



Supporting women's role in peace-building.

## Fiji: A Silent Step Towards Peace

Clare Mendes, IWDA Volunteer

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls is an advocate of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

As the founder of femLINKpacific, Sharon has been working to inform Fijian women of the ways in which 1325, together with initiatives such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, can empower them to "wage peace" at local, national and international levels.

The need for peace has never been greater in Fiji. On 5 December 2006, the country was thrown into turmoil by another military coup.

"Since early 2006 we have been aware of the increasing and public tension between the military and the state and so we assembled the Suva Peace Vigil Collective and resumed monthly vigils at the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral. However, since the military takeover we have reconvened our Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil on a weekly basis," notes Sharon. "It's an opportunity to engage with women from all faiths. **It is my belief that when women come together for peace, their silence can resound throughout a nation.** We also wrote to the leaders of our key institutions, calling for a peaceful resolution to the impasse."

Their intervention had little impact on the December takeover however. Sharon notes that since the military coup of 2000, the efforts of women peacebuilders in relation to national peace and security issues have been consistently ignored by the Fijian government despite international commitments to gender equality.

"Women are peacemakers in the home and local community, but the imagination and inventiveness they have developed through centuries of practice in these settings is rarely used.

**Throughout the Pacific women have contributed so much through their peaceful interventions - yet we are not at the formal peace table."**

In 2000, in an effort to change the practices of media coverage that highlight violence and give little space to creative conflict resolution, femLINKpacific began developing



Tessa McKenzie lights a candle during the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Suva.

PHOTO: MAMU RAMA FOR FII TIMES

a range of women's media initiatives relating to peace, security and decision-making issues.

With the support of IWDA it began producing and distributing community videos and established femTALK 89.2FM, a mobile community "suitcase" radio project that takes radio to women in rural communities:

"It's a very powerful tool," explains Sharon. "Taking 'suitcase' radio to rural communities, **listening to the women's stories, and having them share their fears and aspirations enables me to be a better advocate for peace and security.** It is a very humbling process. femLINKpacific's Community Radio can prepare communities for what will eventually be a national reconciliation process."

femLINK encourages all Fiji Islanders to embrace the recently proposed Commission of Inquiry for Truth, Justice and Resolution. "It will help us to identify the concrete steps needed to end this abhorrent cycle of coups and attempted coups," says Sharon.

In the meantime, femLINKpacific is calling for the adoption of the blue ribbon as a symbol of a national commitment to building sustainable peace in Fiji.

Until then, the silent weekly vigils will continue.

## Letter from the Executive Director

2007 has started with unrest for a number of our project partners, in particular those in Fiji where the fourth coup in 20 years took place on December 5th. For our partner organisations working for peace in Fiji, this demonstrates the **vital importance of women's involvement in building peace**. For this reason, we have focused this edition of IWDA news on our projects that highlight the role of women in peace processes.

The IWDA exhibition "Women's Eye on Peace" depicts images of peace taken by women around the world. The exhibition, co-sponsored by AusAID, marie claire and Harvey Norman, has been a huge success with over 600 people attending the Melbourne launches alone! View these beautiful images on our website [www.iwda.org.au](http://www.iwda.org.au) (see article on page 4).

We also mark the end of an era with Tricia Peters retiring after six busy and inspiring years as President, with many thanks. We welcome Coleen Clare as the new President,

and Joanne Crawford as Vice President. For more details on all the board members please see our website.

We are **putting the "international" back into International Women's Day** by hosting the Executive Director of our partner organisation in Sri Lanka, Rohini Weeransinghe (see Herstory on page 4). Rohini will speak at IWDA events in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and ACT over the weeks around International Women's Day (see back page for dates). We hope you will join us to hear about her work and its positive impact on the lives of women in Sri Lanka, which many of you so generously contributed to during the Christmas Appeal – thank you so much for this valuable support.

Wishing you a year of peace, with women's role in peace processes being stronger than ever.

Happy International Women's Day!



Suzette Mitchell



PHOTO: SUZETTE MITCHELL

## Sowing the seeds of reconciliation, but where is the fruit?

Trudy Hairs and Anne Saenemua, IWDA Solomon Island Program Managers.

**Between 1998 and 2003 the Solomon Islands was rocked by internal conflict predominantly involving people of Malaita and Guadalcanal. It has been four years since the restoration of peace, but the feeling among Solomon Islanders is that their peace remains fragile.**

During the conflict, it was the women who came together to demand that their men lay down arms and engage in dialogue. Many women say that they felt more respect from their communities than ever before.

Following the establishment of peace, two women's church groups organised for 80 women from Guadalcanal to travel by ship to Northern Malaita, to "story" with their provincial neighbours about the tensions.

Anne Saenemua, a Malaitan and one of the organisers, remembers how nervous the women were as they waited for the Guadalcanal women to arrive. The Guadalcanal women, also apprehensive, boarded canoes to reach the shore. Over 100

Malaitan women had formed a guard of honour to welcome them. Women cried as they walked hand-in-hand with their sisters through the cheering crowd. Over three days the women shared stories of the tensions, its impact, and their vision for peace.

Today, the women's contributions to peace are mostly forgotten and their capacities outside the home are little recognised. Women of Malaita and Guadalcanal assert that sustainable peace is dependent on women and men, at a village level, discussing the causes at the heart of the conflict, but their opinion goes largely unheard.

**It is crucial for Solomon Islands' future that women's role in resolving the conflict is remembered and respected, and that their potential as leaders is recognised and**



### New Ways to Support IWDA!

#### IWDA gift cards

feature gorgeous images from our successful Women's Eye on Peace exhibition. These cards are ideal for all occasions.

Send one to your friends to say "Happy International Women's Day".

Purchase them online or call 1300 661 812.

#### "Kachin Pins"

are made by the Kachin Women's Organisation in Thailand, as part of an income generation program from women who have fled from violence and poverty in Burma. The pins will be sold by IWDA to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th 2007. Purchase a pin for \$5 or contact us to sell some on IWDA's behalf.

### About International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)

IWDA is an Australian non-profit organisation that supports positive change for women. Our practical and rights-based projects directly address poverty and inequality in developing countries.

Our projects focus on five key areas of well being: economic empowerment, freedom from violence, participation in

decision-making, reproductive health, and environmental management.

We work in the Asia-Pacific region, in direct partnership with women who work and live in the communities themselves.

*When women benefit, the whole community benefits*

**iwda**

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# Working Towards Peace Amidst Violence in Dili

Irim Tolentino – Bibi Bulak Facilitator & Actor, Dili, East Timor

In early 2006 violence erupted in East Timor, in part a result of conflicts between the East and West Timorese, causing more than 100,000 people to be displaced from their homes.

In response, IWDA devised a project with theatre group Bibi Bulak that focused on strategies for building peace and working to once again create safe communities. Irim Tolentino took part in the training workshop and went on to work with internally displaced victims of the conflict.

## Why Do We Have to Separate?

Life in a new nation like East Timor isn't easy. A new nation is like a child who has just learnt to walk and needs help in all areas. The current crisis has shown us this and brought hardships that we thought we would never have to face.

This crisis has brought many bad things - death, injuries and the loss of homes. It has had a big impact on my family. I am a woman from the west - Loro Monu and my husband is from the east - Loro Sae. This has caused me great conflict as I have had to ask the question "Where should I go?". I should not have to separate from my husband because of people's words.

I was really happy when I got the opportunity to become a facilitator and actor in this project - participating in theatre and running workshops about resolving conflict, building peace, strengthening community and healing trauma.

I have gained a lot, especially ideas about who has the power or ability to build peace. One question that surprised me was: "Who is going to bring together the people that have separated from their husbands or wives?". I have tried to share my personal experience and the reasons for my own decisions. I hope that this allows other people to reflect on their own situations, especially my fellow women.

We have performed and run workshops in over 30 Internally Displaced Person's camps and communities in Dili and the districts, and at times we have been threatened. This has been very difficult as I have been going to all these places along with my four-month-old son.

I would like to thank Bibi Bulak, IWDA and ANZ for encouraging and supporting me and for allowing me to take my child with me. Even though I am scared of what the future will hold, this experience has been unique.

November 2006



Irim and her child Topher at the Tasi Tolu IDP camp.

PHOTO: JOSE MOTT

IWDA news www.iwda.org.au



PHOTO: SUZETTE MITCHELL

## IWDA Charity Challenge

Challenge for Change 7-19th November 2007

Have you ever wanted to visit an IWDA project partner, cycle through beautiful Cambodia or see the spectacular temples of Angkor Wat? Here is that once in a lifetime opportunity – join IWDA's Challenge for Change!

### Join the Journey

1. Make a personal contribution of \$500 to register for your Challenge – easy!
2. Raise \$5,000 with help and support from us. We will provide you with heaps of great ideas, tips and support to make this an easy and fun part of the Challenge.
3. You're off to Cambodia – IWDA and Intrepid organise your trip, you provide the pedal power.

Included in your Challenge are international flights (from Sydney and Melbourne), accommodation, transfers and ground transport, most meals, use of a bike, tour leaders, local guides and IWDA support along the way.

For more information and to register call Kathy Proctor on 03 9650 5574 or email [challenge@iwda.org.au](mailto:challenge@iwda.org.au).

This Challenge is open to both men and women.

# herstory

## Rohini Weerasinghe

Executive Director, Kantha Shakthi

IWDA's Project Partner Rohini Weerasinghe has been active in the women's movement in Sri Lanka since 1979. She has played a crucial role in the campaign for education on human rights in Sri Lanka. Rohini is a tireless worker for women's rights and was an amazing inspiration for IWDA to work with during the tsunami.

The following are excerpts from Rohini's emails to IWDA post-tsunami. These direct words illustrate the inspiring grassroots work and the immediate and supportive style in which she works.

**29 December 2004:** I am writing this under most tragic circumstances. You may have heard the news of the earthquake that killed and displaced thousands of people in Sri Lanka. All the coastal areas including North, East and South are affected.

**3 January 2005:** Today 12 social mobilisers left for the South with a lorry load of food stuff and clothes which they themselves collected. I discussed with my colleagues now it is important to think of long term construction. There are awful incidents regarding affected women. Instances when young girls and women who were rescued were being gang raped. Women are sexually abused in the camps and there are acts of violence against women. I shall write again as soon as possible.

**June 2005:** Since January, five Kantha Shakthi staff trained in grief and trauma counselling have been able to reach almost 600 women in the southern Hembantota and Matara districts. We are working to give affected people a sense of hope, and confidence that they can rebuild their lives and even improve them.

**July 2005:** This letter is to share my joy of success with all at IWDA of recent Kantha Shakthi work with women affected by tsunami. The outcome of the trauma counselling workshop was so exciting. Many women shed "tears of joy" and said it's ironic how the tsunami had been instrumental in changing their lives for the better. I am sure this news will be one of joy for you! Thank you so much for your invaluable support and solidarity, which enabled me and KS to undertake a challenge like tsunami.

Please join Rohini and hear of her amazing work first hand. (See back page or go to [www.iwda.org.au](http://www.iwda.org.au) for details of Rohini's February & March itinerary in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Hobart.)



Rohini with IWDA President Coleen Clare.



PHOTO: SIMONE EGGER

## Women's Eye on Peace 2006

Kathy Proctor, Events Coordinator

Women's Eye on Peace 2006 received over 600 entries from both professional and amateur photographers in more than 40 countries. Images captured interpretations of peace ranging from smiling East Timorese children and breathtaking landscapes in Nepal to peace rallies in Australia.

Judging proved extremely challenging, with many thanks due to our five judges who selected the 100 images for exhibition.

The initial launch on 31st October, to coincide with the anniversary of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, was attended by over 500 people at the Artery in Fitzroy, with speaker Felicity Hill from the Women's International League Peace and Freedom.

100 guests attended the second launch at the Sofitel Melbourne on 7th December, where Lillian Frank spoke passionately about women's role in peace. The images then headed to Sotheby's Sydney for the third successful launch on February 1st, hosted by Catriona Rowntree.

Images can still be viewed and purchased at [www.iwda.org.au](http://www.iwda.org.au). Funds raised from the sale of images support women building peace in Fiji.

Thank you to sponsors marie claire, AusAID and Harvey Norman, and to the many volunteers and supporters who made Women's Eye on Peace such a success.



MAG mine clearing technicians at work.

## Cambodia Mine Action

Kate Burrell, Cambodia Program Manager

**In Cambodia IWDA has commenced groundbreaking work placing gender at the centre of an AusAID – funded mine action project.**

Working with World Vision Australia/Cambodia and the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), IWDA is contributing its gender expertise to the Community Strengthening and Gender Mainstreaming Integrated Mine Action project as part of an Australia-Cambodia Cooperation Agreement (ACCA).

Many might wonder what does gender have to do with landmines? What could be the gender implications for responding to one of the world's cruellest weapons?

IWDA is leading internationally in the area of gender and landmines and was contracted to develop the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Projects.

In Cambodia around 70% of people physically affected by landmines are young men, who are more at risk of walking into heavily mined areas because of their roles as herders and farmers. **A man's disfiguration tends not to limit his marriage options while it severely reduces women's marriage and employment prospects.** In addition an extra burden is placed on women after their husbands are injured, as they take on the role of primary carers, and girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school to become wage-earners.

As the Cambodia Program Manager I had the opportunity to travel with IWDA Executive Director Suzette Mitchell to the north-east of Cambodia in October 2006, to deliver Gender in Mine Action training with World Vision, CARE, MAG and Austcare staff who are all implementing AusAID projects in Integrated Mine Action. This training took place in Battambang and was targeted at field staff to create an understanding of the gender dimensions to their work in mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance and community development.

IWDA also co-chaired the inaugural Gender in Mine Action Reference Group with the government's Cambodian Mine Action Authority. The large attendance – including representatives from CMAA, MAG, Austcare, CARE, UNDP, World Vision, Handicap International and AusAID – reflects the sector's desire to learn more about gender issues in mine action.

IWDA is very pleased to be working on an exciting project that is breaking new ground and will lead the way for other countries grappling with gender issues in the area of mine action.

## Banking on Women: A Strategic Alliance

Cath Rutten, Communications Coordinator

**The business and community sectors are increasingly realising the mutual benefits of building partnerships. In the international sector, there is a growing understanding that non-government organisations can offer their corporate counterparts training and skills to enhance their social investment in the communities where they are working.**

Since 2005 IWDA has been engaged in a successful and varied partnership with the ANZ Bank.

"For our Pacific Business Unit," comments Anne Fogarty, ANZ's Pacific Communications Manager, "we felt that IWDA's values and strategies were closely aligned with the ANZ's. The benefit, as we saw it, was that the local people who were closest to the needs of the community were managing these (IWDA's) programs."

An example of this is the Bibi Bulak peace building project in East Timor. In partnering with IWDA, ANZ was able to support an innovative program of performances and workshops in the camps around Dili (see page 3).

"Many of ANZ's staff in Dili were affected by the conflicts and we wanted to do something to assist them in the rebuilding effort," says Anne.

Other dimensions of this partnership are training on HIV/AIDS, requested by ANZ for staff in one of their Pacific offices, and the ANZ Charity Challenge, which raised \$110,000 for the IWDA project in Vietnam.



ANZ team in Vietnam

Many of the 32 participants who cycled through Vietnam in November 2006 as part of the Challenge cited the visit to the project they raised funds for (Vietnam Women's Union microcredit project) as the highlight of the trip. They reflected:

**"As a group we have experienced an amazing journey. We have been able to help people improve their lives and have challenged ourselves both mentally and physically along the way."**

For an opportunity to participate in a journey like this, join IWDA's own Challenge for Change in November this year. More details are on page 3.

# Celebrate International Women's Day!

Cath Rutten, Communications Coordinator

**What began as a day of protest at the turn of last century has now become a day of celebration across the world.**

For decades International Women's Day has gone from strength to strength. It is now an official holiday in some countries and celebrated around the globe. While there is so much to celebrate, it is important to remember that there is still work to be done in the fight for women's equal rights and working conditions. Women are still not paid equally to men in any country in the world, women's presence in governance and decision-making is still at a fraction of our male counterparts and globally, women's health, access to education and domestic violence remain significant issues.

We would like to inspire you to put the "international" back into your own International Women's Day celebrations; please contact us if you would like to hold an event to celebrate International Women's Day. We are happy to provide a speaker, information to distribute or 'Kachin Pins' to sell.

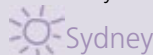
**So, get involved in International Women's Day! Celebrate the women in your life!**

Make everyday a celebration in the lives of women and together let's ensure a safe, secure, bright and rewarding future for girls and women everywhere!

## International Women's Day Events!

Join us at one of the International Women's Day events we have planned to meet Rohini Weerasinghe (see Herstory page 4), Director of IWDA's Sri Lankan partner Kantha Shakthi.

As guest of our annual 'Global Education Tour', Rohini will be speaking about Kantha Shakthi's projects focusing on some of the most vulnerable survivors of the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami – women, and about other Kantha Shakthi projects funded by IWDA supporters.



### Sydney Brunch with Rohini and Stephanie Dowrick

Sunday 4th March, 10am  
Glover Cottages. 144 Kent St, Millers Point  
Ticket: \$25 including brunch  
Bookings: 1300 661 812 or iwda@iwda.org.au



### Melbourne International Women's Day Public Forum

Thursday 8th March, 12.30-2pm  
State Library Theatre  
Entry: Gold coin donation  
RSVP: 03 9650 5574 or iwda@iwda.org.au  
by Tuesday 6th March

## International Women's Day Banquet Hosted by Tricia Broadbridge

Thursday 8th March, 6.30pm  
Araliya, 629 Glenferrie Rd, Hawthorn  
Ticket: \$80 (includes 3 course banquet and a glass of wine)  
Bookings 9650 5574 or iwda@iwda.org.au  
Places limited to 80 so book soon!



### Hobart Women Tasmania Forum

Friday 9th March, 4-6pm  
140 Macquarie Street  
Hobart 7000  
Entry: \$5 donation, Concession: Gold Coin  
RSVP: wt.admin@dpac.tas.gov.au or 1800 001 377



### Canberra An Evening of Wine and Cheese with Rohini

Monday 12th March, 5.30-7pm  
Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St, Canberra City  
Entry: \$5 suggested donation  
RSVP: 1300 661 812 or iwda@iwda.org.au  
by Friday 9th March

**For more information on all of these or any of our other IWD events please visit [www.iwda.org.au](http://www.iwda.org.au), call 1300 661 812 or email [iwda@iwda.org.au](mailto:iwda@iwda.org.au)**

If there is no event in your city or town, we invite you to hold one of your own! If you decide to do this please let us know so we can spread the word to people living in your area.



International Women's Development Agency is a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct which defines minimum standards of governance, management and accountability for non-government development organisations. Adherence to the Code is monitored by an independent Code of Conduct Committee elected from the NGO community. Our voluntary adherence to the Code of Conduct demonstrates our commitment to ethical practice and public accountability. More information about the ACFID Code of Conduct can be accessed at [www.acfid.asn.au](http://www.acfid.asn.au)

## This International Women's Day, I want to invest in real change for women!

### I want to commit to ending inequality and suffering for women...

by contributing to women's:

- \$  **Freedom** (up to \$10,000 & beyond)  
\$  **Equality** (up to \$5000)  
\$  **Dignity** (up to \$1000)  
\$  **Respect** (up to \$500)

All donations of \$2 or more are tax-deductible.

Donation hotline: 1300 661 812



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IWDA endorses the National Privacy Principles. For details please contact IWDA.

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