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Here Are The Women – Pacific (2017): Josephine Teakeni (</index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/539-here-are-the-women-pacific-2017-josephine-teakeni>)



by Alisia Evans



“As an advocate for 1325, it has been... an empowerment to look at peace and security from a human security perspective,” shared Josephine Teakeni, Director of Vois Blong Mere Solomon (VBMS). “In the work we do, the way we do our advocacy and have community conversation, it’s always based on those 7 pillars of human security and trying to link them to what is the impact on women’s lives.”

“Advocating that has been an area that we have been always and will always continue to advocate so that people in our country will understand that peace to them in any given situation is all about their human security.”

For Teakeni, taking a human security approach to peace building means looking at a range of issues including traditional governance, the impact of rising sea levels on coastal and island communities as well as domestic violence and related health issues.

“In Solomon Islands, there are a lot of rehabilitation work happening in different areas since the crisis, the ethnic tension. As a country we’ve been through disaster. Being in this position of knowing that when we talk about social, economic, political issues in our country, it’s all about... you can always look at the human and gender lens.”

VBMS emerged from a crisis situation and has been one of the earliest partners of femLINKpacific as a leading advocate on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) with the women who spearheaded it no stranger to life and death situations.

“I was part of women for peace,” shared Teakeni. “When we went to visiting the warring parties from both sides, we had to cross bridges to go to the other side, and it was a difficult situation for me as a woman.”

“I was also worried about my personal security, but we felt that mothers of Solomon Islands had the responsibility to talk to our sons, to our fathers to come back and broker peace amongst the warring parties. It wasn’t easy for us in Solomon Islands during those times. Women took a lead (and) brokered peace... and then, after that, the women were left aside and it (was) business as usual.”

This under-recognition, however, was not a deterrent for Teakeni and she continued her passion for peace, building on the early work of women peace activists in the Solomon Islands.

Apart from the ethnic tensions, the year 2000 was also a time that saw a shift in the peace and security agenda at the global level because of the work of peacewomen; the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was informed by the experiences of women like Teakeni, putting women at the centre of the peace and security agenda.

The work of Pacific peacewomen was further recognised in 2011 when Pacific Forum Leaders adopted the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2015) that recognised:

“In many violent situations in the Pacific region, women and women’s organisations have demonstrated their capacity to contribute to solutions, whether as mediators or as part of groups working to improve conditions in local communities, or as providers of safe havens for women and children affected by violence and demanding accountability and respect for human rights. Women have generally been the first to actively work across ethnic divides at considerable personal and organizational risk. For example women have: organised peace vigils, rallies and silent marches, as well as dialogue; held negotiations across crocodile infested rivers with armed combatants; developed peace education methods; encouraged voting through advocacy, awareness raising and education; mediated community disputes; supported soldiers returning from peacekeeping operations; provided technical inputs into defence reviews and national security policy development and; have lead significant efforts across the region to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. These are only a few examples of responses to conflict or perceived threats to human security that women leaders and women’s organizations have developed and sustained over the years. Despite women and young women’s productive efforts in Pacific Island Countries and Territories their participation in formal conflict prevention and management and post-conflict recovery efforts, as well as oversight and accountability mechanisms for the security sector is still not fully realized. Women still struggle to be heard at the negotiating table in leadership roles and are not given...absence from political decision-making at all levels of society and continued high levels of SGBV. If women and young women’s contributions are recognized, sustained, strengthened and expanded, they can make a significant impact in realizing the Leaders’ vision of a prosperous, stable and peaceful Pacific region and ensure conflict is avoided and peace is sustained.”

While the resolution has prompted a quantum leap forward in understanding, and despite the adoption of the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2015) (RAP WPS), women continue to be marginalised in peace and security decision making, our world continues to make increasing investments in war, weapons and militarism, and women continue to suffer terribly in wars as well as during internal, political conflicts.

This is why women like Teakeni, almost two decades later, continue to maintain a consistent focus and advocacy on peace and security supported through a regional media and policy network on UNSCR 1325, coordinated by femLINKpacific since 2007.

Established in 2002, VBMS recognised the need to address the information gap that existed in the Solomon Islands while also recognising that information was a vital tool for change.

The work of organisations like VBMS and the leadership of women like Teakeni have been amplified through a regional '1325' media and policy network coordinated by femLINK since 2007 which has also informed the development of the RAP WPS.

The RAP WPS has demonstrated the way in which UNSCR 1325 can be used to protect women's human rights and provide women and girls access to health, psychosocial and legal protection in times of humanitarian emergency.

In 2014, Teakeni participated in the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) reporting process which was an opportunity to amplify the linkages with the women, peace and security agenda.

"Our leaders were talking and then somehow something happened so I jumped in to say something on women, peace and security and that got their attention," elaborated Teakeni.

Subsequently, the CEDAW Committee's concluding observations included a specific reference to Women, Peace and Security:

The Committee notes with concern that women were not formally involved in the peace negotiations and agreements to end the ethnic tensions that occurred from 1998 to 2003, despite their contribution to peacebuilding at the community level. It is also concerned that the national action plan for women and peace and security is yet to be adopted.

The Committee calls upon the State party to adopt the national action plan for women and peace and security and give due consideration to the contributions of women in the maintenance of peace, in line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. It also calls upon the Government to take into consideration the full spectrum of the Security Council's women and peace and security agenda, as reflected in Council resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 2122 (2013). The Committee also recommends that the State party implement measures within the scope of the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and engage in regional processes in the Pacific region

Violence against women during conflict situations and their access to justice

- 6. The Committee observes that, during the period of the ethnic tensions from 1998 to 2003, women faced multiple violations of their human rights, including sexual violence and psychological trauma. It takes note of the information provided during the dialogue concerning the appointment of a judge to review cases relating to the tensions. The Committee is concerned, however, about the lack of information on access to justice and reparations for women who were victims of violence during the tensions, as well as about the absence of prosecutions and convictions of perpetrators. It is also concerned that the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has not been formally adopted or published, delaying the implementation of its recommendations.*
- 7. The Committee recommends that the State party provide effective remedies for women who were victims of violence during the ethnic tensions that take into account international principles and standards of administration of justice and reparations. It also recommends that the State party provide adequate human, financial and technical resources to the Supreme Court in order to address cases of violence against women during the tensions. The Committee urges the State party to formally adopt and publish the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to adopt a framework for the implementation of its recommendations.*

The CEDAW reports of 2014 showed not only the progress of implementing another UN convention; it illustrated the depth to which women peacemakers had made their mark on the global agenda through the adoption of the RAPWPS. Women like Teakeni were not just calling for peace on the sidelines, they are actively shaping the way discussions are happening.

VBMS continues to be a leading advocate of UNSCR 1325 and remained actively engaged in the Women, Peace and Security working group convened by the Ministry of Women (2011- 2016) - contributing to the development of the draft National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security which is currently being reviewed by Cabinet.

However, despite the productive efforts of women like Teakeni in Pacific Island countries and territories their participation in formal conflict prevention and management and post-conflict recovery efforts, as well as oversight and accountability mechanisms for the security sector is still not fully realised.

Changing the dynamic and the way we look at conflict is not enough – without truly committing to full and equal participation by resourcing the leadership of women, peace is impossible. Women still struggle to be heard at the negotiating table in leadership roles and are not given sufficient recognition and resources to do their work.

“We are not only victims when there is a conflict we are also part of the solution... and that is why it is important that (women are)... able to effectively participate and we need to be empowered and to be supported,” pressed Teakeni. “I see that when women are empowered they are able to effectively participate and make things happen to address their human security.”

Thus, VBMS continued to work actively with women in their communities – to bridge the existing gaps in information so that when the spaces are open, the women are ready to engage.

“It’s about (the) simple messages that reaches the attention of ordinary people,” elaborated Teakeni, who is a journalist by profession and believes that the media can bring about positive change in the lives of ordinary people in order to find peaceful resolutions for many of the human security issues affecting them. “We do this through visits to rural and urban communities to collect interviews and stories which we share in our weekly radio programs on our only national radio station, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation.”

“During peace times, when they’re going through crisis, when there’s a disaster – but having those lenses and the gender perspective in how we plan things, (we can) empower (the women of the Solomon Islands) to be able to be in those areas of influence. (We are) helping them to have access to information that will enable them to be able to make decisions about what is happening in their daily lives.”