

Faith communities say no to violence

Fiji Kiribati Regional Solomon Islands Vanuatu Ending Violence Against Women

December 14, 2021



House of Sarah's campaign featured leaders from nine faith denominations proclaiming: 'My faith says no to violence against women and children.' Photo credit: Collage of posters by House of Sarah.

'Ninety per cent of people in Solomon Islands believe in God,' observed Pastor Lima Tura. 'When a message about women comes from the Bible, their eyes are open, they feel it has more weight. And that's why we will see a reduction in gender-based violence and increased respect for women in our society.'

Pastor Tura is the first female lecturer at Seghe Theological College in Solomon Islands. Using materials developed by UnitingWorld, she is teaching 'gender equality theology' to her students. With Pacific Women's support, UnitingWorld is rolling out its Gender Equality Theology – Institutional Transformation project in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Addressing violence against women requires both support for survivors coupled with prevention activities to change the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that allow violence to occur. Pacific Women partners are trialling a range of innovative approaches to help women and men, girls and boys reject the idea that violence against women and girls is acceptable in their families and communities. These approaches recognise that all parts of society need to take action for long-term attitude and behaviour change to occur.

Faith-based approaches are crucial entry points for changing hearts and minds in the Pacific. Pacific Women partners also work strategically with male leaders, duty bearers (such as police officers and teachers), family members, businesses, politicians, and adolescent girls and boys in targeted approaches to reduce family and community tolerance of violence against women.

Crisis centres also play a vital role in preventing violence against women. They use their evidence base from working with survivors of violence to develop powerful prevention activities and campaigns. A report by the Office of Development Effectiveness on ending violence against women programming in the Pacific clearly described how important it is to provide long-term support to crisis services. Changes in attitudes and behaviours toward violence against women can take generations and these services need to be available to respond to, serve, support and empower the women affected.

Church leaders are becoming increasingly prominent advocates for gender equality and ending violence against women and children through partnerships at national and regional levels.

The House of Sarah's Preventing Violence in Fiji's Faith Settings project collaborates with faith leaders from many religions. Its 2018–2019 national television campaign featured leaders from nine faith denominations – from priests to imams – quoting from their respective religious texts and proclaiming: 'My faith says no to violence against women and children.'

Denouncing violence against women and girls in this type of united fashion represents a powerful public condemnation that reaches deeply into the different faith communities in Fiji.

Regional media campaigns and outreach activities are also underway, such as through the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) with more than 30 member churches and nine National Councils of Churches across 15 Pacific Islands reaching over 30,000 people. This approach is being supported by UN Women through the Pacific Partnership.

The Fiji Women's Fund's publication *Promising Practices in Preventing and Eliminating Violence against Women and Girls in Fiji* highlights that the most effective violence prevention programs need to work at multiple levels. They need to be grounded in the local knowledge and context, address social norms to tackle violence at the collective level, while engaging men and boys to prevent violence at the individual level. Pacific Women partners' approaches are doing just this, to ensure family and community tolerance toward violence reduces and more families and communities say no to violence.