

PACIFIC PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMME (PPDVP)

SYMPOSIUM ON CULTURE AND RELIGION

NADI, FIJI

7 – 11 APRIL 2014

SYMPOSIUM ACCORD

A Symposium on Culture and Religion was convened by the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP)¹ in Nadi, Fiji from 6th to 11th April 2014. The Symposium assessed the impact of culture and religion in police practice in response to domestic violence. The Symposium was attended by Police, Non Government Agencies, Regional Organisations and civil society representatives from the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau Islands, Niue, Nauru, Vanuatu, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Palau, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Australia, and New Zealand

Members of the Symposium agreed to develop their statement to be presented to the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) when they meet in New Zealand in October 2014. The PICP provides the PPDVP with a mandate for action on domestic violence with the Pacific Police Services.²

CULTURE AND RELIGION IN POLICE PRACTICE IN RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is now widely recognised as a risk to human security and a potential destabilising factor for communities and societies alike. It remains pervasive across the Pacific, and as it is still considered a sensitive issue in most Pacific cultures, its prevalence often goes underreported. There is an urgent need to acknowledge the prevalence of SGBV in the Pacific at all levels of the community, whether occurring in the domestic context or during conflict and post-conflict situations.³

While accepting the differing contexts of the participating countries, delegates noted the importance of the positive levers of culture and religion, as well as the barriers, when addressing SGBV. Recognising the significance of this issue, symposium participants:

- (a) Noted the 2007 Declaration of Partnership on Domestic Violence between the PICP and PPDVP, which is refreshed annually at the PICP Annual Meeting;
- (b) Affirmed that Domestic Violence is a serious violation of human rights most affecting women.

For the purposes of this Accord, domestic violence is defined as

A person commits an act of family / domestic violence if he or she intentionally does any of the following acts against a family or household member or intimate partner:

- (a) Assaults one or more of the above (whether or not there is evidence of a physical injury);*
- (b) Psychologically abuses, harasses or intimidates the one or more of the above;*
- (c) Sexually abuses one or more of the above;*
- (d) Stalks one or more of the above so as to cause him or her apprehension or fear;*
- (e) Behaves in an indecent or offensive manner to one or more of the above;*

¹ The PPDVP is a joint initiative of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the New Zealand Police, and the Pacific Islands Chief of Police.

² PPDVP PICP Declaration on Domestic Violence Wellington, 2007. <http://www.ppdvp.org.nz/wp-content/media/2009/03/PICP-Declaration-of-Partnership.pdf>

³ Final Communiqué of 40th Pacific Islands Forum, Cairns.

- (f) Damages or causes damage to one or more of the above's property;*
- (g) Threatens to do any of the acts in paragraphs (a) to (f).*

To avoid doubt

- (a) A single act may amount to an act of family / domestic violence; and*
- (b) A number of acts that form part of a pattern of behavior may amount to a family / domestic violence event, though some or all of those acts when viewed in isolation may appear to be minor or trivial.*

(c) Concluded that culture provides no legitimate basis for gender discrimination nor any forms of abuse by men on women (and children) and that such abuse amounts to domestic violence. Although men are expected to protect and care for their women and children, use of these forms of abuse is unlawful and custom cannot be called upon to justify such conduct. When such conduct is brought to the attention of Police it should result in prosecution.

(d) Concluded that culture should not be used as an excuse for abuse and affirmed that the most influential way to address SGBV is to use culture in a positive way to promote gender equality in the Pacific.

(e) Recognised the leadership of women in the elimination of violence in the Pacific and the actions they have taken over many years. This provides a platform for positive action on the negative influence that culture may provide in addressing SGBV.

(f) Concluded that religion should not be used as an excuse for abuse and affirmed that the most influential way to address SGBV is to use religion in a positive way to eliminate gender discrimination in the Pacific. Theological teaching does not justify gender inequality and men and women should occupy equal standing.

We call upon Religious Leaders:

To acknowledge and address the high rates of domestic violence in the Pacific and we urge religious leaders to champion the elimination of SGBV and to act with strong leadership in this regard. Religion or culture or tradition never justifies the use of sexual and gender based violence.

We call upon Traditional Leaders:

To acknowledge and address the high rates of domestic violence in the Pacific and we urge traditional leaders to champion the elimination of SGBV and to act with strong leadership in this regard. Religion or culture or tradition never justifies the use of sexual and gender based violence.

We call upon Police Chiefs:

To acknowledge and address the high rates of domestic violence in the Pacific and we urge them to champion the elimination of SGBV and to act with strong leadership in this regard. Religion or culture or tradition never justifies the use of sexual and gender based violence.

And we Note that:

The Most Reverend Dr Winston Halapua (Diocesan Bishop in Polynesia) and the Reverend Dr Fele Nokise (Principal of the Pacific Theological College) join with and support the PPDVP Symposium and call for the empowering of all people to embrace and promote gender equality within the church and to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women, and challenge for change to occur within religious organisations.

Dated at Nadi, Fiji this 11th day of April 2014

Signed on Behalf of the Symposium Participants by:

Cam Ronald - PPDVP Programme Manager

Inspector Samasoni Malaulau - PPDVP Programme Officer

Judge Peter Boshier – Symposium Facilitator