

TALANOA TOKTOK

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Protect them



Safe church heads out

WOMEN are among the most vulnerable in society, according to recent church surveys.

With climate change and the increase in drug trade, that vulnerability has increased substantially.

This year the Pacific Conference of Churches will attack the issue head-on with training in Tonga and the Solomon Islands. Last year PCC teams were in Fiji and the Republic of the Marshall Islands building safe church networks.

Their work included the creation of policies which safeguard women and children - sometimes from structural violence within church systems.

The PCC's work has been supported by UN Women and UNICEF.

Drug scourge



Paradise lost ... Police officers search for drugs on a remote island

Looming problem for the Pacific

THE growing drug trade in the Pacific has become a major concern for churches.

At a meeting in Australia late last year, leaders from the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kanaky (New Caledonia) Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna heard first hand of drugs and human trafficking. In Tonga and Fiji, drug labs have been found, producing methamphetamines for the local market.

Previously, Pacific countries were hubs in the movement of drugs from North and South America to Australia and New Zealand.

"Now, these drugs are being manufactured and sold in the Pacific to our own people," Reverend Dr Tevita Havea of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga observed.

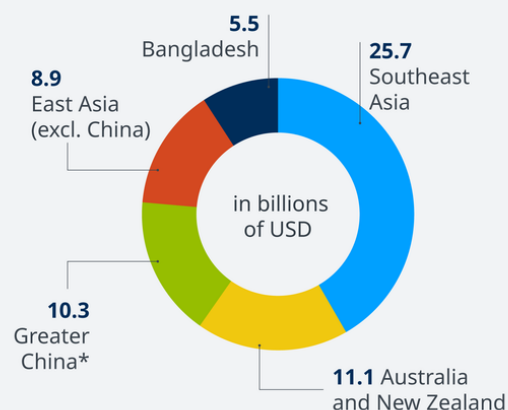
"This is an area which we are ill-equipped to handle and will need to address seriously."

That means educating clergy and church workers in the dangers of drug use and preparing them to counsel and rehabilitate users.

The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga has attempted to address the issue with safe houses for rehabilitation.

There's also the issue of human trafficking linked to drug use.

Meth market size in Asia Pacific



*Greater China includes: Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan.



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime | As of: 2019

In East Timor, women have been sold into the sex trade to pay for the drug habits of their male relatives.

"It will be important for Pacific churches to address this looming problem with urgency," Reverend James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the PCC said.

"That is our only hope."

Scan in and join our family



YOU can get better access to our website by scanning this QR code with your mobile device.

Gain immediate access to images of our work, reports on the Pacific Conference of Churches' work in the region and internationally. Stay up to date with the PCC's exciting programmes with women, youth and indigenous people through a vast network of churches. Scan today and join our family.

Join the ban



Support West Papua, Say no to Indonesia



A CALL to ban the use of Indonesian-made products in the Pacific has gained support across the region.

The initial call to stop the purchase of Indonesian-made products was made by the Methodist Church in Fiji at its 2022 annual conference. The move was made as a rebuke to Indonesia for its human rights abuses in West Papua.

Methodist church members voiced their concern over continued arbitrary arrests, torture and killing of pro-independence activists at the hands of Indonesian police and army units.

The Methodist Church in Fiji asked a Pacific Church Leaders' Meeting in Sydney last year to endorse and support the ban.

More than 20 Pacific church leaders agreed to ask their members to stop using all products made in Indonesia.

But the action could run into obstacles as Indonesian products are among the cheapest available in the region.

"We note that for many Pacific families, the choice to make a principled stand comes at great cost," said Netani Rika of the PCC Self-Determination Team.

"What we ask is that Pacific people consider the cost their Papuan brothers and sisters have paid for more than 60 years.

"There have been as many as 500,000 killings, people have been displaced, families torn apart.

"Next time you go shopping, we ask that you check the product labels.

"If it's made in Indonesia, buy something else.

"Say no to the oppression by Indonesia in Papua by refusing to buy their products."

Indonesia has one of the largest military establishments.

"We cannot be free until they are free" - James Baldwin

Talanoa Toktok

Accounting through a new lens

ON a farm 90 minutes from Suva, Fiji, an experiment in accounting is taking place. The Pacific Conference of Churches' Lomana Na Vulagi

property is being audited for every tree and plant. At the end of 2022, an audit began, taking into consideration the value of

plants and trees at maturity, their medicinal worth, possible revenue from fruit and contribution to the biodiversity.



Year planner ... Bedi Racule and Paula Tuilagivou of the PCC Secretariat

The year takes shape

THE Pacific Conference of Churches is prepared for a big year after its staff retreat in January.

All PCC staff spent four days in Ra Province, Fiji, discussing plans for joint action across programme areas.

The retreat was led by Pacific theologian, Reverend Dr Cliff Bird.

Staff members discussed

Individual goals for 2023 and how these could be achieved.

Key to the implementation of the programmes was the inclusion of the Reweaving the Ecological Mat concept. Known as REM, the concept, the initiative involves rethinking the way in which economies and development models are designed.

This includes the introduction

of Pacific wisdom and philosophies into every day economic life.

The PCC has introduced REM to its farm with organic fertiliser, a ban on pesticides and the planting of native timber species to replace the conventional pine. This year, all PCC programmes on women, children and the environment will include a REM component.

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