

SPOTLIGHT ON R2P



Human rights and atrocity prevention in Vanuatu

Human Rights Defenders

Workshop

A Workshop on Developing Protection Strategy for Human Rights Defenders and Atrocity Prevention in the Pacific was held in Port Vila, Vanuatu, from 21-23 February 2024. The workshop was facilitated by the Pacific Human Rights Defenders Network (PHRDN) in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Pacific Regional Office and the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P), and supported by the Swiss Embassy in Canberra. Local coordination and support from the Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition made the event possible.

Building on the 2021 [report](#) on situation of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in the Pacific, the objective of the workshop was to address the critical need for protection mechanisms for HRDs across the region, and to explore the role of HRDs in atrocity prevention efforts. The program involved sessions on developing a regional protection strategy facilitated by Dr Natasha Khan, Chair

of PHRDN, and Ms Releshni Karan, OHCHR, along with guest presentations, such as from the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission. Ms Nikki Marczak from the APR2P Centre delivered sessions on the link between human rights violations and atrocity crime risk, and the vital role of HRDs in the prevention of atrocities. The recently updated Vanuatu Risk Assessment was circulated, and attendees participated in a hypothetical exercise relating to early warning signs of escalating atrocity risk.

An inspirational session was given by HRDs from Papua New Guinea, who were supported by the APR2P Centre to be at the workshop in person. Ms Shirley Kaupa, Nadika Popena and Stephanie Yakam of Magna Carta PNG shared details about their work, including legal support for those affected by sorcery accusation related violence. The workshop provided a great opportunity for networking between Vanuatu and PNG HRDs.

Outcomes from the workshop included a strong call for a regional

protection strategy for HRDs as well as national mechanisms, the identification of challenges, gaps and solutions, and a plan for stakeholder engagement and advocacy led by Vanuatu based HRDs. The importance of the role of HRDs in atrocity prevention was recognised, and there was a call for future workshops covering aspects of human rights and more in depth training on R2P and atrocity prevention.



Translations Launch Event

Translations of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders into three Pacific languages – Bislama, iTaukei, and Tok Pisin – were **launched** alongside the workshop, following a partnership between the APR2P Centre and OHCHR. To increase the accessibility of the document, posters in local languages were designed in line with local cultures and values. They were unveiled at the launch event at the Holiday Inn Port Vila, by special guests Deputy Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu Ms Emily Fisher and Special Envoy of Switzerland for the Pacific Region Mr Emmanuel Bichet.

Ms Fisher said Australia is developing Human Rights Defender Guidelines to better support and advocate for the work of human rights defenders in the region, reiterating the government's commitment to R2P and to "collective action on global challenges, including by partnering to promote a diverse and dynamic civil society."



Meeting with MSG Secretariat

Ms Marczak also met with colleagues Mr Ilan Kiloe and Mr Brittien Yosef at the Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat to progress discussions on collaborative activities under the partnership agreement between the APR2P Centre and MSG. Following an inaugural workshop for MSG state representatives in July 2023, further trainings and dialogues are in planning for 2024.



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