

## PGWNet – the first Six Years

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The suggestion made at the time of NZFUW Mid-term Council, March 1999 that IFUW members in the Pacific should meet in Suva during Bridgebuilders Consultation in July with the aim of formally initiating a Pacific Regional Grouping had a very successful outcome.

Council members of the Fiji Association of Women Graduates were most enthusiastic and hosted a splendid morning in Bure Molikilagi, a traditional meeting house on the University of the South Pacific campus. IFUW members from Australia (AFUW), Fiji (FAWG), New Zealand (NZFUW), and women graduates from other Pacific nations, about 30 in all, took part. They addressed a previously circulated agenda, co-chaired by Esiteri Kamikamica, FAWG President and Beverley Turner, as NZFUW CIR. Business began with introductory remarks by Dorothy Meyer (NZFUW President), who also took minutes, and Daphne Buckley (Asia Pacific Regional Coordinator - IFUW Special Committee on Project Development).

Outcomes from the vigorous, positive and constructive group discussions were:

- The Pacific Region was defined as the region denoted by the Pacific Community's definition, excluding French, UK, and USA territories, but including Australia and New Zealand. It was thought much wiser at this stage to limit the membership and not to include the Pacific Rim countries.
- Our name - **Pacific Graduate Women's Network (PGWNet)** was agreed. It felt inclusive, modern and sounds good.
- Expectations were identified - eg: pro-active NGO lobbying in wider forums on behalf of Pacific women and girls.
- It was decided that PGWNet's Purpose is:
  1. To create opportunities for graduate women of Pacific countries to achieve the objectives of IFUW, within the framework of the IFUW; and
  2. To promote understanding among graduate women of Pacific countries of the sociological, economic, and historical background that they have in common and also of their differences.
- PGWNet's Mission was agreed in general terms and was refined over the next few months.
- Recognition that all members of PGWNet should be NFAs of IFUW but that because of the smallness of some Pacific Island countries, special provisions may have to be made (eg for individual members).

A steering committee was set up, and to maintain momentum over the initial years, the first convener was decided immediately. Beverley Turner was happy to accept this responsibility. Financial matters were to be minimized, communication maximized, project opportunities sought and attendance at regional meetings encouraged. It was most appropriate that Daphne Buckley (AFUW), as the only IFUW Committee member present, formally moved the adoption of the Draft Plan of Action for PGWNet. Our very busy morning ended with a photo session and lunch, during which a number of new friendships were begun and some amazing connections discovered. IFUW commitment to international understanding, co-operation and friendship and purpose was already very evident – an excellent start for the Pacific Graduate Women's Network.

News of PGWNet's inception travelled fast. Timing was excellent and rising awareness of IFUW led to the formation of new Associations in Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu initially, then, more recently, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The first four are all now affiliated to IFUW as Associate Members and PNG is still working towards this. There is interest from several other countries including Tuvalu and Marshall Islands to join the network and there are scattered individual graduate women members as well.

Early in 2000, AFUW hosted Pacific observers at their Conference in Adelaide and intensive discussions were held. Later PGWNet representatives (6 countries) hammered out the Constitution post-NZFUW Conference in Auckland. In 2001, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu (new) NFAs

presented a joint workshop at IFUW Conference on 'Girl Child – Options for the future in the Pacific's rapidly changing societies'. This was a first for IFUW with respect to regional workshop collaboration and was repeated very successfully in Perth, 2004.

In 2002, PGWNet was formally established at the Pacific Regional Conference of IFUW held in Brisbane. PGWNet elected its first President by consensus of all members - Lily Vesikula, Secretary of FAWG, with whom Beverley Turner had worked steadily since that first meeting in Suva.

PGWNet's headquarters are located in the home country of the President, as are its Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. The Presidency rotates every two years among the Full Members of PGWNet. The governing body of PGWNet is the Council made up of 2 representatives from each Full Member and 1 representative from each Group Member (less than 20 grads) of PGWNet and the Council is expected to meet once a year – somehow!

Early in 2003 members of PGWNet (8 countries) met in Fiji for FAWG's Triennial Conference 'Humanising Globalisation: the Challenges for Pacific Women', which included an excellent Advocacy Skills Workshop linking it to SAAP and we also held the first PGWNet Council Meeting. Later in 2003, Lily Vesikula and Joanna Boso were assisted by NZFGW to attend the NZFGW Conference in Christchurch and they felt that they gained much from their involvement. As IFUW Membership Adviser for Pacific region, I am very grateful indeed for NZFGW's support of PGWNet members. Over the last six years, strong networking and advocacy have developed and innovative programmes and projects have been tackled with enthusiasm and success.

Thank you for your ongoing generosity to sustain our Pacific sisters – evident again in 2004 at Perth where the Presidency and Executive moved smoothly to Ruby Va'a and her team in Samoa. The very real personal interest in all Pacific graduate women by IFUW Presidents Linda Souter and Reiko Aoki, the IFUW Board and Committee members as well as AFUW and NZFGW has been and continues to be much valued and appreciated.