

According to Ms. Tomama Yai, a member of the Ivorian Association for the Defense of Women's Rights, such a legal change would further push women into vulnerable position in a society where the common practice of polygamy continues to perpetuate the sexual privileges of men.

Source: *Women's Watch*, June 1996

NUN CLOSES HOPE AFTER WORKERS STRIKE

A project meant to educate and empower women was shut down after its workers, demanding better compensation and job security, staged a hunger strike and joined a labor union.

The Human Organisation for Pioneering in Education (HOPE) in Pune, western India, closed down its handi-crafts production center on 29 July after its 49 workers went on strike following an attempt to make one worker leave.

The trouble began when worker Teresa Pillai was asked to retire by Chavanod sister Noeline Pinto, the Roman Catholic nun who founded HOPE in 1974 to promote women's advancement through self-development. Pillai, 61, had worked with HOPE for the past 22 years.

"This incident brought a sense of insecurity among the women and they joined the Pune Industrial Employees Union (PIEU)," said Jesuit Father Walter Saldhana, president of the Labour Research and Consultancy Bureau in Pune.

Mahila Sangharasha Sanghata (Forum to Fight for Women's Rights) and the PIEU supported the strikers, saying HOPE was

running a small industry and demanding the minimum wage, gratuities and provident fund for employees.

Forum president Shilpa Umbrajakar said that it was "ironic that an agency that professed to empower women and to bring hope to the hopeless was not heeding their demand for minimum wages."

Yamuna Mufe, 43, who worked with HOPE for the past 18 years, said that all of a sudden the workers received a notice saying the center would be closed permanently and payment due would be sent by post.

According to Sister Pinto, however, "these women were not employees of HOPE in the real sense of the term. They were women in distress who were trained to be self-reliant."

"Our center is not a small-scale industry or profit-making firm but an infrastructure for women to use skills they acquired through HOPE," the social activist nun added.

She said that the handicrafts activities were discontinued after the PIEU began to disrupt the peaceful and smooth functioning of the center.

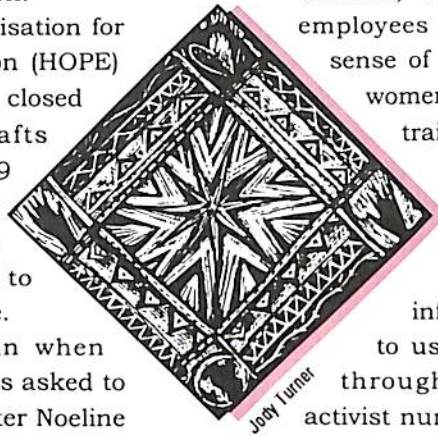
The workers were encouraged to help themselves by forming a cooperative, "but they preferred to lean on the benevolence of the center," she said.

Source: *Sunday Examiner*, Hong Kong, 20 September, 1996

WORLD BANK IMPLICATED IN MASSACRE

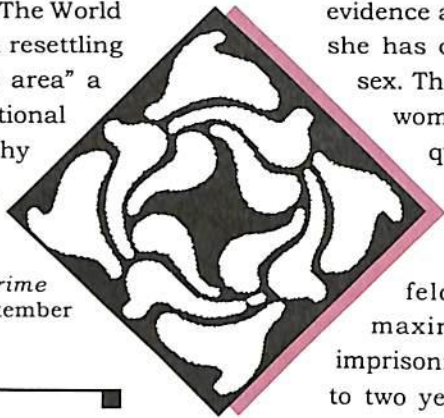
According to a report released earlier this year by Witness for Peace and the International Riv-

ers Network, 376 people from the Guatemalan village of Rio Negro—about 10 percent of the 3,500 people in the region who were to be resettled for the dam—were killed in a series of massacres. The World Bank said that it was not aware of the 1982 massacre. But in 1985, it gave a second loan for the Chixoy Dam. The Witness for Peace report says: If the World Bank did know about the massacres, giving an additional loan to the project was at best a calculated cover-up, and at worst an act of complicity in the violence. If the bank did not know about the slaughter, then it was guilty of gross negligence. Either way, the bank is implicated in the horrors perpetrated against the village of Rio Negro in 1982. After an internal investigation prompted by the Witness for Peace study, a spokesman for the Bank denied any link between the resettlement for the Chixoy project and the murders, although he did mention that the staff were generally aware of violence in the area in 1982. He said that the civil disorder in the project area was considered to have been part of the widespread insurgency and counter-insurgency actions carried out in Guatemala in the 1980s. But villagers told Witness for Peace that the Guatemalan military went after the residents for resisting the project and refusing to be evicted. In one instance, in February 1982, 73 men and women from Rio Negro were ordered by the local military commander to report to Xococ, a village upstream from the reservoir zone which had a history of land conflicts and hostility with Rio Negro. Only one woman returned. According to the report, the rest were raped, tortured and then



murdered by the civil defence patrol, one of the most notorious paramilitary units used by the state as death squads. "The World Bank was involved with resettling 3,500 people from the area" a spokesman for International Rivers Network said. "Why didn't they notice that 376 people were murdered?"

Source: *Corporate Crime Reporter*, U.S.A., 30 September 1996



A MATTER OF RAPE

by Ms. Maureen N. Devi (Fiji)

There are many legal practices in Fiji which discriminate against women but which cannot be challenged. For example, marital rape is not a crime in Fiji, even when the parties are separated. By refusing to protect wives from rape by their husbands, the legal system entrenches its control over women's bodies within the confines of marriage. The notion that a husband should be prosecuted for rape is unthinkable because the law protects the husbands' interests not those of the wives.

Currently, the law holds it against a woman if she waits more than 24 hours to report a rape. Many women are often ashamed to report a rape because of the social stigma it attracts. Given the level of police sympathy and legal responses to the crime of rape, it is not surprising that women need the benefit of advice before deciding whether to report and face the discrimination, inconsistencies and inefficiencies of the legal system. Questioning of the victim's past sexual experiences during a rape trial is permissible, and evidence of her moral charac-

ter may be admitted as evidence against her. A woman's past sexual experience is rendered as evidence against her to show that she has consented to the act of sex. The implication is that if a woman is not a virgin it is quite likely that she would have consented to sex with the accused.

Although rape is a felony for which the maximum sentence is life imprisonment, eighteen months to two year sentences are more common with suspended sentences increasingly being awarded. A common traditional practice of *bulubulu* or an apology is also accepted by the courts as an excuse for not being charged or in lieu of a custodial sentence. The *bulubulu* is also accepted in lieu of punishment in sexual offenses against children. In 1988, Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) officially launched its Anti-Rape campaign. The project included researching the socio-cultural and legal aspects of violence, a nationwide outreach program, the publishing of mass media articles in newspapers and radio, the production of pamphlets and posters, street drama and educational workshops with schools, medical personnel, police officers and judicial personnel. The FWRM also conducted workshops and seminars for rural women's groups in an attempt to educate women about rape and to obtain their support for its legal reforms.

Organizations such as these are helping to make a difference today in the Fiji society. We can only hope that they will increase in number not only for the sake of women in Fiji but for women

worldwide.

Source: *Asian Breeze*, No. 18, October 1996

ENFORCED CHASTITY IN LOMBOK, INDONESIA?

District officials on the eastern Indonesian island of Lombok are using contraceptives as a modern-day chastity belt for local housewives, said press reports from Jakarta in October 1996.

According to the daily *Jakarta Post*, district spokesman Lalu Zakaria said women would not be allowed to buy birth control devices, such as IUDs, while their husbands were working overseas. Written consent from their husbands would be required for women to buy contraceptives, he added.

Officials here fear women might "misuse" the devices while their husbands were working in places like Malaysia. "It is meant as a precaution, so lonely housewives won't be tempted to do negative things while their husbands are away," Mr. Zakaria said.

He said the policy was introduced after migrant workers complained that their wives were using contraceptives while they were away. The newspaper report stated that up to 25,000 men from East Lombok work in neighboring Malaysia, mainly in the plantation and construction sectors.

Local officials were also quoted as saying that many women demanded to have their IUDs removed to demonstrate their faithfulness while their husbands were away.

Source: *Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter* 57 No. 1, 1997