

# Women of the Pacific



## **By Inspector Melita Zielonko, member of the Participating Police Force, Solomon Islands**

The inaugural conference for policewomen and female prison officers from all the provinces of Solomon Islands was held in Honiara in September. The conference was an initiative of the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP) Welfare Unit which identified the need for a forum on women's issues in the Solomon Islands Prison Service (SIPS) and police.

Throughout the week, as a member of the Participating Police Force (PPF), I attended the conference as both a delegate and presenter at the invitation of the conveners. I was joined by other PPF officers Superintendent Sera Bernard of the Fijian Police and Chief Inspector Lauaitu Tupouniua of the Tonga Police in giving presentations on our experiences in our respective forces.

Among the 70 delegates there was much to share in the way of issues, ideas and experiences. The devotion of these women to their roles in the RSIP and prisons is noteworthy and inspirational to members in the PPF.

Superintendent Bernard, Chief Inspector Tupouniua and I gave a three hour presentation to the group on women in modern policing.

Superintendent Bernard discussed the history of the Fijian Police Force, her background experiences and how developments had occurred for policewomen. Chief Inspector Tupouniua gave background information about the Tongan Police Force and her own experiences.

## The conference and networking event achieved excellent results in terms of addressing women's issues in the police and prison service of the Solomon Islands.

I discussed various topics and gave a presentation on:

- Commissioners' Australasian Women in Policing Advisory Committee (CAWIPAC);
- Women in Law Enforcement Strategy (WILES);
- Successes of women in the AFP and other police services;
- Australasian Centre for Policing Research and the status of Women in policing diversity, flexibility, harassment, bullying and intimidation;
- Developments in the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands;
- My own police career and experiences of the '80s in comparison to modern policing for women in Solomon Islands;
- women in the PPF, statistics and their stories;
- the importance of networking; and
- questions and answers about the PPF.

The PPF then hosted a women's networking session between the many stakeholders to the conference. It was a unique opportunity for female colleagues throughout the Pacific region to network with each other.

Approximately 130 women from the RSIP, SIPS, Australian Federal Police, New Zealand Police, Fiji Police, Tonga Police, Australian Protective Service, Australian High Commission, Australian Defence Forces, Special Coordinator's Office and others attended.

The conference and networking event achieved excellent results in terms of addressing women's issues in the police and prison service of the Solomon Islands. The new relationships that now exist between women of the police in the Pacific will no doubt have a positive impact on the future of policing in the region.



Back row (from left): Chief Inspector Lauaitu Tupouniua, Duty Officer General Duties, PPF Tonga; Superintendent Sera Bernard, Prosecutions Officer, PPF Fiji; Inspector Juanita Matanga, Duty Officer Central Police Honiara, RSIP; and Inspector Rita Bennett, Officer Commanding Munda Police Station, Western Province, RSIP. Front row (from left) Inspector Dorothy Manase, Rove Prison, Honiara, SIPS; Superintendent Gwen Ratu, Officer Commanding Personnel Management HQ Honiara, RSIP; and Inspector Melita Zielonko, PPF Australia.