



MEDIA RELEASE

‘INVOLVE MEN AND BOYS TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN’, SAYS MALE GENDER ADVOCATE

For Immediate Release

Suva, Fiji (29 November, 2010) — There is a need to empower women, but to advocate for gender equality, there is a dire need to actively engage men and boys. Men and boys need to be responsible for challenging other men to ‘Say No to Violence’ particularly in their relationships and to actively work to reduce rape and violence against women and girls.

“We need to work with men to challenge their risk behaviours, particularly when it becomes detrimental to themselves and to women and girls. For instance, most women cannot ask their husband or partner to wear a condom during sex as some men do not feel that they need to do so. They also feel that women do not have the right to ask them to,” said Mr Tura Lewai, Gender and Arts Officer at the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSPI).

Mr Lewai’s comments come as the world marks the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women from 25 November to 10 December, World AIDs Day on 1 December and Human Rights Day on 10 December, 2010.

Mr Lewai is also part of the drama group the “Dynamic Vocals” which uses theatre and an acapella crew to communicate powerful messages on rape and violence against women as a means of encouraging behavioural and attitudinal changes in communities.

“The FSPI’s *Stepping Stones* programme uses drama as a means of facilitating community conversations around issues such as reproductive sexual health, gender based violence in the context of STIs, HIV and AIDs and teen pregnancies; discrimination and stigma; protection of human rights and encouraging positive and responsible behavior.

“When *Stepping Stones* first began, we found that even our community-based facilitators were struggling with the concept of gender equality — even the women themselves had questions about their own right to equality,” Mr Lewai said.

“We therefore felt that the use of drama was the best form of sending out messages on gender equality and also encouraging community discussions around difficult issues such as gender based violence, STIs, HIV and teen pregnancies. We want to also portray the physical, emotional and mental blame and stress that it is far too common for women to carry with them after they have been raped or beaten

“The personal is also political and we need to ‘walk the talk’. Our male members of “Dynamic Vocals” have made changes in the way they live and interact with their partners, mums, sisters and women in general,” he said.

“Violence against women is directly linked to sexual risk behavior. If women are not permitted to negotiate the use of condoms they risk their sexual health. Unequal gender relations and gender based violence is both a cause and consequence of the high incidence of STIs and HIV and AIDS in the Pacific,” says Ms Margaret Leniston, FSPI Regional Health Programme Manager.

FSPI is committed continue to support this work with male advocates to reduce risk behaviours and violence against women and girls, to promote gender equality and encourage safe health practices. We continue to collaborate and work alongside agencies like Fiji Women’s Crisis Center (FWCC) and the Pacific Islands Aids Foundation (PIAF) and national governments to make this work more effective across the region,” she said.

Ms Emily Miller of the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) said: “The engaging men work has been fantastic in improving facilitator skills and challenging peer groups to ensure that conversations around gender-based violence occur in a manner that makes a difference. It challenges gender roles and male responsibilities and prepares men to go into communities to initiate discussions.

“IWDA is currently working in Fiji and gender equality is a core component of our work. We would also like to collaborate with FSPI in the area of engaging men and gender-based violence, particularly in the context of the *Stepping Stones* programme,” Ms Miller said. (ENDS)

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