy High Commissioner Amy Crago; and UN Women's Abigail Erikson at the opening of the new building for the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre.



LWCC Project Officer Sera Bogitini with staff Teresia Raqitawa, Rinieta Ratawa, Sonam Nair and Sarita Raj



Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Mereseini Vuniwaqa symbolically opens the new LWCC building while MFAT's Faga Semisi looks on



Guests at the opening of the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre premises at Naiyaca Subdivision on Friday 25 November, 2016

> from page 1
government was proud to have supported the work of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre for most of its existence.

"Our partnership with the FWCC is a cornerstone of our strong commitment to the empowerment of women and girls, and in particular, in our efforts to address violence against women in Fiji and the Pacific. We are proud to have supported FWCC to establish this office and shelter in Labasa."

Ms Crago said: "Australia's partnership with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is a cornerstone of our strong commitment to the empowerment of women and girls, in particular in our efforts to address violence against women in Fiji and the Pacific."

"On behalf of the Australian Government, I extend my warm congratulations to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) on achieving this milestone for the many women that the Centre serves. The FWCC

is recognised as a centre for excellence in the Pacific region for its programs on ending violence against women. This reputation is well-deserved," Ms Crago said.

POSSIBLE NEW SAVUSAVU CENTRE

Ms Faga Semisi, representing the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), said apart from the four women's crisis centres MFAT currently funds, there may be a fifth centre the New Zealand government may fund in Savusavu. MFAT has funded the Labasa centre's programmes for the past 15 years.

Ms Semisi also acknowledged the leadership of LWCC Project Officer Sera Bogitini over the years, adding that Ms Bogitini's name was synonymous with the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre.

FWCC Coordinator Shamima Ali said she had mixed feelings marking the day, although it was one

that she was thankful for as she acknowledged DFAT and MFAT for their long-term support, as well as staff, volunteers, friends and supporters.

"It is sad to meet to celebrate this occasion, because this means acknowledging the great need to have a place where survivors of gender-based violence – rape, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment; can get some respite – it is acknowledging the high rates of crimes against women and girls and children in our beloved country," Ms Ali said.

"Beneath the Fijian paradise lurks a terrible monster, capable of grievous harm to and sometimes killing, women, girls and children," she said.

"What we do celebrate is the commitment we all have made to end this terrible crimes committed on women and girls. And what better day to mark this great event than 25 November - International Day of protest Against Violence Against Women."

Sera Bogitini: The face of LWCC

SERA BOGITINI has been the face of the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre (LWCC) for the past 14 years, having become Project Officer in the Northern town in 2002.

Prior to joining the branch of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Ms Bogitini had worked as an assistant nurse in Brisbane, Australia for six years.

Before that, part of her career also included stage acting with the Fiji Arts Club under Larry Thomas as well as a three-month theatre-in-education program in the United Kingdom under Vilsoni Hereniko.

For three quarters of the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre's existence, funding has been provided by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Ms Faga Semisi, representing MFAT, acknowledged Ms Bogitini's contribution to LWCC over the past 14 years.

Ms Bogitini said: "The satisfaction I get from working with women and children who are survivors of violence is so rewarding when we contribute to the progress of their cases and to see the relief on their faces."

"The skills of handling and addressing issues of violence against women are those I have learnt from the mentoring and guidance of the FWCC Coordinator, Shamima Ali, whom I wish to show my gratitude and appreciation to."



LABASA STATISTICS

Since 1999, from when records exist until the opening of the new building, the Labasa Women's Crisis Centre has seen 4,664 clients, most of them because of domestic violence, but also for rape, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment and attempted suicide. There have been 221 community education sessions that have reached 18,735 citizens – 9,524 of them female and 6,211 male.

The origins of LWCC

THE LABASA Women's Crisis Centre was formally established 21 years ago through the dedication and commitment of a woman from Dreketi named Bimla Singh, along with Rinieta Ratawa and others.

But even before it was formally established in 1995, much work had gone into preparing the foundation through training, community talks and counselling sessions. The Centre's roots goes back to four years before its registration, when Bimla and others attended the first National Conference Against Violence Against Women at Deuba in 1991.

When they returned, they arranged a training for other women and never looked back. For several years after that, the volunteers used Bimla's home and telephone as their contact to counsel women, accompany them to court, conduct fund-raising activities and give talks to community groups and schools.

The Centre was officially opened in 1995 in rented rooms with the support of Canada Fund, through the assistance of Diane Goodwillie. Afterward, for more than 15 years, LWCC has been funded by New Zealand's MFAT.

The Labasa Women's Crisis Centre has grown from strength to strength and under the leadership of Sera Bogitini, the Labasa Project Officer, the LWCC is firmly established as the premier rights-based service provider in Vanua Levu for survivors of violence against women, girls and children.

25 YEARS OF 16 DAYS

THIS YEAR marks the 25th anniversary since the start of the 16 Days of Activism of Violence Against Women campaign. The 16 days is marked globally and during this period women's human rights activists and organisations, along with government agencies and religious groups, focus their attention on this problem of tragic proportions.

In June 1991, the FWCC's Shamima Ali was among a group of 23 women from around the world gathered at Rutgers University in the American state of New Jersey, which created the 16 Days campaign, something that would go on to become a global annual event aimed at raising awareness about violence against women.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women was born out of the first Women's Global Leadership Institute (WGLI) convened that year by Rutgers' Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL).

Participants chose the dates 25 November – International Day Against Violence Against Women, and 10 December – International Human Rights Day, in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasise that such violence is a gross violation of women's human rights.

The 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including 29 November – International Women's Human Rights Defenders' Day; 1 December – World Aids Day, and; 6 December – White Ribbon day to commemorate

the Montreal Massacre of female university students in Canada in 1989.

The initial efforts and commitment of the first graduates of the WGLI have been complemented by a growing number of activists around the world who are working to highlight and put on the agenda, all forms of violence against women that persists today.

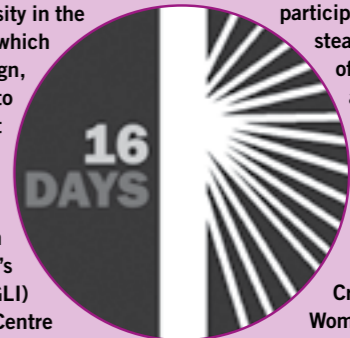
Since its founding in 1991, more than 5179 organisation in 187 countries have participated in the 16 Days Campaign, steadily increasing the amount of media attention both locally and internationally the issue of gender-based violence has received.

Among the handful of organisations to mark the first 16 Days Campaign in 1991 were the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. These organisation have continued to use this

period each year to shine a light on the many forms of violence women and girls face daily.

"The initial rallying call of the 16 Days Campaign, 'women's rights are human rights', resonated all over the Pacific," says Shamima Ali, in a 16 Days publication by CWGL.

The campaign has also raised the profile of International Human Rights Day – once the domain of official UN events – and has played a significant part in the movement for democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Fiji and the Pacific.



Rakiraki Women's Crisis Centre staff and supporters during the 16 Days march last year

25 November and the Mirabal sisters

THE 16 DAYS from 25 November-10 December were chosen to reinforce the rallying cry that violence against women in all its forms is a gross violation of women's human rights.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women was first declared in 1981 by the First Feminist Encuentro (feminist conference) for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Bogota, Colombia in honour of the Mirabal sisters from the Dominican Republic who were brutally assassinated on 25 November 1960 because they dared to defy dictator Rafael Trujillo.

In 1991, the first Women's Global Leadership Institute was convened at Rutgers University where the participants chose that date as the start of the campaign they had conceptualised. It took the United Nations General Assembly almost another decade to officially recognise 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1999 in honour of the Mirabal sisters.

Patria, Minerva, Maria Teresa and Dedé were born in Ojo de Agua near the city of Salcedo, in the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic. The sisters, known as 'Las Mariposas' ('the Butterflies'), were fearless feminists and highly visible symbols of resistance to Trujillo's dictatorship. They were

> continued on page 4

We remember...

Over the past four years (2013-2016) at least 23 women have lost their lives due to violence perpetuated by an intimate partner. Two children were killed by their father. Here we remember some of the women and children who lost their lives due to partner violence during 2015 and 2016.

April 2015 - Losana McGowan, 36, of Suva - punched and kicked multiple times, so severely that she died of brain haemorrhage in April 2015. Her partner, Usaia Kilaiverata, was convicted of her murder and sentenced to 18 years in jail in November 2016.

July 2015 - Tanvi Prasad, 5, and **Jeralle Ishav**, 3, of Suva - victims of a horrific domestic violence case at Kinoya. Their father stabbed and injured his wife, Karishma Lal, 30, before taking his children's lives and his own. Karishma survived the ordeal.

May 2016 - Lavenia Radinitabea, 33, of Suva - stabbed to death by her de facto partner at a motel in May 2016. Bernard Hicks was convicted of her killing and jailed for life with a minimum of 16 years behind bars in September 2016.

August 2016 - Reshmi Devi, 39, of Ba - killed by knife wounds. Her husband was found dead by suicide. There was a history of domestic violence. Police classified the case as murder-suicide.

August 2016 - Korovou Laisenia, 32, found dead in Taicirua. Her husband was found dead by suicide in Valelevu, Nasinu in August. Police classified the case as murder-suicide.

In other cases the victims cannot be named for legal reasons, particularly if an intimate partner is still under investigation or awaiting trial. They include:

- three young women dying of burns after allegedly being set alight by their husbands
- two young women dying by suicide after long histories of domestic violence
- a woman whose badly burned body was discovered in the hills near her home. Her husband is awaiting trial
- at least three women stabbed or knifed to death where their partners are awaiting trial or under investigation.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE FOLLOWING:

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre 3313 300/ 9209 470
 Nadi Women's Crisis Centre 6707 558/ 9182 884
 Ba Women's Crisis Centre 6670 466/ 9239 775
 RakiRaki Women's Crisis Centre 6694 012/ 9129 790
 Labasa Women's Crisis Centre 8814 609/ 9377 784

32 years on, the statistics stack up

SINCE ITS inception in 1984, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre with its branches (with different inception years) have seen:

- 18,628 domestic violence cases
- 817 rape/sexual assault cases
- 538 sexual harassment cases
- 1,320 child abuse cases
- 17,722 others cases

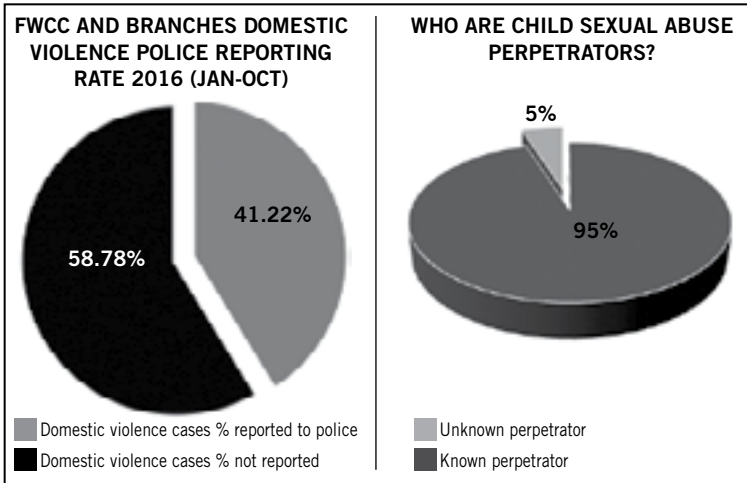
From January to October this year, FWCC and its branches received 1,036 domestic violence cases, 13 rape cases, 23 child sexual abuse cases, 25 child physical/emotional/verbal abuse cases and 25 sexual harassment cases.

Of the 535 cases from Suva office, the majority of the cases are from the Suva-Nausori corridor amounting to 371 new domestic violence cases. That is 35.8%. The Western Division, which includes statistics from our Ba, Nadi and Rakiraki offices, received 39.7% of new domestic violence cases.

The Labasa Centre which caters for Vanua Levu, Taveuni and nearby islands had 8.7% new cases. The trends are similar for other issues such as rape and child sexual abuse. Labasa and Rakiraki centres saw a rise in the 'Others' cases as many women were attended to after Cyclone Winston.

REPORTING RATES

With 1,036 domestic violence cases this year, only 427 were reported to police that is 41.22%. 9 (69%) of the 13 rape cases were reported, 6 (75%) of attempted rape, 19 (82.6%) of Child sexual abuse and 19 of sexual harassment cases that is 76% were reported to the police. This numbers indicate that for domestic violence cases, a huge number goes unreported which could be due to various reasons. Less than 50% of the women facing violence who come to the centre, report the crime to the Police.



> from page 3

repeatedly jailed, along with their husbands, because of their struggle for democracy and justice.

On 25 November 1960, three of the sisters, Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa, were murdered, along with their driver, by members of Trujillo's secret police. They had been on their way to visit their imprisoned husbands. Their bodies were found at the bottom of a precipice, broken and strangled.

The news of their assassination shocked the nation and the outrage helped propel the anti-Trujillo movement. Trujillo was assassinated six months later and his regime fell soon after.

The Mirabal sisters have become symbols of both popular and feminist resistance.

SIGNIFICANT DATES DURING THE 16-DAY PERIOD INCLUDE:

- 25 NOVEMBER:** International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- 29 NOVEMBER:** International Women Human Rights Defenders Day
- 1 DECEMBER:** World Aids Day
- 2 DECEMBER:** International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 3 DECEMBER:** International Day of People with Disabilities
- 6 DECEMBER:** White Ribbon Day to commemorate the Montreal Massacre
- 9 DECEMBER:** International Anti-Corruption Day
- 10 DECEMBER:** International Human Rights Day