

Kikau calls for change of perspective

By LUKE RAWALAI

PEOPLE living with disabilities do not want to be recognised from a patronising perspective but from an ideology on their ability to achieve, contribute and lead in their communities.

Speaking during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) forum yesterday,

Spinal Injuries Association of Fiji president Jope Kikau also called on people living with disabilities to work together.

As a young leader living with disability, Mr Kikau said it was important to build solid foundations for the future of those living with disabilities around the country.

"Those who live with disability are powerful people because

challenges they face make them become stronger," Mr Kikau said.

Quoting from the Bible on love being the greatest gift above faith and hope, Mr Kikau said without love voices would not be heard.

"When we don't have love we do not have the strength to lead, and I thank families, partner agencies, government stakeholders and NGOs and affiliates for

contributing to the advocacy of our needs and plight."

Also officiating at the celebrations, another young leader Georgina Naigulevu told civil society organisations and government representatives at the meeting that she was a product of their advocacy works.

"Thank you for giving us a voice and for listening to our plight," she said.

The rights of people living with disabilities

By LUKE RAWALAI

FJIJI has come a long way in recognising the rights of people living with disabilities, says Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Meselesi Vuniwaga.

Mrs Vuniwaga said Fiji was now a proud signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) since 2017.

She said the country also had in place a domestic law in the form of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018 which further clarified and mandated legal obligations pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities in Fiji.

"With a strong legal mandate comes a collateral duty to initiate programs for the fulfilment of our legal obligation and this requires a whole of nation collaborative effort," she said.

"In order to achieve the central mandate of the 2030 Agenda, to 'leave no one behind', securing and protecting the rights of people with disabilities is an important step in the right direction.

"Today as we commemorate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), a day that has been annually observed on December 3 around the world since 1992, we can say that we as a nation have surely taken some great strides in the direction that will move Fiji and all Fijians forward — together.

"I wish to thank all the stakeholder partners from the civil society in helping the ministry and the Fijian Government in implementing its vision for inclusive development for persons living with disabilities and we look forward to continue strengthening our partnerships and collaborative efforts in ensuring that the rights of Fijians living with disabilities is fully enjoyed by them in all aspects."



Vuniwaga, Picture: FILE



UN resident co-ordinator Pacific Office Sanaka Samarasinha speaks during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities Forum at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in Suva yesterday. Picture: ATU RASEA



Kyle Blake of USA during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities forum at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in Suva yesterday. Picture: ATU RASEA



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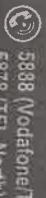
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'So many' out there

Time for action, forum told

By LUKE RAWALAI

THE frameworks and strategies developed for those with disabilities need action, says Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat's director of governance and engagement Stone Tekeiteki.

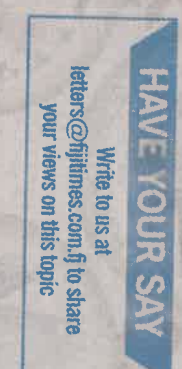
Reflecting on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) forum held at the PIFS conference room yesterday, Mr Tekeiteki called on civil society organisations to work with political leadership in the context of the secretariat.

"No more frameworks and strategies, there are so many out there, and it is now time for action," he said.

UN resident co-ordinator Sanaka Samarasinha shared the same sentiments adding they had already begun work with CSOs, those living with disabilities, and governments, to develop country action plans for those with disabilities.

Mr Samarasinha said these were part of their work for next year and assured those leaving with disabilities that they would be consulted before the plans were finalised.

"If you look at how we employ people with disabilities, we don't have proper toilets for someone in a wheelchair, or a person who is visionally or hearing impaired," he said.



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"I discussed this with the UN Secretary General in New York recently and we want to make the Pacific a pilot, a champion, for the recognition of the needs of those with disabilities — not just in words.

"When it comes to barriers and stigma there is greater awareness and acceptance and effort to remove barriers and address stigma."

Meanwhile, People Disability Forum's chief executive officer Setareki Macanawai said they were eager to see what the future had for those living with disabilities.