

3rd Annual PFF Keynote Speakers

Shamina Ali – Speaker 1

Noelene Nabulivou – Speaker 2

Speaker 1

First of all, let me just say how great it is to be in a room full of women. It always energises me no matter where I am. I think back to when we first met. You know the first march we had in Fiji, the first one in 1987. Thirty people, mostly us and our families and our colleagues. When we used to call meetings there used to be about twenty women, twenty-five women, thirty women. Now we can have meetings as big as this. Full of women of all ages and all their diversity. It is really, really, for me, a sense of relief that despite all the odds against women we are here today. You are all here today and what a great job Nalini and everyone else who's been involved in getting you all together. Congratulations to everyone and acknowledging all women, girls, young women who are in this room and all your diversity. Acknowledging all of you and this journey that most of you have been on and most of you are most probably starting. I wish you all the best.

I like to tell stories so I'll tell the story about the Crisis Centre. You know we can't say that feminism started with us. There have always been women in Fiji. There is a question always asked: why is Fiji so strong in advocating, in lobbying and so on? Why is the feminist movement so strong? We have always had feminists everywhere throughout the Pacific. In Fiji we have had the YWCA, The National Council of Women, we have all the charitable organisations. The mother's clubs which we all have in our countries. We've got educationists who have pushed for women's education in Fiji, in Tonga, in other countries in the world. We have had feminists like Grace Moelisa, Amelia Rokotuivuna, Ruth Lakti and so on. Many, many of them who have led the YWCA and Grace Moelisa, who you all know, from Vanuatu and many women from Papua New Guinea and so on. And I'm sorry if I fail to mention the names of many, many women who have been there before us.

It's not just like, you know now there is the trend is that the donors are coming in and saying we've got money to do this and we scramble around for what we want to do and we find something that hasn't come from the women of this country or from the people. It just comes from a few women. The FWRM and the FWCC started that way with women meeting together. Over eighty women at the YWCA building many years ago in 1983. Women from all walks of life got together and talked about violence against women and a group of them got together and decided that they needed to work on ending violence against women. They were going to do a rape crisis centre then they did the research. It took them a year to find out what was wrong and the enormity of it. They found out there was domestic violence, there was sexual harassment and so on. So, they took all of that on. We started as a feminist collective and I am very proud to say, which many people don't like, we are still a feminist collective, bigger, but still a feminist collective. There has been a lot of pressure on us to corporatize. But we have stood fast. We review ourselves every year and all the new people coming in; younger people, older people coming they have said that is the way they want to do it. So, we've remained that way.

We always knew we were going to set ourselves up, and I am not a founding member I was away following my husband like a good third world wife while he was going to do his Ph.D. I left my job and was looking after him in Sussex. But I learned a lot there. I learned a lot more feminism there, all types of feminism I learned there. I joined the Crisis Centre in 1985 and it had been in operation since 1984. Then in 1986 we decided that we did the work at the ground level and we needed another organisation that was more academic. Who could look at research policy and could look at all other areas of women's rights. We at the Crisis Centre find all the problems and hand it over to them. And that's how the Fiji Women's Rights Movement came to be and there were some women from the YWCA and other organisations again called a big meeting and out of that the Fiji Women's Rights Movement was born. There was no money, let me tell you, there was no money when we started. We paid for it, those of us who had paid employment, we paid for the rent; two rooms, rented everything else and now the Crisis Centre owns six properties throughout Fiji. All our centres, most of our centres except one we own the buildings and so on which is a big thing. So, from nothing here we are.

But the problem hasn't gone away. The problem is still there. But we don't have to like each other. We don't have to agree with each other's policies, the way we operate but when it came to the crunch, we all came together. We came together on the citizenship issue. We all of us together for the first time, I remember we met at the Fiji Club. All of us together, people we had never talked to, people we always talked about and said she's so conservative, she's so this, that and the other. But we had one voice. We wanted full citizenship in Fiji as women, that our spouses could also get citizenship; men, the husbands could get citizenship. Where at that point in time the women if you married a foreigner, a man married a foreigner she could get citizenship, but if we married a foreigner we couldn't. So that was something we came together on. From then on, we kept getting back together whenever there are issues. Just recently last week we did a joint presentation. Women of all walks of life came together again on our births, deaths and marriages law. That is really violating women's human rights. We keep coming together.

During COVID we set up the COVID Alliance, six different organisations came together to respond to COVID at that point in time and that also became very political. I know people keep telling us: stop being political, stop being political. I remember the former AG said "You do so well with the women. Why do you want to be political?". I said "Well feminism is a political movement, isn't it?". The feminist movement is political. It's all about ideology, that you know that our place is everywhere. So, these are the kind of battles that we fight throughout and we keep fighting and so on.

There are many, many stories that I have to one day sit down and get someone to write. And then we have Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women. And I think that is a predecessor to the Feminist Forum because that is the one movement that has lasted until now. We are looking at its future. How do we merge? That was formed in 1992. The first ever ending violence against women conference or workshop that we had. Two weeks of Pacific women from fifteen different countries were there, all over the place. We were there and we taught. The first week as you know was crying a lot. Every woman in the room had a story to tell

of violence, of discrimination and all those things and then the second week we got to work. So out of that the Network was formed.

When you want to have movements, when you want to have a strong feminist movement. Some of you must be or all of you might be realizing that you have to have the knowledge, the information, the strategies that we work out together and how do we move forward with that. So that's what we deal with in the Network. So how are we going to do that? Training. Those of us who are already there like the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, women who are doing things, the YWCA, National Council of Women in Solomons, in Vanuatu, in Samoa and so on. They are doing some work or other. Papua New Guinea, there are many people that are doing that work. But how could we bring all of that together? So, the training was one thing. In country we are offering training, mandatory funding, lobbying for funding for ending violence against women.

Also, together within the multi-year funding we talked to AusAid and we were the first ones to get it because we were together. Then lobbying for funds for Vanuatu Women's Centre, for Family Support Centre, for all these places and in recent years. Tonga Women and Children's Crisis Centre about twelve years ago lobbying for funding, becoming the managing agent. Taking everyone along. You know that African saying: "If you want to go fast. Go alone." And you get tired and you fall down somewhere. But if you want to go far, we go together all of them. In my life I have made it my business to teach everyone. That is what Sfem is for; to build the movements. We have to talk about it everywhere. It's a lifetime for me. You know, that this is my life.

The personal is political. What happens to us comes from a deeply political, systemic background. So personal is political, that we must take to heart. What we are preaching out here, what we tell other people we must practice ourselves. Also, the ethics around it and also the accountability. One of the things I always say "loose the fear" and if you believe that what you are saying is right, you stand up and fight for it. No matter if you look around and there is nobody there. Everyone will be there behind you saying "yes, yes, yes, yes" well a crunch comes you'll find, I have felt very isolated over the last sixteen years in Fiji. The political situation has been really, really bad and I felt that I was the one speaking out. People were there behind me. But I just felt that, and you know also as you get older ageism comes in also.

There is a place for everyone in this movement. You know whether you're young, whether you're a girl, young women, older women. I am seventy and I'm very proud to do that. People tell me "Why didn't you dye your hair?". I said I've earned each one of those white hairs running after all these men. But it does happen, we get isolated. Like its time for you to go off, expiry date, I've heard all of that. But you know what? Noeline said that to me just now "You know how do we change the training program?". No, it's the same thing. What we are teaching on feminism, on patriarchy. It's the same thing over and over again. We only package it in different ways. So that thing will go on and I'm going to be around. Feminists go out with a Bang! Not with a whimper. And I am going to be around a very long time.

Again, I will say, it's a place for everyone. Solidarity is so important for all of us. I am glad that a lot more of that is being talked about. You know me, being here is a great acknowledgement. And there are other people also of my age who haven't made it. Or who

would be of my age who haven't been able to make it. It is very hard to sustain feminism and feminist ideas.

You know the other day I was at this women's seminar and they asked me "Can you tell me if I have a problem with my husband? What do I do?". I just muttered under my breath I didn't realize the mic was on I said "Oh my goodness I'm onto my third one. How can I give you any advice?". And then everyone burst out laughing and things like that. But the thing is that, you know I always tell women don't suffer. You know this culture and religion is real burden on women. Real oppression of women. Once you get rid of that, respect your culture, respect your religion, once you get rid of it, we come out of the shackles and you see the world with new eyes. That makes you feel you can do anything and our place is everywhere.

Solidarity is so important for us. No matter, I always say, we don't have to love each other to death. But we must stand up for each other where ever we are. Movement building is about what we do in our own homes and what we do everywhere we are. Imrana Delar used to say that I was a party pooper. She didn't want to take me to all these parties because I used to go to look for funding. Whenever I used to go anywhere, I used to say to point me out the Australians and who else is giving money and as soon as they would point that out to me I would take my glass of wine and stand next to them and bore them to death about the Crisis Centre and what we do and why and all the data. Whether they wanted to hear it or not. I could see them wanting to get away and someone would have to come and rescue them. But I said I'm not doing it for myself. I'm doing it for all of us. All the women. So that's how; you have to be fearless, hard-faced and do it. Don't get embarrassed about things. If you believe in it there are ways to do these things. If you believe in it in your heart; loose the fear, push your boundaries.

Especially now when those spaces are shrinking for us. There is a huge backlash against feminism. I'm not on social media but I do get access to the Crisis Centre Twitter and all that. When I read some of the things I cringe. How can people say these things? You know? In Fiji the past sixteen years have been very difficult. Already when we have some semblance of democracy, human rights are intact, rule of law is intact and women are suffering. We are suffering. Women and girls we are oppressed still. We are still fighting. Imagine when those places shrink that's worse for all of us. It gets worse. We have to keep fighting. We can never step back and say "Oh we've got this now we can relax.". We can never relax from feminism. We have to keep on, and on, and on at it. Always antenna up finding out these things.

I also want to encourage people to read. One of the things I find with people that I work with is they don't read because they've been on some social media. I know what they read there. But you know the world news. You know we've also formed alliances with the Independence Movement in the Pacific. At the moment we are so engaged with West Papua. I actually have to find things and send them over on Twitter and send them over to everybody to read and things like that. We have to read things and get our knowledge there. We are everywhere and we must know what is going on. Especially when we want to build movements. We have to know what is going on in Vanuatu, what is going on in Papua New Guinea, what is going on here and there and let everybody know what is going on. We even have, in Fiji, vigils for Iran, Afghanistan. When something happens. When women's rights are threatened. When they are violated so badly. We get together, we get people to understand. It is very important that we do that.

So just remember: solidarity, accountability for ourselves and holding everyone else accountable on women and girls and so on. Thank you very much for listening to me. I wish you all the best this week. I can just feel the energy.

Speaker 2

I just want to start by honouring indigenous peoples all around the world including here in Pacific Island states where sovereignty is not ceded, it is never ceded. And Giraamincha people and those who have been affected by coloniality and imperialism and neoliberal economics. I think we kind of have to ground everything we do in that, as Pacific peoples.

The first thing is we actually know those systems that oppress. I think we've heard very much already from Shamina on this and our movement knows this. The racism, like I said; the coloniality, the imperialism. These are not old things. These are things that we are struggling with now. Patriarchy; the systems that mean that we put certain people on a hierarchy and then that hierarchy kind of devolves. By the time you get to the bottom of that pyramid there is not a lot of basic need and rights that are being respected for the people there. We know the ways we're failing in terms of our ecosystems at the smallest level and the ecosphere at the global scale. Two hundred species a day are going extinct and that's a thousand times the background rates. I don't have to tell you any more than that.

When we look at our statistics in the region and we look at our wonderful women. Shamina and I were just talking about this; you know the broken bodies, the blood, the tears and the struggles that are going on every day. These are not just individual struggles. These are struggles that are about systems that oppress. I really wanted to say, you know we already have a lot of those statistics in place and the analysis and we have to move. If we know that the high levels of violence against women are real, they are already documented then we need to move. If we know that the levels of unmet need for contraception are between 30-50 percent, whatever sets of analysis you're using. There is a huge number of women who can't negotiate successfully for their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Not just reproductive rights. We are not just bodies that produce babies. We are whole human beings. And that means that we talk about sexual and reproductive health and rights.

If we also know that these things are true and then also in our region, we have some of the lowest rates of representation in national legislature, in parliaments. Five only in Fiji and that's even with all of the work that we do, tirelessly. Vanuatu, your first MP in thirteen of fourteen years. You know that's not democracy that's something else. That's a patriarchal manifestation of power. And we have to change that if we are truly going to have representative democracy.

We know the potential for other ways to be in the world. But really, think about taking humans from the top of the pyramid and think about placing us into a circle where we are part of the ecosphere. Where we are truly trying to build different ways to live in this world. That are gentler to ourselves, gentler to other species and just for the whole planet. We see the feminist

energy that brings change towards balance, justice and love. And those are not fuzzy words these are really tough struggles and resistance movements that are fighting for these things. This incredible feminist revolution. It's a million flowers of the revolution that are going on all around the world. We are connected to all of that. That's an incredible source of strength. When I'm feeling really like tired and I can't do it anymore and I want to retire to a corner store. Then I know that I am part of the movements all around the world.

Some things can be said about the way that we move. If you're wise and keep your politics as clear as we can be. We are all human, right? But if you keep it clear and we conserve our energy. We can do really good work ourselves as individuals. But also, in groups and as a community. That's often a lifetime set of work and sometimes it's not. You know sometimes people come to it late and that's wonderful as well. We are all different. Feminists work is to change civilization. It is necessarily hard and complex as much as it can be joyous. And I say don't fight that. Don't try and dumb it down to make it simpler. It is tough. So, if it's tough and beautiful that's the reality of changing what really matters.

We need knowledge transfer. Like this feminist community of practice. Like the regional network to end violence against women that goes over decades. A workshop or two it doesn't change things. And those ADHOC workshops they still go on. But they're not going to do the work. That's why we always say there is a difference between other sets of work and women autonomously led networks and constituency. Once you've built it from the small rooms, into the larger rooms and you keep building. I mean one dream we have is that it's going to get too big for this and that we're going to be in some convention centre, some huge one because there is so much mass. We have to create critical mass.

Feminists also always have one foot in the patriarchal mud and then there is one foot always flying. That's just taking flight, it's true. You always feel like half of you is trying to fight the struggles. But you have dreams that are huge for yourself, and for your family, for your community and for society. That's a good thing. Let's do always both. Be real about the fact that we also have much of the patriarchy in ourselves. We have to keep washing it off every day. We have to keep working on ourselves. Auto critique, you know it's not easy to often work out which battles you fight because you can't fight every battle. But you just get so exhausted. And I have to say boy when I was young that was my struggle because everything made me mad.

Really, I was just furious about seeing people's bodies broke, seeing people taken for granted and the endless back breaking work of women in the Pacific. We still do three to five times the work of men in the community. The ILO tell us that seventy-six percent of unpaid work is done by women. And yet do we see any of that in our representation? In the way that we're honoured in our own families? Do we see it in our society? No. And that's the real pain of it. And that's the real fury of it. And what drives so many of us is this love for each other as human beings and as women. And to say "No I don't accept it.". That's why we use that stop, right? The red, blood hand. We say "Stop!". In order to build you have to break some things. Some dark stuff. You have to be willing to talk about ending patriarchy. You can't blow it away with a soft voice, you can't. There are times where you have to stand full and strong and big.

Until we get there, there is going to be a resistance struggle. You know the Israeli philosopher Yuval Harari; he talks about the feminist revolution as the fastest revolution. And he said that it was bloodless. But he misunderstands because there are women and people who struggle and who lose their lives and who fight in resistance every day around the world for this new world. You know, for a different world. One of the things that I really hope for us is: be clear that there are many who are putting their lives into the struggle. That means talking about things like old age. It means taking care of each other and it's not easy to do. It's very difficult to do that when you're in the middle of a resistance struggle.

There are women from West Papua here who are fighting for their life every day. While they are also coming along to our feminist movement work. From Kanaki, there are many women from Gamea who are here. Lolive from Gamea she says that she hasn't had an NGO visit them in twenty to thirty years. It's also about the reach of our movements, all of us, and who gets to be part of the movement and who doesn't. You know there are struggles of resistance that are different for different women. That's why we say things like intersectionality. That's why we call our interlinkage work. All of this stuff that we have learned from our movements, from each other we can't just keep reinventing it and going oh this is a new one. Like Shamina was saying; we go where the money is. The money has to come because we identify which struggles must be funded and resourced. Right? We know that but we have to talk in new ways about that and really demand respect when we speak like that. Because many of us, boy it's a long, long time that we've been working on this.

So, tell the struggles of conscientization. How do you talk about your own realities? Make that clear. Talk about our development of activism, about mobilisation and organisation. It's not the same; to mobilize is not the same as to work on the long work of organising and how you do that. How do you deal with different levels and kinds of power?

There are small ring the bell moments in our movements and there are also big system shifts. We have to recognize both those kinds of work. There is the above ground work and there is the below ground work. There is the slow evolution and there are the big revolution moments around the world. I think that people often mistake what feminists are doing.

So, it's like Yasmin said earlier. We talk about man-haters, bra burners and everything else. Who cares whether we're wearing a bra? There is fury and anger at many not just at men. But let's look at who is doing the damage. Let's say okay I know what's going on, I know what patriarchy is and I am working for an end. But it's easier to say what we don't want and it's hard to work out what we truly want. What is it that we are building and what do we require in order to build? Because to me that means that we have to talk straight to the nation state. We have to look at the nation state and we have to talk straight to them and say you know what? The way that you are building social floor and social protection doesn't work for everybody.

Every time you start to talk about neoliberal economics, excuse me, I want to throw up. We should be clear on what economics is; it's about the sharing of resources. It's not about somebody deciding for elites that we are going to go this way, our economic paradigm is this shift it. But you know what? Once you start taking on big power we have to be organized. Because if you're going to take on The World Bank, IMF and all the international financial

institutions we better know what we're doing. This is what Shamina is saying but even more. You have to know your stuff and you have to learn it yourself. I am not an economist. But I know if I don't know how to speak to a finance minister, they're not going to listen to me. I have to learn it. I have to learn their language until we can break some of that as well. We bring in our own feminist magic when we go into those rooms.

To get to civilizational change there are consequences and that takes bravery of all of us. It means that we're going to make sure that we know that we have to work beyond our boundaries. The question is: not whether we are going to change but what is the cost? How slow are we going to go? We have crossed six of the nine planetary boundaries; on water, on climate change, on the nitrogen cycle. Everything around the world is in flux now because we refuse to look at the fact that we are extracting from the Earth and not putting back.

The third feminist forum is another part of this set of work for longer, wider path for liberation, balance, justice and love on all territories. And that's what I hope we are going to do together this week and keep doing together in the future.