

# FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE

Newsletter



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April 1999

## Acting PM, Minister visit FWCC

Fiji's Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Education and Technology, Hon. Taufa Vakatale, and Fiji's Minister for Women and Culture, Hon Seruwaia Hong Tiy, visited the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre at our invitation, on 9 December, 1998. The invitation was part of the FWCC's Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence Campaign, which was launched on 25 November, 1998, which is International Women's Day Against Violence Against Women.

This historic visit was attended by representatives of all major media organisations in Fiji. It began with a presentation by the FWCC's Co-ordinator, Shamima Ali, who spoke of the lack of gender sensitivity and services available to women and children who are survivors of violence. Shamima also spoke of the inadequacies of current legislation to deal with the crime of domestic violence as well as the inefficiency of law enforcement agencies in putting the No Drop Policy into effect.

A cheque of \$5000.00 was presented to FWCC by the Prime Minister's Office in recognition of the FWCC's work. Ms Vakatale said that she was making this



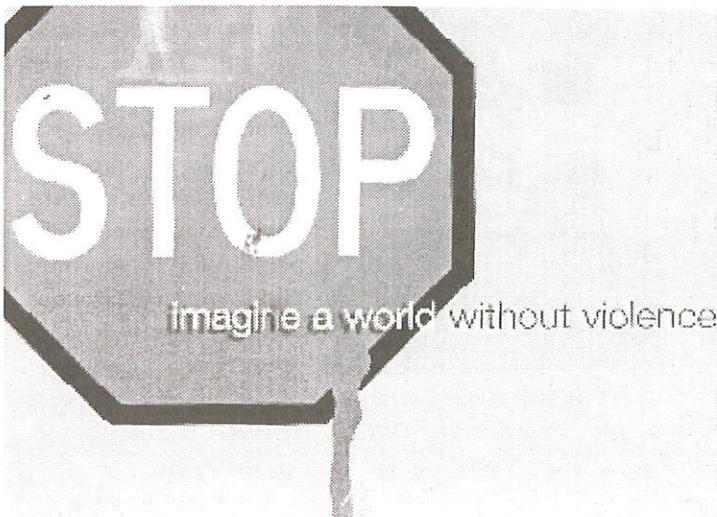
Hon Taufa Vakatale with Shamima Ali signing the Zero Tolerance petition

presentation to show the Fiji Government's "deep and sincere appreciation of FWCC's sterling work in creating and spreading increased awareness of the rights of women, the rights of 50% of our total population, the rights of mothers, and the rights of children, to live their lives in dignity, and in an environment that is loving and caring, and free from all kinds of harm and degradation".

Ms Vakatale went on to commend FWCC's "sustained effort and contribution in making people more aware, not only of their rights as individuals but also of their responsibility of caring for one another ... and to make our society a better place for individuals and families, and most important of all, a society where there is a deep and abiding respect for the sanctity of motherhood and children, and of women as a whole."

This donation was to go towards the FWCC continuing its community education program to raise awareness in Fiji on the issue of violence against women and children.

During her visit, Ms Vakatale made a personal commitment towards legislating the No Drop Policy, in order to ensure that the crime of domestic violence was treated with the seriousness that it deserved. After this visit to FWCC, both the Acting Prime Minister and the Minister of Women and Culture, accompanied the FWCC staff to the CWM Hospital and the Tamavua Rehabilitation Centre to visit two women who were hospitalised as a result of severe domestic violence. One of these women has



Hon Taufa Vakatale, Seruwaia Hong Tiy listen to Shamima's presentation

# AusAID gives FWCC \$2.2 million

Australian High Commissioner, Mr Greg Urwin, visited the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre on International Women's Day to announce that Australia will be providing the FWCC with up to A\$2.2 million over the next five years to assist the Centre in its efforts to combat violence against women.

Mr Urwin acknowledged the importance of the counselling services and community education programs provided by the FWCC as well as the FWCC's role as Secretariat of the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women.

"Funding which is provided through AusAID's Pacific Regional Program, will commence in July this year and end in June 2004," Mr Urwin said. "Ending violence against women has been a priority in the Australian aid program since the announcement of the Gender and Development Policy on International Women's Day in 1997," he said. FWCC will use the funds in programs aimed at the elimination of all forms of violence against women and children, and in projects aimed at raising the status of women in Fiji and the Pacific region.



FWCC office at Gordon street in Suva and (left) Australian High Commissioner Greg Urwin



The FWCC, on behalf of the women in Fiji and the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women thanks the Australian Government for its substantial funding support towards programs to address

the grave issue of violence against women.

It is significant that this year, which is the beginning of our next five-year funding period, the theme for International Women's Day is "Addressing Violence Against Women". Receiving this funding is a recognition by the Australian Government of the gross violation of women's human rights throughout the

world, and for us in Fiji. It is also a recognition of the pioneering work carried out by the FWCC in this area.

The funds will go towards strengthening the FWCC's capacity to meet the tremendous increase in demand for crisis intervention services. The FWCC also intends to build the capacity of other government and non-government agencies in Fiji and the region, through training and the provision of appropriate services and programs to address the causes and consequences of violence against women and children.

Over the next five years there will be more outreach to rural areas and outlying islands in Fiji to ensure that appropriate counselling services and community education programs reach these areas. There will be an intensified focus on advocacy, community education and campaigning activities targeting both men and women and with a particular focus on younger men to bring about changes in attitudes. The FWCC will also consolidate its regional program through more in-country training and support visits in the region.

The FWCC thanks the Australian Government for its support over the last eight years and looks forward to a pleasant working relationship for the next five years.

## PM, Minister visit FWCC

• from page 1

since died as a result of illnesses stemming from prolonged starvation and alleged chronic abuse at the hands of her husband. The other woman is now bed-ridden as a result of the abuse she suffered. She will remain confined to a wheel chair and can no longer pursue her career as an educator.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has been campaigning for many years on the issue of domestic violence and the lack of effort that service providers are making to address it. This visit indicates that the Fiji Government has heard and is willing to put into motion the necessary safeguards to address violence against women and children.

We will monitor the situation and continue our lobbying and advocacy on the issue.

## Thank You for Your Support

The FWCC would once again like to thank the many people and organisations that have lent their support to our programs and activities.

In particular, we thank:

- Prime Minister's Office
- Department for Women and Culture
- Homestay
- American Women's Association
- Roger Dawkins
- International Women's Association
- Elsa Miller



Air Fiji staff deliver Christmas hampers and gifts for FWCC clients.

A special thank you goes to Mr Ken McDonald and Mr Gillet from Air Fiji for the donation of Christmas food hampers and gifts for the women and their families who are clients of the Centre.

Nor do we forget the many members of the public who support us by participating in awareness raising activities that we organise, as well as those people who support and assist the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre professionally.

# Death by domestic violence

## School teacher Meena Kumari dies after being beaten and starved

Meena Kumari was a 38 year old high school teacher and mother of four children.

She came to public attention when the media published her story in September 1998. Meena Kumari had been beaten and systematically starved by her husband and was hospitalised at CWM Hospital after a neighbour reported the matter to the police and the Department of Social Welfare. Meena's children were taken into custody by the Department of Social Welfare. It was claimed that they too had been physically abused.

On admission to hospital, Meena was suffering from pneumonia, tuberculosis, anaemia and severe malnutrition. She was also anorexic and had lost a lot of weight. She died in hospital on 23 December, 1998. Her body was too weak to fight off tuberculosis. Despite the seriousness of the abuse that her husband is alleged to have committed, he is yet to be charged and is still



allowed access to his children. According to neighbours and witnesses, Meena Kumari had been bed-ridden for three months prior to being hospitalised. Her children, ranging from three to fourteen years of age, who had been without food and were frequently seen asking neighbours for something to eat. They were kept in a separate room. According to her children, their father refused to give Meena food and made her

remain in bed for 3 months. Neighbours said that they often heard him beating and kicking Meena and threatening her with a cane knife.

Meena's neighbours had reported the abuse and neglect that Meena and her children were exposed to on several occasions, at various police stations, but no action was taken by the police. It is only due to their persistence that the matter finally came to light and the police and welfare department eventually intervened. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre gives full credit to Meena's neighbours for their perseverance in seeing that she was removed from the violent and abusive situation that she was in and urges all members of the public to play their role when it comes to preventing domestic violence.

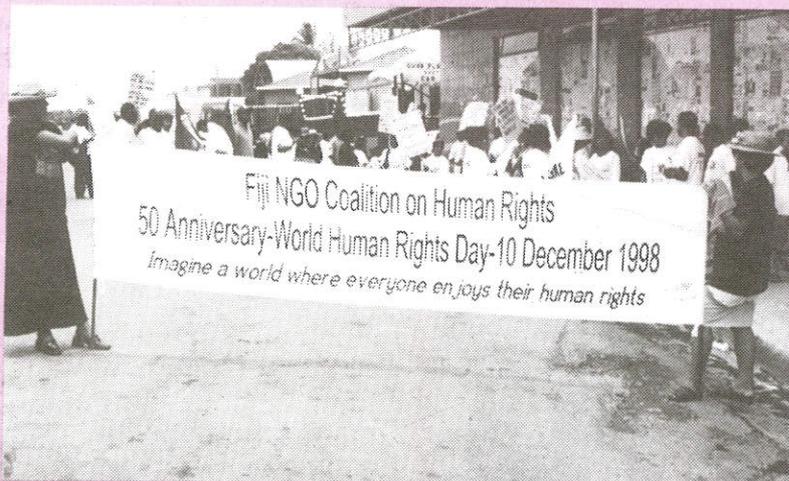
**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A CRIME -  
IT IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS!**

## Human rights "for everyone"

World Human Rights Day on December 10, 1998 proved to be a great success, with Fiji's Vude Queen, Laisa Vulakoro performing throughout the day, backed by Tui Ravai and the Freelancers. The concert was well attended, with thousands of people in attendance at Ratu Sukuna Park.

The Human Rights Day March began at 12.00 p.m. from the Suva Flea market and ending at Sukuna Park where the concert was taking place. Roughly 300 people participated in the march, which was led by the NGO Coalition

followed by solidarity statements by all members of the NGO Coalition. Also on stage, were the Bahai Youth Group who performed several dance items on human rights themes.



World Human Rights day in Fiji - December 1998

With the arrival of the marchers, the Rally began. The keynote address was delivered by UNICEF Pacific Representative, Nancy Terreri. This was

The 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights gave the NGO Coalition on Human Rights the opportunity to spread the message that

human rights should be enjoyed by all human beings, whether they are disadvantaged or not, and that we can all make a difference, by our attitudes and practices, in ensuring that the human rights of all are preserved. The day was funded by the United Nations to promote the issue of human rights and its relevance to the daily lives of people in Fiji.

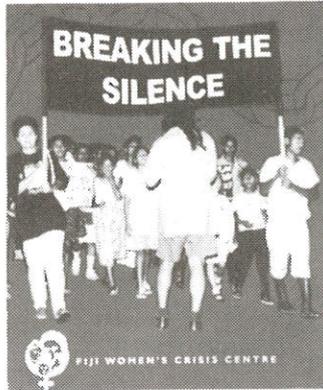
Prior to the actual day, the NGO Coalition had launched an intensive media campaign with advertisements on the radio, newspapers and in Village Six, to raise awareness on various human rights issues, including disability, workers rights, women's rights, environmental issues, HIV/AIDS and civil/political rights. Flyers were distributed widely to publicise all organised activities. A panel discussion on workers rights was also held in Suva, on 7 December, to coincide with the beginning of Trade Union Week.

# FWCC Launches 'Breaking the Silence'

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre launched its ground-breaking book of women's stories in Suva on 9 December, 1998. *Breaking the Silence* is a collection of stories and poems written by women who are victims/survivors of violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault and child sexual abuse. It also includes writings by young people on how violence against women has affected their lives.

The FWCC spent years putting this volume of short stories together, in order to ensure that the safety and wishes of the authors and contributors were respected, and also to prepare the women for the consequences of going public with their stories. In some cases, the women have chosen not to reveal their identities, while other authors have chosen to do so. Proceeds from the sale of the book will go into future documentation of women's lives.

The launch of *Breaking the Silence* was



Laisa Vulakoro at the launching of *Breaking the Silence*



held on the eve of World Human Rights Day on 10 December, 1998 which also marks the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. It is also the last day of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign. Several authors who contributed to the book were present at the launch, as well as government officials, representatives from non-government organisations and the members of the media. The theme for the 1998 16 Days of

Activism was Women Light the Way for Human Rights and involved the symbolic use of light to celebrate the strength, courage and leadership of women's human rights defenders.

The FWCC incorporated this theme in the launch of *Breaking the Silence* by having staff and guests light and dedicate a candle in acknowledgement of women

who have been killed, scarred, emotionally oppressed and violated by any form of gender violence. The launching ceremony was solemn, empowering and unique and was dedicated to all women who have suffered at the hands of men. It was followed by a candlelight vigil until midnight. There was an immense feeling of solidarity in the knowledge that women all over the world were holding similar vigils on the eve of 10 December 1998.

## Stunning murals

A mural competition for secondary schools, which was organised by the Coalition earlier in the year, was judged a week before the Rally. All 18 participating schools handed in stunning pieces of work, based on the theme, *Imagine a World Where Everyone Enjoys Their Human Rights*. The judges had a difficult time deciding on the winners. These murals, along with a Human Rights Exhibition put together by the Coalition murals were

displayed from 7 - 10 December at the YWCA Cafeteria.

Prizes were handed out to the winning schools during the World Human Rights Day Rally by UNIFEM Regional Program Adviser, Laufitu Taylor. The winners were:

**1st Prize Marist Brothers High School (\$500.00)**

**2nd Prize: Suva Grammar School (\$300.00)**

**3rd Prize: Nadi Centre for Special Education (\$200.00)**



Vineshwaran Pillay (Nadi Centre for Special Education) accepts 3rd prize in the NGO Coalition's Mural Competition from UNIFEM Regional Program Adviser - Laufitu Taylor.

## Other Activities

### November 1998

Edwina attended a Conference organised by Health, Empowerment, Rights and Accountability (HERA) in Mexico.

### February 1999

- Shamima attended the Melanesian Women's Caucus Meeting in PNG and presented a paper on Violence Against Women in the Pacific and Programs to address it, as a back ground to the SPC/UNFPA Multi-Site Research on Domestic Violence. Shamima also attended the WHO Domestic Violence Research Protocol Meeting in London. Both these trips were sponsored by SPC

- The FWCC has been invited to be part of the Fiji Government's Women's Plan of Action Taskforce on Violence Against Women. Its

role and function is to identify areas where action needs to be taken, and to develop ways to implement these actions. This Taskforce will provide support in the implementation of the Women's Plan of Action, which was launched in October 1998.

- The FWCC's Research Team visited and conducted its study on domestic violence and sexual assault in Ovalau. The team was well received. A big thank you goes to the Roko Tui Ovalau for his hospitality, transportation and assistance during this visit. The schools, especially Levuka Public School, were also particularly responsive to our needs. The Principal of Levuka Public School was very gracious in extending an invitation to us to address the whole school on the FWCC's role and services, and on the issue of child abuse.