

New Crimes decree reduces coup penalties

The Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) expresses concern on the reduction of penalties for coups and treason under the new Crimes Decree which comes into effect on 1 February 2010, as this could lead to greater acceptance of these crimes.

"The promulgation of over 50 decrees by this government since April 2009 is perpetuating the coup culture. In our view, the new decree will not end the cycle of coups and is against the recommendations on Ending the Coup Culture that are in the People's Charter," CCF Chief Executive Officer Rev Akuila Yabaki said.

For a person who commits treason resulting in the death or imprisonment of the Prime Minister or President, or acts that collude to an armed invasion or war, the penalty of imprisonment for life has been retained. "Of major concern, however, is

that a new element of intention is now incorporated into crimes relating to treason. A person committing treason who can justify that they were acting in good faith or that their action was necessary, will now incur sentences of less than 15 years or could even go free," Rev Yabaki said.

The courts now have to consider if a person committing an act of treason was acting in good faith to show that:-

- The Prime Minister, the President or one of the advisers were mistaken;
- There are errors or defects in the Government of Fiji, the Constitution of Fiji, the legislation or the administration of justice; or
- There are feelings of ill-will or hostility between different groups.

"These considerations mitigate the offence

of treason by making treason more acceptable in law if it is done with good intentions. These provisions of the new Crimes Decree perpetuate the coup-culture in Fiji and do not take into account the severity of crimes of this nature," Rev Yabaki said.

Chapter III, Part 10 of the Crimes Decree, titled 'Treason and Other Offences Against Government Authority' cover a range of offences and penalties. The penalty for mutiny has now been reduced to 15 years imprisonment whereas the penalty for minor misdemeanours has been increased to up to five years imprisonment.

Failure to report knowledge of treason can incur life imprisonment and offences that are seditious can incur up to seven years imprisonment. Urging overthrow of the Constitution or the government can incur a sentence of up to 15 years imprisonment.

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Wasawasa inspires peace art



Children display paintings created at the CCF Art Booth at the Wasawasa Festival, held from 19-28 November 2009 at the Albert Park in Suva. Experienced and amateur artists, as well as sculptors, handicraft

and curio makers from the Pacific, exhibited their work at a large tent put up in the centre of the Park by the Fiji Arts Council. The Festival coincided with the South Pacific Pageant. Full story on page 7.

Editor's notes

Human rights activists were surprised to receive a permit for the 10 December march, although it did not allow 'political' messages and carrying of placards.

Optimism that this was a step forward for Fiji was crushed a month later, when the new year saw the sacking of three magistrates whose decisions did not favour authorities.

A decree restricting pension entitlements, the Crimes Decree which reduces penalties for treason, and a proposed decree to regulate the media have renewed fears that democracy and freedom of expression will not return for a long time.

A dialogue process is yet to commence and the sincerity of the regime to hand power back to the people of Fiji, remains doubtful.

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Create enabling environment for an independent judiciary

The Interim Government needs to take immediate steps to create an enabling environment for an independent judiciary in Fiji, so that confidence in the judiciary can be restored, says the Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF).

"In the aftermath of the 5 December 2006 coup, the people of Fiji remained confident of the independence of our judiciary. This was evident in the range of Constitutional and legal redress cases filed for judicial review," CCF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Rev Akuila Yabaki said.

"The *Qarase v Bainimarama* case in 2008 and the appeals case in April 2009, plus the sentencing of the army and police officers responsible for the deaths of Sakiusa Rabaka and Nimilote Verebasaga, reassured people that Fiji's courts had remained independent after the 2006 political upheaval".

The reported sacking of three magistrates and the termination of employment of at least three prosecution lawyers by the newly appointed Acting Director for Pub-

lic Prosecutions (DPP) Mr Aca Rayawa, has renewed fears that the Interim Government maybe intimidating judicial and legal officers.

"The judiciary needs to be seen to be independent. If magistrates get sacked soon after making a decision against the government, then one may assume that this government will not tolerate a judgment that does not go in its favour," Rev Yabaki said.

Fear of losing jobs could intimidate judicial officers and law enforcement agencies into being less impartial and to be more favourable towards the government."

An independent judiciary is essential for the preservation of the rule of law in a country, as well as for safeguarding good governance principles, human rights and moral values.

The lack of an independent judiciary means that people in Fiji will not be able to fully enjoy the basic human rights of the Right to Fair Public Hearing; and the Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty.

A new criminal code for 2010

A new criminal code came into effect on 1 February 2010, comprising the Criminal Procedure Decree, the Crimes Decree and the Sentencing and Penalties Decree.

Gazetted on 5 November 2009, they replace the existing Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, which were repealed under the provisions of the three new decrees.

The new Crimes Decree features new offences and has some changes in penalties, including:-

- New offences relating to crimes against humanity and people trafficking;
- Criminalisation of the procurement of prostitution services;
- Expanded definition of corruption;
- Severe increase in penalties for certain offences;
- Reversal of the onus of proof for some charges, whereby the accused must prove innocence rather than the prosecution; and
- Changes to the criminal procedure which includes an expanded role for the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC).

Corruption

Part 11 of the Crime Decree is titled 'Offences Against the Administration of Law-

ful Authority' and features offences ranging from corruption, forgery, bribery, impersonation, counterfeiting, falsifying information and obstructing justice.

Some corruption offences that were previously considered as misdemeanors and would not have attracted a jail term now have a penalty of up to three years imprisonment. There is an increase in penalties for most other offences ranging from three to 17 years imprisonment.

The penalties can be considered extraordinarily high as these offences do not involve physical harm to another person. By comparison, the charge of rape only attracts a maximum 10 year imprisonment term.

Obtaining a 'benefit' for the purposes of corruption has been expanded to "any advantage including political gain, and is not limited to property".

In addition to this, any benefit that has been paid to or received by a public official is presumed to be done without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. The accused must now prove, on the balance of probabilities, that the payment or receipt of this benefit was lawful.

Chapter III, Part 10 of the Crimes Decree has a new section titled "Treason and Other

Offences Against Government Authority' which is highlighted on page 1 of *Tutaka*.

Prosecution Powers

Under the Criminal Procedure Decree, FICAC now has equivalent powers to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to commence and litigate any criminal charges.

This gives increased powers to FICAC as a prosecutorial body and means that they are not limited to prosecuting corruption-related charges under the Crimes Decree 2009.

The failure to have independent and impartial prosecutors could affect the following human rights: Article 7 - Right to Equality Before the Law, Article 10 - Right to Fair Public Hearing, and Article 11 - Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty.

Sentencing & Penalties Decree

Part XI of this new Decree allows for the participation of traditional and community leaders in sentencing processes. Regulations may be prescribed for the selection of the traditional or community leaders, the procedures of the court, and the limitations on the types of offences where this arrangement may be applied.

Leaders must practice good governance

Leaders in the community and government need to practice good governance to be more responsive to community needs and to keep promises they make to communities.

This was the view of participants at a Capacity Building Workshop for Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) conducted by CCF at the Kamla Wati Building in Rakiraki town from 18-19 November 2009.

The workshop had 26 participants from the following organisations: HART, Red Cross, Soroptimist International, Navutulevu Women's Club, Catholic Women's League, St Rose Community Group, Korowaqa Women's Club, Naqoro Women's Club, Nakorokula Women's Club, Naraviravi Youth Group, Naivuvuni Youth Group, Qaqa Youth Group, and Raviravi District Youth.

Workshop participants shared some governance practices they had experienced in organisations and their communities. The

training enabled them to gain a good understanding of the eight good governance principles.

The module on a 'Rights-Based approach to Development' was new to many participants as it taught the importance of considering human rights and good governance principles in development activities, through incorporating practices such as participatory decision-making, inclusiveness and fulfilling obligations to communities.

A project planning exercise was useful in explaining the need to understand the realities in the community, the relevant institutions and their roles in any community development project.

The challenges faced by organisations at the community level was shared by participants in the session on 'Organising for Governance'.

"One common challenge is that women and youth's voice are not always heard and they have to come up with strategies to break the barrier," Community



CCF education team at the Rakiraki workshop, from left: Bulutani Matai, Sereima Lutubula and Wilfred Tukana.

and Field Officer Ms Sereima Lutubula said.

"Building on their own experiences and using the good governance principles, participants showed enthusiasm to better organize and mobilize their organizations for responsible actions.

"Good leadership was recognised as necessary for a successful organization. The workshop itself was a good platform for building partnerships with other organizations," Ms Lutubula said.

The workshop was facilitated by Ms Lutubula and CCF Education Support Officer Mr Bulutani Matai and Mr Wilfred Tukana.

Guest speakers at the workshop were Ms Naomi Nawaitoga, who is a Legal Officer with the Legal Aid Commission in Lautoka and Mrs Shaleshni Naidu Lalji, who is a Senior Welfare Officer, North West, in the Department of Social Welfare in Ba.

It also featured sessions on Human Rights and Responsible Citizenship.



Participants at the Capacity Building workshop in Rakiraki.

A feminist approach to look beyond the law

A group of 24 women gathered in Nadi, Fiji from 9-13 November 2009 to receive training on Feminist Legal Theory and Practice.

The training covered feminist theories, gender issues, women's human rights and litigation strategies.

Case studies, moots and group discussions were used to improve participants' knowledge of the intersecting identities of women because of their sex, ethnicity, class, religion, economic, sexual orientation or other status which tends to disadvantage them.

"The training taught us to look beyond the law and see the impact it has on women's lives", says Kate Schuetze, Legal Officer at CCF who was also a participant at the



Kate Schuetze (left) takes part in group activities at the training.

workshop.

"Law reform to protect the rights of women - such as the Domestic Violence Decree

created recently in Fiji - is only the first step towards improving the lives of women. When looking at this law through a 'feminist lens', you realise that there is an equal need for substantive support structures such as counseling services and training of law enforcement officials, and a change in culture to eliminate violence against women," Ms Schuetze explains.

"Because of the interdependence of human rights, promoting the rights of women is essential to achieving equality and non-discrimination for all peoples," she said.

The training program was developed by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and supported by the Fiji Womens' Rights Movement.

Human rights elusive for Indo-Fijian villagers

By Mosmi Bhim

Human rights is a beautiful ideal that is more of a reality for urban areas, is the message one gets from two Indo-Fijian communities in Sawani and Muaniweni in the Naitasiri province.

Tucked away in a mountain top in Sawani, Princess Road, this Indo-Fijian Sawani village is accessible only by steps cut into the steep mud-cliff, or through a muddy, winding uphill road, which would be difficult for travel on rainy days.

Once on top, one is greeted with a breath-taking view of the Sawani riverside communities in the valley, and the greater interior of the Naitasiri province. A workshop for the Indo-Fijian village on breezy mountain-top Sawani was conducted on 29 October 2009, largely in the Hindi language, due to a lack of fluency in the English language of most of the 30 participants.

People living here largely have small employments in the town or do small-scale farming or business. Those who achieve higher education or get plush jobs tend to leave the area. As the English language was not understood by all participants, those who could speak English assisted the others in filling out the registration and pre-assessment forms. Few participants had heard about human rights and only those who had attended other workshops had heard about good governance.

For one participant aged in his 60s, this was the first workshop he had on human rights and good governance. The only violation of human rights that he could think of had to do with access to land for survival and forced evictions. Many women identified crimes of violence against women as human rights violations.

Participants were keen to use the human rights and good governance principles in their own community. They questioned on how they can know that a particular incident in their neighbourhood (for instance, a quarrel or physical violence) is a human rights violation and what were the rightful actions they could take to intervene. Many questions focused on social and economic rights such as how to get better roads, proper water supply and income-generating activities in their area.

The most captivating session for participants was on good governance. The fictional stories used to illustrate accountability, transparency and corruption, generated much laughter in the audience and taught



The Rewa River - on the left bank is the Muaniweni Village and the bank on the right is where cane farmers used to stay in the past.

them to be critical of leaders.

Muaniweni was a different experience than Sawani. We drove on a gravel and dirt road to the interior of Naitasiri province, going slightly uphill off the main road. Cows grazed the lush green mountains. Our arrival at the riv-

e r s i d e
M u a n i w e n i
V i s h n u
M a n d i r, the temple that was the venue for our workshop, was heralded with the arrival of trucks which had the food for morning tea and lunch. The workshop was attended by 26 people.

Muaniweni village is located next to the Rewa River. The land was acquired for sugar cane farming by the Colonial Sugar Refinery in early 1900s. The village itself used to be the site for cane farms many decades ago and the workers lived across the river on the hilly land.

The Muaniweni workshop was a different experience for CCF staff especially because of the Chandrika Prasad constitutional court case. Instigated by CCF in 2000, this was a milestone court case in Fiji's history.

CCF's radio play on racial discrimination titled "The Looting" is also based on true incidents of looting and terrorising of Indo-Fijians living in Muaniweni, by nearby Fijian villagers, during the attempted coup of 2000. Chandrika Prasad went through a similar incident and had to migrate after winning his court case, for safety reasons.

Knowing the history of the area, we were pleasantly surprised to find the participants quite keen to learn, as they came in after finishing their morning chores. Working men also took the time out to learn, as did two girls preparing for university education. Participants came with an open and positive mind. As most participants were not fluent in the English language, bulk of the workshop was conducted in Hindi. Income in the area mostly comes from vegetable farming.

"Out of all the workshops we have conducted, Muaniweni stands out for us," says Ms Sereima Lutubula, Community and Field Officer at CCF.

"The Muaniweni participants want to help to move the country forward. They are hopeful of a Fiji that is peaceful and happy."

"The Muaniweni participants are aware of human rights violations and discrimination at public facilities such as the Health Cen-



Women listening attentively at the Sawani village workshop.

tre. They remember the 2000 events. Some people had been victims in the 2000 coup and had to hide in bushes and become refugees. They didn't want to hear CCF's radio play as they had been through those events," Ms Lutubula said.

Some people still live in fear of nearby Fijian villagers and are afraid to attend government or political party meetings. Nevertheless, they were glad to learn about their rights and good governance, and where to report violations and seek help.

Many Indo-Fijians expressed feeling isolated - Muaniweni people remain apprehensive on how they will exercise their rights, especially when seeking timely help during a violent crisis or disaster, since they live in communities that are far away in the rural interior.

Human Rights Day celebration

Story: Sunayna Nandini

Pictures: Kate Schuetze

The NGO Coalition on Human Rights (NGOCHR) celebrated International Human Rights Day on December 10th 2009 with a variety of events, with a particular emphasis on the theme "Climate Change as a Human Rights Issue".

The NGOCHR advocated on International Human Rights Day through a march in the streets of Suva City, an evening poetry reading at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Laucala Bay, Suva, and a talk-back show on Fiji One Television. The talk-back show 'Have Your Say' hosted by Emily Moli, featured Edwina Kotoisuva from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and Sharon Bhagwan Rolls from FemLink Pacific, who spoke on the "16 Days of Activism" against gender violence. Close to 50 people participated in the march.

The march commenced from the Flea Market at Roadwell Road, Suva, and ended at the Peace Park behind Suva's Civic Centre where speeches were made. Organizations taking part in Human Rights Day celebrations include Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF), Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), FWCC, Nausori Rural Women's Association, Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy (ECEA) and the Young People's Concerned Network (YPCN).

Refreshments at the march and poetry reading was provided by FWRM, the outgoing secretariat for the NGOCHR.

In addition to participating in the NGOCHR activities, CCF aired Human Rights Day radio advertisements on the local radio station, Fiji Broadcasting Cooperation Limited in the three languages – English, Hindi and Fijian.

CCF also sponsored airing of advertisements on Fiji One Television over the Human Rights Day period and during the Christmas and New Year break.

The advertisements produced by the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) were on Article 2 – Freedom from Discrimination, and Article 18 – Freedom of Religion and Belief, of the



Activists assembled at the Peace Park after the march.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

CCF's Communications and Advocacy Officer, Mosmi Bhim told Tutaka, that CCF fully supported the NGOCHR by participating in the planning of, and join-



CCF staff carry a banner highlighting human rights articles.

ing the march to commemorate International Human Rights Day celebrations.

"The march went ahead as scheduled and most of our office staff joined in. Through the aid of volunteers, the media and youth team a banner was painted for the march



NGOCHR secretariat lead the march through the streets of Suva.

reflecting UDHR Article 1 – Everyone is born free and equal in dignity and rights - in a big letters, with the other articles and slogans in smaller letters," she said.

She added the banner was an alternative medium used to convey the message of human rights, as the permit obtained by the NGOCHR prohibited carrying of placards and distribution of pamphlets.

"Other NGOs and youth activists overcame the restriction by wearing T-shirts which had slogans and through messages painted on the face and body," Ms Bhim said.

The evening poetry reading, organized by the NGOCHR in conjunction with the USP-based Pacific Writers Forum (PWF), was held at USP's AUSAID Lecture Theatre. The poetry night attracted a small, but enthusiastic crowd of youngsters and older people alike, who brought along poems and read them to the audience.

FWCC, the current chair of the NGOCHR, confirmed that it was highly likely that the poetry reading will become an annual event for future human rights day events. FWRM, FWCC and CCF staff read poems at the event, as did well-known poet Mohit Prasad and DJ Hugh.

CCF'S Chief Executive Officer, Reverend Akuila Yabaki said a prayer on peace and tolerance. Rev Yabaki conveyed CCF's message 'human rights come

with responsibilities' during media interviews. In spite of strict censorship, human rights day interviews were published in local dailies.

Rev Yabaki was surprised and rather relieved that NGOCHR managed to get a permit to hold the march.

"The focus on climate change took attention away from the political and constitutional crisis in Fiji and made it easier to obtain a permit for the march. In 2008, CCF organized the public march to mark International Human Rights Day, which attracted 60 participants," he added.

Rev Yabaki said it was a pleasure to see Human Rights Day celebrated despite the imposed limitations on free speech in public due to the Public Emergency Regulations.

From Paramountcy to Equality

“Constitutionalism plays a key role in establishing the legal and political framework for government. Even a good constitution cannot ensure political stability if it is not properly understood and supported by the citizens of a country and the people in power.”

These comments were made by CCF’s Chief Executive Officer Reverend Akuila Yabaki in a paper presentation at the Pacific Islands Political Studies Association (PIPSA) Conference, held at the University of Auckland, New Zealand from 3-4 December 2009. The theme of the Conference was “Pacific Democracies”.

Below are the excerpts from his paper, titled, “From Paramountcy to Equality: Constitutionalism, Dialogue and Ethno-Political Conflict in Fiji”.

“There is an utmost need to reform the electoral system and other government procedures to remove the focus on ethnic identity, and also address the social factors leading to conflict through an ongoing, inclusive and independent dialogue process.

Without an ongoing commitment from all aspects of society to engage in an open, inclusive and fair dialogue process, including from the interim government and the military, the ethno-political conflict will prevail. With the right attitude, dialogue can bring people together and help reconcile Fiji with its past history of ethno-political conflict.

Fiji has had a turbulent political history with five coups in just over 20 years. Conflict between the two major ethnic groups (Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian) has often been blamed for this instability, but the reality of the situation is much more complex. Broader social problems, such as poverty, access to education, lack of good governance and a struggle for wealth, land resources and power, have contributed to the political instability.

Government’s structure under Fiji’s three Constitutions had a profound impact on ethnic division by encouraging segregation and discrimination rather than equality.

In order to break away from its history of racial politics, there is a need to address the political and legal structure to ensure fair representation and participation in government for different ethnic groups. Likewise there is a need to deal with the social aspect (the attitude or mindset of the Fiji people) that contributes to the division and conflict.

Colonialism largely contributed to the ethnic mix by introducing indentured laborers from India in the late 19th Century, but there has been a continued failure to critically address the issues which perpetuate the ethnic division. This division was encouraged by the ‘divide and rule’ mental-

ity of the colonial power. This attitude was designed for effective administration of colonies rather than to promote racial harmony, and has left a painful legacy for many countries that continue to struggle with these issues today.

Fiji’s 1997 Constitution entrenched the principle of ‘paramountcy’ of Indigenous Fijian interests (a remnant of the colonial era) and a distinctive lack of social understanding and acceptance of different cultures and ethnic groups ensure that this division remains today. The role of the military and its dominance by one ethnic group (Indigenous Fijians) has perpetuated the divisive political economy and the politico-administrative structures.

In spite of some flaws, the 1997 Constitution was a comprehensive and advanced document with a strong focus on human rights. The first true test for the Constitution came not long after the first elections were held in 1999. An Indo-Fijian party led by Mahendra Chaudhry won the elections. Some Indigenous-Fijians found this outcome unacceptable and felt deceived by the constitutional review process.

Old fears resurfaced and the Indigenous-Fijian community felt that their cultural institutions were threatened by the election result. This perception seems to be unfounded. Far from eroding indigenous rights, the 1997 Constitution provided a protectionist approach to indigenous Fijian interests and tried to strike an acceptable balance between individual and group rights.

The increased racial tensions following the election culminated in the 2000 civilian-led coup by George Speight. Due to the inability of the State to function whilst Parliament was held hostage by Speight, the military assumed control of Fiji and advised the President to abrogate the 1997 Constitution. In a decision that became known internationally as “the case that stopped a coup”, an indigent Indo-Fijian farmer successfully challenged the abrogation of the Constitution on the basis that it took away his rights. In this manner, the judiciary played a vital role in restoring political stability and constitutional rule.

Qarase was appointed caretaker Prime Minister by Commodore Bainimarama and in spite of the Court’s decision, the Chaudhry government was not reinstated. Instead, Qarase led Fiji to elections from the enviable position of incumbent Prime Minister. Qarase’s lack of adherence to the strict terms of the 1997 Constitution at this time subsequently attracted criticism from the Court of Appeal, when he himself was seeking to be reinstated after the December 2006 coup.

Even though elections were held in 2001,

ethnic tensions between communities remained high. Some people were tried and convicted for their roles in the 2000 coup and the violence that ensued, whilst others were allowed to continue in government or chiefly positions. It was this arbitrary application of justice and the suggestion of amnesties (including for convicted offenders) under the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill 2006 which enraged advocates for the rule of law and victims of the events of 2000.

There was no attempt to offer compensation or other relief to those who were harmed, evicted or had their property damaged in the violence following the 2000 coup. The failure to adequately address calls for justice and the emerging social and economic problems, such as poverty and access to land, compounded the political problems. Land leases continued to expire with each passing year, and no attempt was made to reform the Fijian Administration to encourage development and improve access to land. Poverty was on the rise and the number of people living in squatter settlements continues to increase. Resentment was allowed to simmer with no genuine attempts at reconciliation.

There have been a few attempts since December 2006 to bring people together to try and address the past problems of political instability. The major one was the NCBFF, which was established to bring people together to talk about moving the country forward. The process attracted considerable support, but it also attracted strong opposition by those that refused to participate (including the Methodist Church). The Charter process attempted to address past conflicts and provide potential solutions through Chapters such as “Ending the Coup Culture” and “The Role of the Military”. The process ultimately resulted in a document that could form the basis for continued debate and dialogue.

An ongoing national dialogue process could support and facilitate both aspects and is a good starting point for reconciling the divide between ethnic groups. Once a truly participatory and representative government is firmly established, a truth and reconciliation tribunal could be used to further ease lingering ethnic tension and address the problems of the past. A multi-dimensional approach which considers the need for constitutionalism and the rule of law in addition to an open, inclusive dialogue is essential if Fiji is to become a just, equitable and stable society.

Without an ongoing commitment from all aspects of society to engage in an open, inclusive and fair dialogue process, including from the interim government and the military, the ethno-political conflict will prevail”.

CCF Art Booth attracts artists at Wasawasa

By Sunayna Nandini

Close to a 100 people visited CCF's Art Booth at the weeklong 'Wasawasa Festival of Oceans' held from 19-28 November 2009 at Albert Park in Suva.

CCF made the most of this event by setting up an art booth on the theme "Peace and Multiculturalism through Arts" for three days at the festival.

Speaking to *Tutaka*, the Public Relations Officer of the Fiji Arts Council (FAC), Peter Sipeli said that according to FAC, the CCF Art Booth was a great way of showing that art is positive and a non-threatening way of talking about issues.

"The use of FAC artists at CCF's Art Booth was a very educational experience for other young artists in learning how to use arts as a vehicle for change," he added.

29-year-old Waqa Vuidreketi, who was hired by CCF as an art guidance teacher for the Art Booth, told *Tutaka* that art was the best way to encourage young people to express their ideas about peace and multiculturalism in a creative way.

"A lot of people have their own concept of what peace and living in a multicultural society means, but rather than giving endless speeches which youths tend to get bored of, I recommend creative arts where people get to express their feelings without explaining to others," he said.

Vuidreketi added that the CCF Art Booth attracted children and youth as well. Another FAC artist Iliesa Lee said it was interesting to see the different perceptions of people on what they interpreted peace and multiculturalism to be.

"We had a lot of young school children visiting the CCF Art Booth and most of them painted nature such as green grass, waterfalls, and blue skies while the youth had a different viewpoint of the theme," Lee said.



These talented artists used their free time at the Wasawasa Festival to paint for CCF.

Ten-year-old Samantha Tamani said she had a lot of fun painting at the art booth.

"I like art and craft; it is my favorite subject in school. I painted a water fall and flowers with my friends because it means peace to me," she said.

Vuidreketi and Lee also worked on a mural which was a collaborative art work by artists and interested members of the general public, on the given theme.

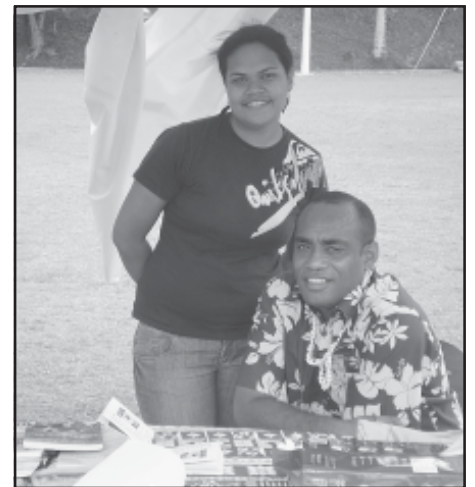
According to Vuidreketi, the mural itself is a unique representation of the theme "Peace and Multiculturalism through Arts" as it depicted many creative thoughts of people in one art piece.

CCF recorded a high turnout of people at the art booth on the afternoon of Saturday 21 November when more than 20 children came by to paint on the given theme. However, the highest turnout was on the following Wednesday 24 November when various primary school students turned up at the booth.

CCF's Communications and Advocacy Officer, Mosmi Bhim said, the purpose of having an Art Booth at the Wasawasa Festival was to encourage young people to express their ideas on concepts of peace, multiculturalism and human rights, using the creative medium of paints.

"As part of its education and advocacy program, CCF has a range of projects. These include printing of educational posters

on multiculturalism, human rights and good governance. We hope to utilize art events to generate creative materials for our edu-



CCF Youth Liaison Officer Losana Tuiraviravi (left) and Projects Assistant Jolame Driu, at the CCF Art Booth.

cation work through the talents of young people," she added.

Apart from the main mural, three smaller paintings were completed by various school students. CCF used the booth as an opportunity to hand out brochures and other publications to the public.

Ms Bhim said CCF was glad that the event inspired an exceptional painting on peace.

She said that the painting would be used to create a poster which will be distributed to communities all over Fiji, while the few smaller paintings produced by children, youth and working adults would be used by CCF in their future publications.



Women try their hands at painting at CCF's booth.

Stopping pension an abuse of power

The Interim Government is committing acts of abuse of power and misuse of funds, as well as violating International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions by promulgating a decree to stop pension payments to its critics, says the CCF.

The decree was made available to the public a week after Interim Prime Minister Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama revealed it in the daily news early this month. The 'Regulation of Pensions and Retirement Allowances Decree 2009' was gazetted on 31 December 2009.

Such a decree will be detrimental to national dialogue and will hamper attempts to move the country forward. CCF called

on the Interim Government to respect human rights and refrain from implementing any discriminatory laws such as this decree.

"A pension is the rightful entitlement of public servants, who earn this through their long civil service career," CCF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Rev Akuila Yabaki said.

"Once a person retires from public service, they are entitled to their pensions, regardless of their opinions or beliefs. Even if convicted of a crime, a pensioner is still entitled to receive the pension which they earned."

"Not only is the Bainimarama government

following bad governance practices amounting to misuse of taxpayers' money, abuse of power and corruption, they are also violating workers rights," Rev Yabaki said.

The following basic human rights are being violated by this decree:-

- Freedom from Discrimination
- Right to Life, Liberty and Personal Security
- Freedom of Opinion and Information
- Right to Social Security and Desirable Work
- Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights.

News in pictures



These youth found a creative way to convey human rights concerns at the march to commemorate International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2009 in Suva. They painted various human rights articles and slogans on their t-shirts, face, arms and legs.



Marching through the streets of Suva are CCF staff. Behind them are the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and young people, at the 10 December 2009 march for human rights.



The human rights march procession enters the Civic Centre in Suva, where they assembled at the Peace Park to hear speeches and partake refreshments. In front are CCF with their banner. In the background are Fiji Women's Rights Movement staff with colourful banners painted by girls during workshops.

Respect for other religions

Rev Akuila Yabaki recently gave a talk on 'Respect for other Religions from Christianity Perspective', at the 41st Jalsa Salana in Fiji, held at the Fazal-e-Umar Mosque from 16-17 January 2010 in Samabula.

Rev Yabaki was one of many speakers from the major religious organisations in Fiji, who were invited to speak at this event organized by a Muslim religious body.

Rev Yabaki commented that the impact of Christianity on the non-Christians in Fiji has been minimal despite the presence of Hindu and Muslim Indo-Fijians over a period of over 130 years here.

"As we find ourselves here in Fiji as everywhere in religiously plural societies and are called to give account of the hope of a restored human community in Christ, we are challenged to embrace the fact that Christian faith is communitarian at its core - having things in common sharing the same attitudes and the same interests - and it binds people in a community of love. How can we testify to this Gospel? It is important to build up creative and responsible relationships with people who belong to different religious traditions. This calls for dialogue with people of other faiths. The challenge is how do local congregations recognize that living in a dialogical relationship with people of other faiths is a fundamental point of our Christian service within the local community and a response to the command to "love God and your neighbour as yourself"?

"Genuine sharing could only take place when partners in dialogue encounter one another in a spirit of humility, honesty and mutual respect," Rev Yabaki said.