

## Reorienting human rights: young Pacific Island people's views and awareness of human rights

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This article<sup>1</sup> focuses on the results of a pilot study undertaken on human rights within the Pacific Island region. More than 100 young Pacific Island people were surveyed on their views and knowledge of key human rights instruments and areas. The article reveals the need to reorient perceptions and human rights education within the Pacific Island region.

### Introduction

Human rights are a contested field of debate in the Pacific Island region. Arguments abound about the applicability and relevancy of human rights for individual countries and for the region as a whole. For the most part, the debate is restricted to academic and political circles with contributions also coming from so-called 'grass roots' communities via the NGO channels. Thus far, there has been little contribution from those that occupy a veritable 'middle ground' in society, despite the likelihood that they are going to be future leaders in the region. This group — university students — has valuable viewpoints, opinions and knowledge that need to be incorporated into the human rights debates in the Pacific.

It was from teaching human rights at the University of the South Pacific (USP) that my own awareness of the gap in the literature/research was increased.<sup>2</sup> While teaching classes on human rights, I found that the issues were becoming repetitive and increasingly irrelevant to young Pacific Island people who do, indeed, 'have their own perceptions of what they should or should not do and be, and why

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1 The article is based on a paper presented at the Pacific Island Political Studies Association (PIPSA) conference in Suva, Fiji, in December 2005. The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewer for helpful comments and suggestions.

2 Human rights, as a broad field of study, has been incorporated into a number of 100-, 200- and 300-level Pacific politics courses at USP. The author has lectured on human rights for both the Division of Politics and the Division of Sociology. For 2007, there is a proposal to offer a new course specifically on human rights issues. The course will cover theoretical, philosophical, legal and other aspects of human rights, helping to contextualise the approach of Pacific Island states within the international arena.

(Thaman 1999). Predominately, research in the area of human rights has not concentrated on the Pacific Island region, either as a whole or with regard to individual states within it. Often, sweeping generalisations are made about the state of human rights within the region and in individual countries. While there is a lot of debate about the relevancy of human rights in the region, much of this is either legalistic or rhetorical. As noted, much of the research conducted in this field focuses on either the 'grassroots' communities or revolves around a very academic and philosophical discourse. In classroom discussions I found the comments and viewpoints of my students to be insightful, valid and invaluable when trying to assess whether or not human rights should be considered relevant and applicable to the region. It was from this experience that the inception of this pilot study stemmed.

The purpose of the study was simply to gauge the views and awareness of young Pacific Island people — all university students — on a range of human rights instruments and issues. From this it is hoped that the relevancy of human rights for young people can be ascertained with a view to understanding future directions for human rights within the region, while also establishing areas for further research and education. It is also hoped that this study goes some way towards fulfilling an objective established by Professor Konai Thaman of the University of the South Pacific in the late 1990s, when she called for 'holistic human rights education, both formal and non-formal' (Thaman 1999) that included an understanding of Pacific views.

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was compiled with the purpose of assessing both the knowledge and the views of Pacific Island people relating to the area of human rights. There were three key sections:

- general perceptions about human rights;
- human rights instruments; and
- beliefs on human rights issues.

The questionnaire was circulated among politics and sociology students at the University of the South Pacific.<sup>3</sup> These disciplines were selected because of their direct relevance to the area of human rights (both departments incorporate human rights into a number of courses). It can be anticipated that students in this area have both an interest and an awareness of the issues raised within the survey. Classes

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3 At USP, politics is taught within the Department of History and Politics; however, the survey was only circulated in politics courses.

ranged in level from 100 to 300. Students voluntarily completed and returned the survey. All responses were to be anonymous, although participants were asked to submit key demographic information such as age, gender and nationality.

### Limitations, obstacles and responses

There are a number of limitations and obstacles that can be identified in a study such as this. First and foremost is the limitation of the study to a select group of people within society (university students, discipline specific). The survey is not intended to be a 'grass roots' study of Pacific Island perception. The limitation of the study to university students is deliberate and specific. The study was intended to reveal what individuals of a certain educational standard think about human rights issues, as well as their knowledge of international instruments. Many of these students will go on to pursue careers in fields such as government, civil service, journalism and education at domestic and regional (if not international) levels.

*Country specific:* While a cross-section of the Pacific Island community was surveyed, the responses were skewed with the majority of respondents being from Fiji. Such a factor needs to be revealed due to the fact that individuals may have different values and interpretations that are culturally relevant.

*Sample size:* The sample size is limited to less than 150. While it is acknowledged that it is difficult to make sweeping generalisations about an entire region based on this sample, it should be reiterated that this study is only intended to provide the framework for further research in this area.

*Interpretation of questions:* The questions asked required specific answers (yes/no, agree/disagree and true/false) and did not allow respondents to elaborate on their viewpoints (although many did). It may also be possible that participants misunderstood or misread questions or, alternatively, interpreted the question to have a different meaning than was intended. All surveys were in the English language. USP is an English-language institution and all courses are taught in English. There was no translation of the questions into any of the local USP languages. Interpretation of words and terms is an issue that needs to be considered and the complexities associated with this should be recognised, because even when using the same word (in English) across the region, different countries and people have a varied understanding of what the word means.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> A key example is the word 'adoption', which is understood generally in the Pacific as an informal arrangement, often within families, but in Western countries is a legal issue. Dr 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki has commented on this previously: see Taufe'ulungaki 2004.

*Interpretation of results:* When interpreting the results, it can be difficult to ascertain what the percentages actually mean. One difficulty is that some of the students have studied courses containing specific human rights components,<sup>5</sup> while others have not studied any human rights specific topics at all. It is also the case, as one colleague raised, that students can complete the questionnaire anticipating what the surveyor is wanting to hear, rather than expressing their own viewpoints.<sup>6</sup> Falsification of data is always a possibility in any survey, and it is hoped that anonymity would have encouraged participants to complete the survey accurately. It is also the case that not all respondents answered every question. The results tabulated throughout this article make allowances for such discrepancy to validate the data as far as possible.

### Demographic indicators

To date, 126 people have completed and returned the questionnaire. Participants were from Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (refer to Tables 1.1 and 1.2), although the majority of participants were from Fiji (56 per cent). Of these, 50 per cent identified as female and 38 per cent as male. Ages ranged from 18 to 36+, with the majority (64 per cent) being in the 18–24 year age bracket and 82 per cent being under the age of 30.

**Table 1.1: Demographic indicators — gender and country**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Female	2	33	6	0	6	5	3	1	7	63
Male	2	33	1	1	3	5	2	0	1	48
No answer	0	5	1	0	1	6	1	1	0	15
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

**Table 1.2: Demographic indicators — age and country**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
18–24	3	48	4	0	10	7	3	0	6	81
25–29	1	9	3	0	0	6	2	1	1	23
30–35	0	8	1	1	0	2	1	0	1	14
36+	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	8
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

<sup>5</sup> Such as HP101: Pacific Government and Politics and HP308: Advanced Pacific Politics.

<sup>6</sup> Thank you to Dr. Seu'ula Fua Johansson of the Institute of Education, USP, for comments on this area.

**Awareness of international instruments**

One of the longstanding arguments about human rights within the region has revolved around the applicability of international instruments and mechanisms. Irrespective of the philosophical and ethical debates, Pacific Island governments have committed themselves (and, by default, their countries and populations) to a variety of conventions and declarations, some of which are legally binding.

The International Bill of Human Rights consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Other major instruments that participants in the survey were questioned about include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). While these are not the only instruments related to human rights, they are the ones that Pacific Island countries are party to.

Most of the respondents were familiar with the main instruments: more than 80 per cent of respondents had 'heard' of the UDHR, ICCPR and ICESCR. An interesting observation can be made for the responses related to CEDAW, CRC and CERD. A significant amount of publicity has been given, by UNIFEM and various women's organisations, to CEDAW. As a result, it is perhaps not surprising that approximately 85 per cent of respondents had heard of the convention. What is of interest is that a higher percentage of respondents were familiar with CEDAW than with the UDHR (approximately 82 per cent). Also of interest is that there were lower degrees of familiarity with CRC and CERD (approximately 75 per cent and 70 per cent respectively). One of the concerns about this (for the governments concerned and relevant UN agencies/NGOs) is that all of the USP member countries are a party to CRC and four have agreed to CERD (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Nauru). Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this area of the survey is not in the percentages that have heard of the various instruments; attention should also be given to those who claimed they have not heard of the instruments. For example, 18 per cent claimed to have not heard of the UDHR and similar figures were revealed for each of the major conventions. That 25 per cent of respondents claimed not to have heard of a convention that all of the countries had signed (CRC) is somewhat astounding, given the emphasis that has been placed on promoting human rights in Pacific Island countries.

**Table 2.1: Have you heard of the following international instruments?  
Answer: 'Yes'**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
UDHR	4	56	4	1	10	15	6	0	7	103
ICCPR	4	62	7	1	10	16	5	1	5	111
ICESCR	3	61	6	1	9	12	3	2	4	101
CEDAW	4	58	8	1	8	14	6	2	6	107
CRC	3	55	4	0	8	13	6	1	5	95
CERD	3	47	7	1	9	11	5	1	4	88

### Awareness of national approaches to human rights

All members of the United Nations are morally bound to the principles contained within the UDHR; accordingly, all of the USP member countries are committed to the declaration. As Table 2.1 reveals, however, not all of the participants in the survey were familiar with the UDHR. Only 67 per cent of respondents believed that their country had 'agreed' to the UDHR. It can be argued that if people are not familiar with an international instrument of human rights in the first instance, they are less likely to be familiar with their country's commitment to the convention. The vast majority of those surveyed responded that they were 'unsure' if their governments had agreed to the various instruments.

The results of the survey identified similar trends for the other conventions. Of the countries represented in the survey, the Solomon Islands is the only USP member country to be a party to the ICESCR (it succeeded to the covenant in 1982). Slightly more than 30 per cent of respondents thought that their government had agreed to ICESCR; 23 per cent thought their governments were party to ICCPR. Of the 16 Solomon Islands respondents (the only country to agree to ICESCR), only 50 per cent were aware that their country was a party to the covenant.

Despite the majority having heard of CEDAW, individual government commitment was a different matter. Six of the 11 countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) have agreed to become a party to CEDAW; all countries were represented in the survey. Of the 115 respondents originating from these specific countries, approximately 69 per cent were aware that their governments had agreed to the Convention.

All of the USP member countries are party to the CRC. Only 63 per cent were aware that their country had agreed to the provisions of the instrument. Fiji, the Solomon

Islands, and Tonga are all party to CERD.<sup>7</sup> Of the three countries represented in the survey, less than 40 per cent knew that their country was committed to the principles enshrined in the convention.

**Table 3.1: Has your country agreed to the following instruments?  
Answer: 'Yes'**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
UDHR	2	48	4	0	9	9	4	2	6	84
ICCPR	2	14	1	0	5	4	1	2	0	29
ICESCR	2	17	0	0	7	8	2	2	0	38
CEDAW	3	48	5	1	7	11	2	2	6	85
CRC	3	45	7	1	8	8	2	0	5	79
CERD	3	27	4	0	5	6	3	0	0	48

**Table 3.2: Has your country agreed to the following instruments?  
Answer: 'No'**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
UDHR	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ICCPR	0	2	3	0	1	0	1	0	0	7
ICESCR	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	7
CEDAW	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
CRC	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
CERD	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	5

**Table 3.3: Has your country agreed to the following instruments?  
Answer: 'Not sure'**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
UDHR	1	14	3	1	1	6	1	0	2	29
ICCPR	2	47	3	1	4	12	3	0	7	79
ICESCR	2	41	6	0	2	7	2	0	7	67
CEDAW	0	15	0	0	3	5	3	0	2	28
CRC	0	19	1	0	2	7	1	2	3	35
CERD	1	35	2	1	3	9	3	2	7	63

<sup>7</sup> See also Anderson 2005.

All of the countries represented in the survey include provisions to protect the human rights of citizens within their constitutions. The Constitutions of Tuvalu (Pt 2) and Fiji contain 'Bills of Rights'. The Constitution of Tonga contains a 'Declaration of Rights', while Pt II of the Constitution of the Independent State of Western Samoa stipulates the 'Fundamental Rights' of citizens. The Constitution of Solomon Islands and the Constitution of Kiribati contain chapters on the 'Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the Individual'. The Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu makes reference to the obligations of citizens in its 'Fundamental Rights and Duties'. The Constitutions of Fiji and Kiribati make a further commitment to rights by attempting to safeguard traditional or group rights.<sup>8</sup> The Niue Constitution, which was formed by the *Niue Constitution Act 1974* (NZ), is the only constitution of a USP member country not to specifically dedicate a portion to the rights of individuals; however, other sections offer protection to the rights of the Niuean people.

In spite of such institutionalisation of human rights into national frameworks, more needs to be done with regard to promotion or education about this in the public realm. Only 76 per cent of respondents were aware that the constitutions of their countries contained human rights provisions. This has implications for the view of human rights as being applicable to a country.

**Table 3.4: Does your country include human rights in its constitution?**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Yes	2	56	6	1	8	14	4	0	5	96
No	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Not sure	2	13	2	0	2	2	2	2	3	28
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

<sup>8</sup> Constitution of the Marshall Islands (1979), Art 10 — 'Traditional Rights'; Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands (1997) — 'Group Rights' (as specifically contained in acts pertaining to Fijians, Rotumans and Banabans); Constitution of Kiribati — 'Banaba and the Banabans'. See also Anderson 2005.



This lack of awareness and mechanisms, however, shouldn't be interpreted as a lack of belief in human rights in general. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents said that they believed human rights were applicable to their country.

**Table 3.5 Are human rights applicable to your country?**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Yes	2	67	7	1	10	12	4	1	7	111
No	2	3	1	0	0	4	1	1	1	13
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

#### Views on human rights associated issues

While, as indicated earlier in this study, the majority of respondents believed that human rights were applicable to their individual countries, it remains that almost 25 per cent thought that human rights are Western and not valid in the Pacific. Such results are further complicated by the survey evidence revealing that almost 50 per cent of people surveyed believe that human rights depend on cultural values.

**Table 3.6: Human rights are Western and not valid in the Pacific**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
True	1	17	1	0	2	5	1	2	2	31
False	3	52	6	1	8	11	4	0	5	90
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Other	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

**Table 3.7: Human rights depend on cultural values**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
True	2	31	2	0	3	14	3	1	4	60
False	2	37	6	1	7	2	1	1	4	61
No answer	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	4
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

Exactly what areas constitute human rights related areas is also a matter of contention. Participants were asked which areas they considered to be related to human rights. Categories were 'health', 'education', 'domestic violence', 'employment', 'religion', 'media', 'politics', 'poverty' and 'law'. All are considered by human rights practitioners to be a part of human rights, and numerous human rights instruments cover these areas. While 92 per cent of respondents believed that 'education' was 'a part of human rights', only 57 per cent thought that 'poverty' was. Other areas revealed similar disparity. At least 80 per cent of respondents thought that the areas of 'health', 'domestic violence', 'employment' and 'law' were included as parts of human rights, but a considerably lower percentage believed that the areas of 'religion', 'media' and 'politics' could also be related (between approximately 70 and 73 per cent for each category).

**Table 3.8: Areas to be considered part of human rights**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Health	4	56	4	1	10	15	6	0	6	102
Education	4	64	7	1	10	16	6	1	7	116
Domestic violence	3	62	6	1	9	12	4	2	4	103
Employment	4	58	8	1	8	14	6	2	6	107
Religion	3	53	4	0	8	13	6	1	4	92
Media	2	46	7	1	9	11	6	1	5	88
Politics	1	47	7	1	8	13	5	1	6	89
Poverty	1	43	4	1	6	9	5	0	3	72
Law	4	60	7	1	8	11	6	1	6	104

Such responses are compatible with the responses received for the statement 'Some human rights are more important than others', in which respondents were asked to either agree or disagree. Just over 56 per cent thought that the statement was true. Again, this has implications for the types of education programs and promotional campaigns that are being conducted in each of the countries. While some areas of human rights — such as those of women — are now quite well-publicised, others — such as the rights of children, migrants, the elderly and people with disabilities — may require special attention (by way of media or other campaigns) and funding to achieve the same rate of awareness.

**Table 3.9: Some human rights are more important than others**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
True	3	38	6	1	6	8	3	1	5	71
False	1	33	2	0	4	7	3	1	3	54
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

### Whose rights? Which rights?

Knowledge or awareness of international instruments does not necessarily correlate with agreeing with all aspects of them. The third section of the survey asked respondents simply to agree or disagree on a range of human rights related questions. The responses have been collated into categories, with the relevant tables appearing on pages 175–82. While there was disagreement about which areas constitute human rights, the answers to the following sections also reveal a variety of viewpoints.

#### *Health and education (Tables 4.1–4.3 and 8.1)*

The vast majority of respondents believed that education should be free and that it is equally as important for girls and boys to go to school (Table 8.1). There was disagreement over whether or not children should be forced to go to school, with almost equal numbers (approximately 49 per cent) arguing in favour and against.

Access to health facilities was another issue of contention. Those surveyed were asked about access to facilities and cost. While the vast majority agreed that everyone should have access to adequate health facilities, slightly more than 16 per cent believed that people should pay for medical facilities. Participants were not asked what they thought was a reasonable amount to pay.

Possibly not surprising is that more than 80 per cent of the respondents — who are university students — felt that education should be free. It remains, however, that more than 16 per cent disagreed with this. One respondent made it clear that free education should only be for the ‘underprivileged’.<sup>9</sup>

On the issue of affordability, the views of one Samoan respondent are valuable:

<sup>9</sup> Respondent from Fiji, gender not given.

For free education and medicine, these rights should be based on the economic ability of a country ... Pacific Islands are developing, these rights should be based on the Government budget and enforcement should be made accordingly ...<sup>10</sup>

### ***Elections, trade unions and media (Tables 5.1–5.4 and 10.1)***

In regards to broad political areas — associated with ideology and participation — answers were again varied (and sometimes qualified by additional notes). While joining trade unions was not a concern (87 per cent of respondents agreed that people should have the right to join a trade union), membership of politics parties drew an entirely different response: almost 29 per cent disagreed with this right. A similar tension was seen when asked about elections. While just over 75 per cent agreed that all people should be able to vote in elections for parliament, only 56 per cent believed that all people should be able to stand for election.

Within the region, the constitutions and electoral laws place a range of limitations in regards to candidature and voting in elections. Minimum age limits vary, as do the eligibility requirements of candidates voters are able to elect. There were no questions requiring respondents to specify who they thought should be eligible to stand as a candidate in a national election, or who should be able to vote.

Freedom of the press was an area of which many respondents seemed wary. Only 31 per cent of those surveyed agreed that the media should be able to print any story it wants. One respondent argued against censorship in the additional comments section of the survey. Another questioned the type of story printed, posing the question 'does the story violate human rights or a person's dignity?'.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Culture, language and tradition (Tables 6.1–6.4)***

Questions related to the areas of language, culture and tradition drew interesting responses, considering that the responses to other questions are not always compatible. Over 92 per cent of respondents agreed that more needs to be done to protect cultural and traditional rights (although it should be noted that respondents were not asked to clarify which cultures or traditions). Almost 90 per cent agreed that all people should be able to speak their own language or dialect. It seems, however, that some aspects of tradition and culture are not viewed as positively. Approximately 77 per cent of those surveyed disagreed that chiefs and/or village

<sup>10</sup> Female respondent from Samoa.

<sup>11</sup> Female respondent from Rotuma, Fiji.

leaders should have special rights and 73 per cent disagreed with the use of traditional forms of punishment.

***Indigenous, migrants, minorities and identified groups (Tables 7.1–7.4 and 8.2–8.8)***

The area of group rights is a complicated one within the international arena. Participants were asked to answer questions on a range of identified groups — Indigenous people, migrants, women, children, men, youth and people with disabilities. Questions for this section were varied, ranging from rights-specific to domestic violence.

The issue of women's equality in parliament and in the family has been the source of much debate in the Pacific. Respondents to this survey, however, agreed that women should have equal rights with men (approximately 85 per cent), that it was important for women to be included in parliament (approximately 87 per cent) and that it is just as important for girls to go to school (94 per cent).

Domestic violence is a concern that has been raised in the region. In this survey, the lines were drawn clearly. Almost 90 per cent of respondents did not agree with men hitting women. In contrast, 77 per cent did not agree with women hitting men (almost 20 per cent agreed that it was okay). The issue of violence and children drew a mixed response and one that was drastically different to that of violence associated with adults. More than 42 per cent of respondents agreed that it was okay for parents to hit their children, with almost 54 per cent disagreeing.

Most respondents disagreed that Indigenous rights are more important than other rights (67 per cent), but the concerns relating to the possible erosion of Indigenous rights (in terms of land, culture and tradition) were raised in the final part of a number of surveys. One respondent, who disagreed with chiefs and/or village leaders being given special rights and the use of traditional punishments, still argued later in the survey for the protection of traditional and cultural rights: 'I am worried that some of the human rights issues has undermined or will undermine indigenous rights.'<sup>12</sup>

In terms of other groups, the results were also mixed. Ninety-two per cent agreed that people with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else. Almost 75 per cent thought that prisoners should have human rights. Only 53 per cent, however,

12 Male respondent from Fiji.

thought that migrants should have the same rights as everyone else (with one respondent asking about the citizenship of the migrants in question).<sup>13</sup>

### **Religion (Tables 9.1–9.2)**

Religion was another interesting area. While participants were not asked to identify their faith, 96 per cent agreed that all people should be able to choose and practice their religion, while more than 93 per cent believed that all religions should be treated equally. In a region where Christianity is the predominant faith (between 70 and 100 per cent in most countries represented in the survey<sup>14</sup>), it may be difficult to gauge what the acceptance of other faiths actually is. One respondent, who agreed that all people should be able to practice their religions, added the note 'so long as there is not sacrificial killing'.<sup>15</sup> Another respondent, who also agreed with the freedom to choose and practice religion, later qualified this response:

... freedom to practice religion means that only Christian belief should be practiced and nothing else. I totally disagree with religions to be practiced that are unchristian ... but I will treat every human (with) the respect they deserve and love them as a brother.<sup>16</sup>

### **Towards a Pacific Charter?**

The idea of creating a Pacific Charter has existed for some time. Corrin Care notes that the idea was first raised in the mid-1980s in a LAWASIA report,<sup>17</sup> while Wickliffe (1999) has noted that, more than a decade later at a Commonwealth Workshop on Human Rights Education and Training in Vanuatu, 'it was resolved that the Pacific needed a Pacific Charter of Human Rights'. While the charter itself already exists in draft, the final section of the survey gave participants the opportunity to stipulate

13 Respondent from Rotuma, Fiji, gender not given.

14 According to *The World Fact Book* (CIA 2005), in June 2005 the statistics were as follows: Kiribati, 90 per cent; Niue, 81 per cent; Samoa, 96.9 per cent; Solomon Islands, 97.1 per cent; Tonga, 95+ per cent; and Vanuatu, 76.7 per cent. Fiji is a different story, with the country's last official census putting the figure at 57.9 per cent (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics 1996).

15 Female respondent from Fiji.

16 Male respondent from Fiji.

17 Corrin Care 1999. Corrin Care cites *Report on a Proposed Pacific Charter of Human Rights*, a LAWASIA report from May 1989.

what they felt should be included in a 'Pacific Human Rights' document.<sup>18</sup> Forty-eight (38 per cent) chose to respond to this section. Many of the responses were country or culturally specific.

Many of the areas raised in this section's responses were already addressed (briefly) in the survey. The importance of the education of women for the betterment of society was raised by one male respondent from Tonga, who argued that 'extra emphasis' needed to be given to:

... the education of women (rather than) men since they are the first teacher for humanity. Good mothers bear good children — conducive for the betterment of society. Women do not want to send their children to war!<sup>19</sup>

Many of the respondents electing to respond to this question recommended culture and tradition being included in a Pacific human rights document. Despite this, however, there were words of caution. One participant from Fiji requested:

... while compiling the document it is important to note traditional practices and lifestyle of each Pacific Island nation, please tread carefully on issues relating to traditional practices for this can cause conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Another argued:

In terms of our cultural values, human rights should depend on them. However, if such cultural values violates fundamental human rights, provisions must be made in the Pacific Human Rights document. Pacific Human Rights document should note that the cultural values have been in existence way before these rights. Hence some human rights are more important than others.<sup>21</sup>

While the argument to include culture and tradition in a Pacific document was strong, two participants (both from Samoa) noted that the choice to participate in cultural practices needed to be an individual one.

The inclusion of Christianity as an aspect of culture was addressed by one

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18 Thaman (1999, 1) has noted that few of the Pacific Island countries 'had a prominent profile in the preparation' of the Draft Charter.

19 Male respondent from Tonga.

20 Respondent from Fiji, gender not given.

21 Respondent from Rotuma, Fiji, gender not given.

respondent, who noted that, in a Pacific document on human rights, there would need to be a 'separation of Christian values from the cultural ones'.<sup>22</sup> A respondent from Fiji argued that the 'Equality of all religion'<sup>23</sup> must be included in a Pacific Charter of Human Rights.

The issue of gender equality in a variety of cultures was also raised by a number of those who answered this question. One respondent argued for the inclusion of gender equality, but added:

... although I have doubts that this will be practiced — traditional context — but who knows. It is one thing to have things on paper and another to have them practiced.<sup>24</sup>

Questions relating to sexuality were not asked, although this has been a controversial issue in Fiji in recent times. Despite the absence of this topic on the paper, some students chose to address the issue in any case. Wrote one female respondent from Fiji: 'I think that we should have the right to have a relationship with anyone; male or female.'<sup>25</sup> Another respondent noted there should be 'no gay marriage in Fiji',<sup>26</sup> while another noted that it was 'best for rights that are moral to be included in the 'Pacific Human Rights' document and that the 'rights of homosexuals are not moral so should not be included'.<sup>27</sup>

The human rights of sexual minorities were not the only issue raised by students but not addressed in the paper. One student noted that 'the rights of old people and prisoners'<sup>28</sup> needed to be included in a Pacific human rights document.

One respondent from Fiji noted the need to educate people also about responsibilities, arguing that 'with rights comes responsibilities'. The same respondent also noted that human rights need to be 'limited to a point where it infringes on the rights (hr) of others' and that 'some progressive aspects of culture should be incorporated'. The way in which human rights issues are approached by security forces (such as the military and police) was raised by one male surveyed:

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22 Female respondent from Samoa.

23 Male respondent from Fiji.

24 Female respondent from Fiji.

25 Female respondent from Fiji.

26 Male respondent from Fiji.

27 Female respondent, no country given.

28 Female respondent from Kiribati.



Security forces like the Army, Police should be well versed when dealing with issues concerning human rights. It seems they are not adequately trained to tackle issues relating to H/Rights especially when dealing with civilians.<sup>29</sup>

### **Human rights as a source of conflict in the Pacific? Concluding remarks and recommendations**

Many of the responses outlined in the preceding section indicate the tensions that exist relating to the area of human rights in the Pacific Island region. Indeed, of those surveyed, almost 77 per cent agreed that human rights cause conflict. This conflict is not only between civil society groups and governments, but also between individuals who have differing perceptions and awareness of human rights — theoretically, philosophically and practically.

**Table 11.1: Human rights cause conflict**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	2	52	8	1	9	12	6	2	5	97
Disagree	1	18	0	0	1	4	0	0	3	27
No answer	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

In a region with diverse cultural and religious values, where change is ever present and ‘modernisation’ (in the form of changing economic structures, technology, fashion and so on) is increasingly influencing people and putting ‘tradition’ under some stress, it would be a difficult task to create a charter (or other document) to satisfy all members of society. The perception that human rights pose a threat to culture and tradition in the region still holds some sway. One respondent raised this in his survey response:

Human rights have social implications in particular [in] the ... Pacific in the sense that it breaks up the communal setting and emphasis the importance of individual rights. This gives rise to a lot of problem[s] which advocates of human rights don’t consider. The communal role is a binding feature in some cultures and plays a great role in maintaining ‘order’.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Male respondent from Fiji.

<sup>30</sup> Male respondent from Fiji.

The results discussed throughout this paper indicate a clear need for further education in the specific areas of human rights instruments and constitutional provisions throughout the region. While many of the students were aware of the existence of key international instruments of human rights, applicability to their own countries was a source of confusion. International organisations, NGOs and educational practitioners working in the area may like to consider the responses as feedback on their promotional and educational campaigns regarding these instruments.

It is also evident that there are some grounds of commonality and value sharing among young Pacific Island people, which may make the adoption of a Pacific Human Rights Charter viable. These are clearly areas to be explored. This study is preliminary and, while it should be acknowledged as such, it seems that there is room for further research in the area. It remains, however, that there is still considerable work to be done before consensus on and comfort with human rights issues are reached in the Pacific Island region. Education about human rights in the region is being conducted on an unprecedented scale in a variety of media (incorporated into curricula, community development programs and media such as radio and television). The 'promotion of awareness of rights-based domestic legislation within the Pacific' has been included as part of the Pacific Plan.<sup>31</sup> More research about the impact such education programs are having is necessary to gauge the results of such initiatives and help assist with the planning of other initiatives in this area. It is hoped that in this way studies such as this one are considered relevant and valuable to human rights educators, international organisations and a range of others involved in the delivery of human rights services. If nothing else, it is hoped that studies of this type serve to draw attention to the wide range of opinions that exist on this topic, while also helping to contribute to a broader understanding of 'what more needs to be done'. To create a truly Pacific Island approach to human rights, it is necessary to take the opinions of a broad range of people into consideration and incorporate such views into the debates (irrespective of their political correctness), as all voices should be considered valuable in this discussion. ●

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31 See the Pacific Plan web page listed in the References section below.

**Appendix: Additional tables of results*****Health and education*****Table 4.1: Education should be free**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	3	58	5	1	7	16	4	1	6	101
Disagree	1	11	2	0	3	0	2	1	1	21
No answer	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Not sure	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

**Table 4.2: Everyone should have access to adequate health care**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	4	69	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	124
Disagree	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Not sure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

**Table 4.3: Medical facilities should be free**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	3	60	5	1	9	15	5	0	4	102
Disagree	1	9	3	0	1	1	1	2	3	21
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

*Elections and political freedom***Table 5.1: People should be able to join trade unions**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Agree	3	64	5	1	7	15	6	2	7	110
Disagree	1	6	3	0	3	1	0	0	0	14
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 5.2: Democracy should be a human right**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Agree	4	59	6	1	6	10	6	1	4	97
Disagree	0	8	2	0	4	6	0	1	3	24
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Other	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 5.3: Everyone should be allowed to join a political party**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Agree	2	53	3	1	8	8	6	1	6	88
Disagree	2	17	4	0	2	8	0	1	2	36
No answer	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 5.4: All people should be able to vote in elections for parliament**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	2	54	6	1	7	12	5	1	7	95
Disagree	2	16	2	0	3	4	1	1	1	30
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 5.5: All people should be able to stand for election in parliament**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	2	42	5	1	4	8	4	1	4	71
Disagree	2	27	3	0	6	7	2	1	3	51
No answer	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	15	6	2	8	

*Culture, language and tradition***Table 6.1: More should be done in the Pacific to protect cultural and traditional rights**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	3	67	7	1	8	16	6	2	7	117
Disagree	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
No answer	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 6.2: Everyone should be able to speak their own language/ dialect**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	4	62	8	1	10	14	6	1	7	113
Disagree	0	8	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	12
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 6.3: Chiefs/village leaders should have special rights**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	1	13	1	0	1	6	1	0	3	26
Disagree	2	56	7	1	9	10	5	2	5	97
No answer	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 6.4: Traditional methods of punishment should still be used in the Pacific**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	0	19	3	0	0	4	1	1	0	28
Disagree	3	48	5	1	10	12	5	1	7	92
No answer	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Depends	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

*Indigenous, migrants, minorities and identified groups***Table 7.1: Indigenous rights are more important than other people's rights**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	2	24	2	0	1	3	2	0	3	37
Disagree	1	44	6	1	9	13	4	2	5	85
No answer	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Not sure	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 7.2: Prisoners should not have human rights**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	1	16	2	0	1	3	0	1	3	27
Disagree	2	52	6	1	9	13	6	1	4	93
No answer	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Not sure	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	7	

**Table 7.3: Migrants should have the same rights as everyone else**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	1	40	3	1	7	7	2	1	5	67
Disagree	3	29	5	0	3	9	4	1	3	57
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unsure	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 7.4: People with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	4	66	8	1	9	14	6	1	8	117
Disagree	0	5	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	9
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

*Women, children, youth and the family***Table 8.1: It is as important for girls to go to school as it is for boys**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Agree	3	67	8	1	10	16	5	1	8	119
Disagree	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 8.2: Children should be forced to go to school**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Agree	2	37	4	0	5	5	6	1	2	62
Disagree	2	32	4	1	5	10	0	1	6	61
No answer	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 8.3: It is okay for parents to hit their children**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Agree	2	27	2	1	6	8	4	2	2	54
Disagree	2	41	5	0	4	8	2	0	6	68
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

**Table 8.4: It is okay for men to hit women**

No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total	
Agree	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	9
Disagree	4	66	7	1	10	10	6	2	7	113
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	14	6	2	8	



**Table 8.5: It is okay for women to hit men**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	1	10	2	0	3	4	2	2	1	25
Disagree	3	59	6	1	7	10	4	0	7	97
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Not sure	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	14	6	2	8	

**Table 8.6: Age should not matter when applying for a job**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	0	43	3	1	2	7	2	1	2	61
Disagree	4	26	5	0	8	9	4	1	4	61
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Not sure	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	7	

**Table 8.7: It is important for women to be included in parliament**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	4	69	8	1	9	15	6	2	8	122
Disagree	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 8.8: Women should have equal rights with men**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	3	62	7	1	10	12	5	0	7	107
Disagree	1	6	1	0	0	3	1	2	1	15
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

*Religion***Table 9.1: Everybody should be allowed to choose and practice their religion**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	4	68	7	1	9	16	6	2	8	121
Disagree	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
No answer	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	

**Table 9.2: All religions should be treated equally**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	2	65	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	118
Disagree	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
No answer	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	8	126

*Media***Table 10.1: The media should be able to print any story it wants**

	No country	Fiji	Kiribati	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	Total
Agree	1	22	5	0	4	5	1	1	0	39
Disagree	3	44	3	1	6	11	5	1	7	81
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total	4	71	8	1	10	16	6	2	7	

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