

SPOTLIGHT PACIFIC PROGRAM



Fiji Civil Society Workshop on Atrocity Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

On 3-4 November 2021, the inaugural Fiji Civil Society Workshop on Atrocity Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect was held in Nadi. The workshop was co-hosted by the Asia Pacific Centre for R2P and the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), Fiji's national liaison unit under the PIANGO umbrella.

Aligning with the APR2P Pacific Project, as outlined in the Centre publication, *Atrocity Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect in the Pacific: A Vision for 2021-2024*, the workshop aimed to develop awareness of and sensitivity to atrocity prevention, and to strengthen collaboration and networking among civil society organisations (CSOs). Its objectives included to:

1. Develop networks and partnerships with Fiji based CSOs on atrocity prevention
2. Provide an opportunity for Fiji based CSOs to express concerns and priority areas relating to human rights and early warning

3. Raise awareness of R2P among Fiji civil society representatives and develop skills to recognise risk factors for atrocity crimes
4. Explore opportunities to scale up atrocity crimes prevention efforts, build and sustain an early warning mechanism for Fiji CSOs

Highlighting the crucial role that CSOs play in early warning and atrocity prevention, and in holding governments to account when triggers for atrocity crimes are detected, the workshop brought together 30 participants from NGOs working on human rights and social justice issues, and from District Councils of Social Services (DCOSS). A hybrid model was offered to allow a face to face gathering at the Tanoa Sky-lodge Hotel Nadi, and an online participation option for those unable to be present in person.

The workshop was officially opened by Commissioner West, Mesake Ledua. On behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senior Policy Officer UN

Political, Peace and Security Dr Catherine Hesse-Swain, addressed workshop attendees, stressing that "Early warning, early action, prevention, justice and accountability ... can only be realised through partnerships that locate our international obligations and commitments in the reality of lived daily experience." DFAT acknowledged that the workshop marked a key step in the application of R2P among Pacific Island nations, and reiterated the Australian Government's support for early warning and human rights protection, and thanked participants and facilitators for their collective efforts.

Training was provided to participants on the principle of R2P and the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Prevention, and thematically linked issues such as hate speech, gender, and climate change. Special guest presenters included Debbie Stothard, Founder of ALTSEAN Burma, who spoke on the overlap between human rights and civil society work and atrocity prevention, and Meghna Gu-

hathakurta from Research Initiatives Bangladesh, on the sexual and gender based violence early warning project in Bangladesh's refugee camps. YCGAP member Nyon Nyin Toh presented on the importance of youth voices in atrocity prevention.

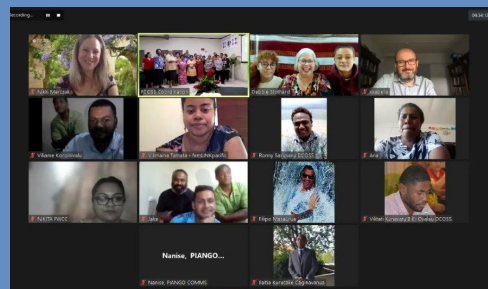
Facilitated by FCOSS Executive Director, Vani Catanasiga, and R2P Pacific Director, Romulo Nayacalevu, the workshop also provided an opportunity for dialogue and discussion, including on key human rights issues for CSOs in Fiji, and the potential for developing an early warning mechanism for atrocity crimes in Fiji.

The workshop was extremely well-received by participants and strengthened the relationship between FCOSS and the APR2P Centre. FCOSS Team Leader, Research, Communication, and Training Unit, Josaia Tokoni, joined YCGAP following the workshop and will be a strong advocate for atrocity prevention in Fiji. There was positive social media response during and after the workshop.

Significantly, the workshop resulted in a published outcome document, the Nadi Civil Society Statement on Atrocity Prevention and R2P, which can be viewed here: https://r2pasiapacific.org/files/7693/2021_Fiji_CSO_Statement_on_R2P.PDF

In this landmark statement, participants agreed to recognise the role of civil society and local communities in human rights, early warning and atrocity prevention, and affirm the benefits of greater awareness, socialisation and localisation of R2P in Fiji, valuing the lived experiences and local knowledge of Fiji communities. As expressed in the statement, CSOs in Fiji are committed to working collaboratively under the guidance of FCOSS and the APR2P Centre to develop mechanisms for early warning and response, establishing a network of advocates for R2P in Fiji, strengthening advocacy, education and information sharing on atrocity prevention in the local context.

The statement also outlined recommendations for action by the Fiji Government on R2P including the appointment of an R2P Focal Point, development of policies and legislation that include an atrocity prevention lens, collaboration with local communities to reduce hate speech, empower young people to participate in dialogue and leadership roles, and acknowledge the links between gender based violence, climate change and Covid-19 and the risk of atrocity crimes.



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