

SPOTLIGHT PACIFIC PROGRAM



The Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect held several meetings and activities in Fiji at the start of November 2022, strengthening existing partnerships and deepening awareness of atrocity prevention in the Pacific.

Atrocity Prevention Coordinator, Nikki Marczak, was in country for the events which ranged from meetings with local partners and regional organisations, to a community roundtable on gender, and training for human rights defenders.

One of the major events was a community roundtable co-hosted with Femlink Pacific on gender-based atrocity prevention and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The roundtable was held alongside the Fiji Feminist Forum on 5 November in Pacific Harbour, and involved women from diverse backgrounds and with a range of expertise on women's issues in Fiji. Following an introduction by the APR2P Centre on gender-based atrocity prevention, Executive Director of Femlink, Susan Grey, provided opening remarks, and then

moderated a discussion addressing the following themes: the root causes of GBV; current gaps in SGBV services; strengthening the participation of women and the capacity of civil society; how the implementation of the WPS agenda can enhance prevention efforts in Fiji; strengthening the gender-responsive capacity of the security sector; and developing gender-responsive early warning indicators. Participants offered feedback on these issues in Fiji, highlighting specific concerns including gender-based violence, discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, and the impact of climate change on women. The input and recommendations for progressing the WPS and R2P agendas was invaluable, and the partnership between the Centre and Femlink is ongoing.

A meeting was held between the APR2P Centre, the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) and the Fiji Law Society (FLS) to progress outcomes from the July event, "Regional Security and the Responsibility to Protect", which was

co-hosted by the three partners alongside the 51st Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting in Suva. Concepts and plans for a Fiji-based early warning system were discussed, with a view to a fully developed proposal in the new year, including identification of grant funding opportunities to support such a project.

FCOSS and the Centre also met with Reverend James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and Emeline Siale Ilo-lahia and Josaia Jirauni from the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), broadly about the atrocity prevention agenda and ways of collaborating with the churches and NGO sector, and specifically about the situation in West Papua.

Ms Marczak visited Mr Terio Koronawa, Regional Security Advisor with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) to discuss the links between the R2P principle, the Centre's work in the region, and the PIFS 2050 Strategy, particularly the thematic area of Peace and Security. It was agreed there are a number of

connections that may be leveraged to mutually support policy and program development on regional security, and that a partnership between the organisations would help support PIFS' vision of a "resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, which ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives."

Also at the regional level, a meeting was held with the Human Rights and Social Development area of SPC (Pacific Community), to discuss common thematic concerns including gender-based violence, hate speech, and human rights. Several specific initiatives were discussed including the Pacific Women's Lead program and the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women in 2024, as well as emerging work on online safety in the Pacific.

The Centre was invited to deliver training as part of the Pacific Human Rights Defenders Network (PHRDN) capacity building course, held at the University of the South Pacific in collaboration with the secretariat of the PHRDN, the Pacific Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Ms Marczak delivered a session on hate speech that covered definitions, international norms and relevant conventions, such as the Rabat Plan of Action. Examples of how hate speech can be a precursor to atrocity crimes were provided, followed by a discussion about hate speech in the Pacific context, and the potential misuse of hate speech laws to silence opposition voices and human rights defenders. Further engagement with the PHRDN will occur in future on atrocity prevention themes, while further activities are planned for 2023 with OHCHR, building on the success of this year's collaboration on workshops and translation of key documents.

Ms Marczak met with the Deputy High Commissioner at the Australian High Commission, Mr Paul Wilson, to provide a briefing on the Centre's work in Fiji over the past year, including the important partnership activities and strong relationships with regional bodies as well as local community organisations. The Pacific members of APPAP were noted, as was the youth project run by APPAP partner, the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding, with support from the Centre. Also discussed were future plans for civil society engagement in Fiji, and the importance of locally adapted narratives and language for R2P and atrocity prevention.



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