

Fiji: Women, Peace And Security in Security and Defence Policy

With Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls. Found in: Schirch, Lisa, with Deborah Mancini-Griffoli (editors). *Local Ownership in Security: Case Studies of Peacebuilding Approaches*. The Hague: Alliance for Peacebuilding, GPPAC, Kroc Institute, 2015. Found at www.humansecuritycoordination.org

On 19 May 2000, following the civilian led overthrow of the Labour Party led government the first step for a core group of women was to convene on May 21 what became known as the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil. Because of the recurring role military in addressing instability in Fiji, women began to negotiate and communicate directly with the security forces. The National Council of Women Fiji made contact with the military, and as a result, the commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces brought together the members of the military council and other senior officers to meet with the representatives of the Peace Vigil.

The women's delegation presented what has become known as "The Women's Letter" to outline various suggestions, particularly the need for Fiji to return to parliamentary democracy, respect human rights, and uphold the 1997 Constitution as the supreme law of the country. The Fijian military received the "women's letter" respectfully and favourably. Fijian women's groups learned the importance of using the language of the military and security sector for future dialogue and peace initiatives.

Awareness of the impact of violence on women and women's roles in peace and security had been increasing at the global level with the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and 2122 reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

The challenge:

The security sector was not gender sensitive to women's security concerns and did not include women in security sector roles.

Theory of change:

Women's advocacy and relationship building with the security sector created opportunities for greater dialogue and opportunities for oversight.

Following the return to parliamentary democracy in 2001 local women's rights groups in Fiji such as FEMLINKPacific promoted UNSCR 1325 as a way to engage with the Fiji security sector to advance the growing global "women, peace, and security" agenda. Beginning in 2003, the Women, Peace and Security Fiji Coordinating Committee on 1325 (WPS Fiji) was established, following consultation with the Ministry of Women and a range of women's groups and NGOs including FEMLINKPacific. This built on the efforts of the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil and focusing on increasing their own capacity to understand national security processes and also to begin raising issues about the transparency and accountability of the process - who was consulted, and what security threats were identified and prioritised.

Fijian women continued to send communication to the Fiji Ministry of Defence outlining that national security must include a sense of safety for women in their homes and communities. Fijian women saw the need to talk about human security as something that not only the military could deliver, but rather it was a societal commitment involving many government agencies, religious leaders, media and civil society groups. The National Security and Defence Review was an opportunity for women's civil society groups to participate in shaping a human security agenda together with the Ministry of Defence. Fijian women began to jointly explore options for

women’s representation on national security councils and other local or district/provincial level committees and delegations addressing security issues. Together, they documented factors that impede women from participating in security decisions. Fijian women’s organisations worked with the state security sector to do the following:

- Provide policy advice on improving transparency, accountability and responsiveness.
- Monitor the implementation of international and regional agreements, as well as national and institutional policies.
- Provide capacity building for oversight bodies on gender issues.
- Identify early warning indicators or security threats and issues facing individuals and communities.
- Facilitate dialogue between local communities and security sector oversight bodies.
- Raise public awareness of how to hold security sector institutions accountable.

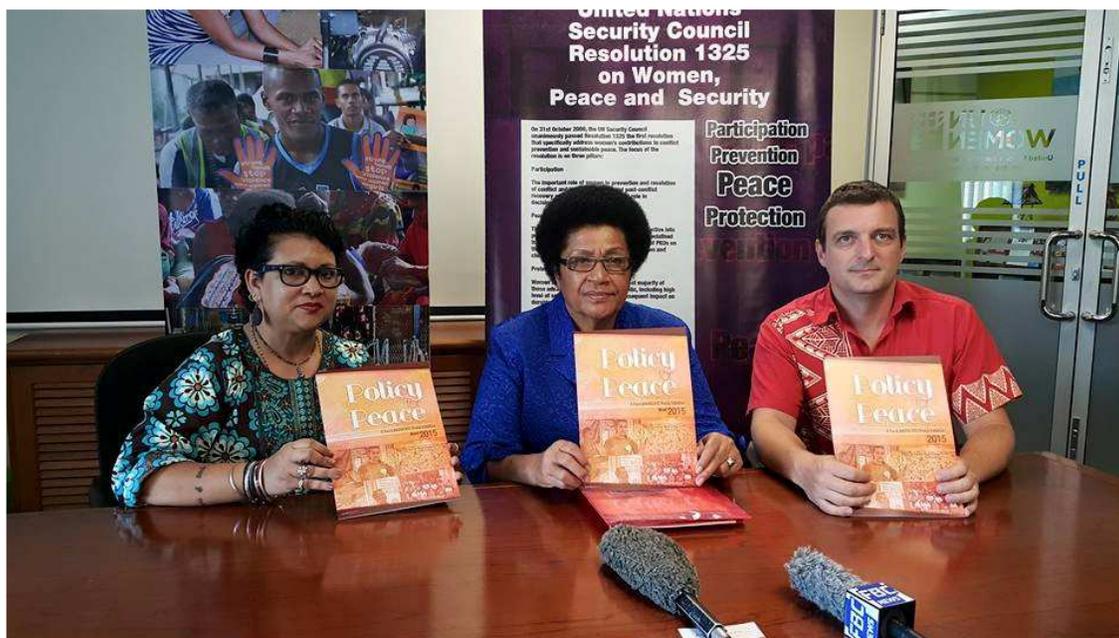


Photo 29: Women, Peace and Security launch of policy report. Photo Credit: FEMLINKPacific

The Fiji Women, Peace and Security Coordinating Committee, together with the National Council of Women, also made formal submissions to the National Security and Defence Review. Recommendations reaffirmed that defence and security is the business of men and women, therefore the organisational mechanism that deals with it should ensure that issues of men and women are given the same level of attention.” The National Security and Defence review provides an opportunity to take corrective measures of existing structures and processes that are out-dated. The women included these recommendations:

- The Minister of Women should be included as a member of the National Security Council;
- The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women should be included as a permanent member of the National Security Advisory Committee;
- Women should be effectively and equitably represented on Provincial and District Security Committees;
- Women should be included in the National Security Assessment Unit;
- Gender balance in the decision-making levels of the security forces should be ensured and efforts made to recruit women into the Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

Fijian women also noted the importance of environmental security issues such as addressing the negative impact of extractive industries, preparing for natural disasters and the impact of climate change on food and nutrition security. Following the submission of the position paper, the Fijian Ministry of Defence invited the Women, Peace, and Security Coordinating Committee to make a presentation in front of the National Security and Defence Review.

The Ministry of Defence also indicated that they have committed the full implementation and mainstreaming of the fulfilment of state obligations under the UNSCR 1325 into their policies, plans and an integrated approach with Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This gained traction at the regional level and subsequently the UNDP Pacific Centre, in collaboration with PIFS, the University of the South Pacific and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) FEMLINKPacific - as the convener of a regional network on the 1325 and the Citizens' Constitutional Forum held a series of three regional consultations on human security in 2008, beginning to outline roles and responsibilities of existing institutions to fulfil a human security agenda. The series of regional meetings and documentation contributed to the adoption of the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012 - 2015).

While the WPS CC in Fiji was disbanded, women-led NGOs such as FEMLINKPacific have persisted in engaging on national security policy advocating at national and regional level. Since 2014 the Women's Human Security First campaign and reports has been a basis of advocacy and engagement including a submission to the Hague 2015 National Security Policy review and it should be noted that the Ministry of Defence in Fiji has included a human security approach and implementation of UNSCR 1325 in its Strategic Plan.



Photo 30: Women conducting policy analysis. Photo Credit: FEMLINKPacific