

Enough is enough – a Samoan story with regional resonance

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Earlier this year I met with Lemalu Sina Retzlaff to interview her for the 'Pacific Conversations' series. It was great to catch up with her, as we hadn't seen each other since 2006 when we first met in Apia. We [discussed](#) a whole range of things. In particular, Sina shared her thinking and her concerns about intimate partner violence in her country. I knew that her passion for this subject sprang from her personal experience but I had thought that was a part of her past. It now appears that I was wrong. In a very public way, through the newspapers in Samoa and via online forums, [Sina has alleged](#) that her former husband, [Muliagatele Brian Lima](#), assaulted her in public. Mr Lima has since been [charged](#) with actual bodily harm and remanded on bail pending a court appearance next month.

Sina's bravery in putting herself, her family and her story into the public domain is awe-inspiring. Even in the midst of extreme personal distress, she has continued to articulate and advocate for more and better support for victims of this type of violence.

This is a confronting story as we approach the Christmas season, which is generally regarded as a time of joy. But for those who live in fear of family-based violence it is an extremely stressful and potentially dangerous time. It is a story that needs to be told and retold.

So what does Sina's story tell us that matters for addressing the myriad challenges posed by gender based violence (GBV) in our region? For me, several key things stand out.

First, it tells us that legislation focused on combatting GBV (such as that [currently before Parliament](#) in Kiribati) may be necessary but it is not sufficient. Appropriate processes spanning multiple sectors are also required. Secondly, it tells us that survivors of GBV need to be able to access an integrated response, including medical, social and legal services regardless of entry point. This is an issue that has been [discussed](#) very effectively elsewhere on this blog. Thirdly, it tells us that where services are provided (e.g. through NGOs) the demand is often [outstripping the ability to supply](#).

From a wider perspective, it reinforces what we know about GBV (including sexual violence) in the region – it is an [ever-present risk](#) for many women from all walks of life. Sina is an articulate, educated, professional. She has access to resources both financial and social. These have assisted her in recovering, seeking protection and in publicising her story. However, they have not (it would appear) prevented it from being her story. Many others have fewer options by far.

The policy challenges in this space for Pacific leaders are many and varied. They speak to issues of culture, history, gender awareness and more. And, increasingly, by virtue of the bravery of Sina and many others like her in our region, they will continue to speak and to cry out in each and every forum until they are heard and answered.

If and when Natasha Stott-Despoja visits Samoa in her capacity as Australia's [global ambassador for women and girls](#), I hope she will meet with Sina and join with her in the powerful and crucial work she is doing in and for her country.