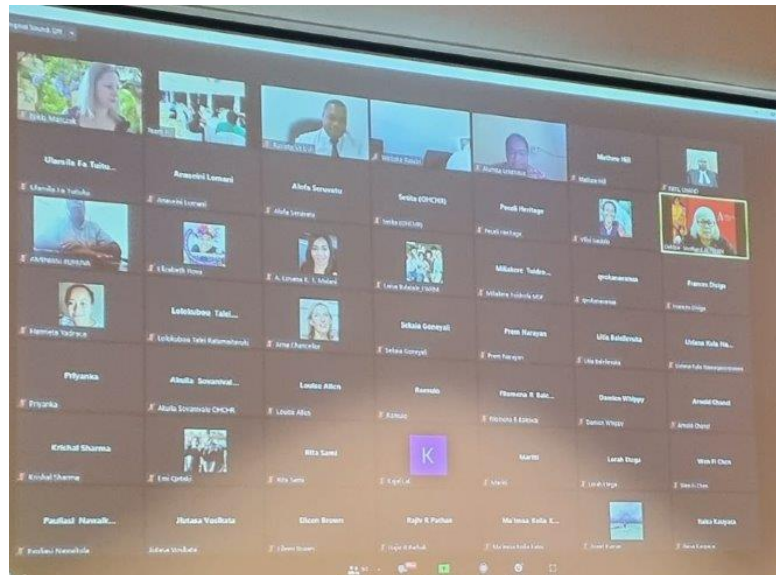


SPOTLIGHT PACIFIC PROGRAM



Regional Capacity Building Training for Human Rights Defenders on Atrocity Prevention and Protection Strategies

The Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P), in partnership with United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), co-hosted a 3-day training for human rights defenders. The workshop aimed to develop awareness and capacity among HRDs on atrocity prevention and early warning, as well as to build on the recommendations of the 2021 OHCHR report on the situation of human rights defenders, with a focus on protection mechanisms. This activity aligns with the R2P Pacific Project, under which the APR2P Centre is partnering with civil society, intergovernmental and non-government organisations to raise awareness of the UN principle of the Responsibility to Protect, and the links between atrocity prevention and broader human rights.

The event took place at the Hilton Hotel Nadi, on 21 – 23 February 2022, and used a hybrid model with 50 attendees onsite and over 90 joining online. Participants included representatives of the Pacific Human Rights Defend-

ers Network (PHRDN), police officers, journalists, youth leaders, and around 60 lawyers, who received CLE points from the Board of Legal Education for their participation. Online participants joined from Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tuvalu.

It was an honour to have the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on R2P, George Okoth-Obbo, offer his welcome remarks. Introducing the concept of R2P and the aspiration to prevent the sorts of atrocities seen in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990's, Mr Okoth-Obbo explained that while atrocity crimes are the gravest of international crimes, they are "often preceded by less systematic or serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law... Human rights violations are an important indicator for whether a risk for the occurrence of atrocity crimes exists." He noted that these may be linked to patterns of discrimination against particular groups. The Special Adviser commended Pacific

Island states for their diverse and active civil society engaged in the protection of human rights.

OHCHR Regional Representative Heike Alefsen also emphasised the role of HRDs in preventing human rights violations, and in turn, atrocity prevention, while Executive Director of ALTSEAN Burma, Debbie Stothard, told participants, "If any of you have ever been involved in issues of justice and rule of law, if you've been involved in equity and equality... whether you've been concerned about resource conflicts... about the impacts of climate change, Covid-19, whether you've been upset over abuse of power and privilege, thought about transitional justice, or if you've even just thought 'why is this happening?', you are already an atrocity prevention activist. Your human rights work is already linked and intersecting with atrocity prevention."

Wai Wai Nu who spoke on protection of HRDs in situations of extreme risk such as in Myanmar, and Yuyun Wahyunin-

grum, AICHR Indonesia representative, on how to amplify human rights voices in international forums.

Akuila Sovanivalu of OHCHR's Pacific Regional Office moderated the event, and a panel discussion was held with local NGO reps from women's rights and LGBTQ+ organisations, including Susan Grey from APPAP partner organisation, Femlink. Training on gender, hate speech, the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Prevention, international law options for accountability, and case studies from the Pacific, were delivered by the APR2P Centre, including Romulo Nayacalevu, Kirril Shields, Nikki Marczak, Louise Allen and Rebecca Barber.

Mr Nayacalevu, R2P Pacific Director and Vani Catanasiga, FCOSS Executive Director, facilitated a session on the links between human rights and atrocity prevention, and the final day saw a talanoa session which led to the election of new PHRDN chair, Natasha Khan of the University of the South Pacific, and to a commitment to the revival of the network. Following the workshop, the Leadership, Governance and Human Rights programme at the University of the South Pacific (USP) became

the latest member of APPAP, in order to work more closely with others in the region on atrocity prevention.

Over the three day workshop in Fiji, there were many opportunities for learning and discussion, and concrete outcomes were delivered. In addition to the PHRDN, the workshop has led to steps to re-convene the Pacific Human Rights Lawyers Network, and to a commitment for future partnership activities between APR2P Centre and OHCHR Pacific Regional Office, including joint research and translations. Participant feedback was extremely positive, with attendees saying the event was interesting, interactive, informative, satisfying, amazing, inspirational, and with many requesting further training and conferences in future on these topics.

The workshop came to an end with Mr Nayacalevu giving a moving speech that inspired participants and presenters alike, saying, "We are the Pacific and today our proverbial waters remain tranquil from atrocity crimes, but not all is calm. As Human Rights Defenders, the responsibility to navigate the treacherous waters of conflict, violations, discrimination, and violence remains our collective responsibility."



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