

femLINKPACIFIC Alert:

July 23 2009

The detention of Fiji indigenous high chief and ousted Minister for Education Ro Teimumu Kepa is very disturbing on a number of levels and brings to the fore rising human insecurities including community, economic and personal security, inextricably linked to the political insecurity in Fiji particularly through the events of Easter weekend and the purported abrogation of the 1997 Constitution.

At a time when women's groups are part of an effort to engage in dialogue with a range of stakeholders including the current administration, the demonstration of military might by the way in which Ro Teimumu was taken from her home (by 16 policemen) in the early hours of July 22 as well as her detention does not augur well for this and other peacebuilding efforts in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325.

Such "rules of engagement" are a further reminder and warning that there is no room for an alternative viewpoint including from those of traditional leadership and it casts a shadow on the civil society led dialogue efforts. Recently a number of women NGO leaders were banned from speaking at the Pacific Youth Festival.

However despite these challenges women leaders are rallying together through peace vigils which we first mobilized for in 2000 (currently led by Susana Evening the President of the Catholic Women's League).

At this time this is regarded as the most appropriate action and a demonstration to the broader community that despite such actions and threats to ones personal security we must continue to demonstrate our commitment to active non violence.

What is required is sustained support for the dialogue and peacebuilding work particularly to prevent any overt violence and support women's leadership in these efforts to assist us negotiating our way through a fragile "peace" and as required to enter into dialogue with the military council leaders.

We also need to have safe information and communication channels to support these efforts and also protection mechanisms for women in active and open leadership.

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