



Pacific Conference of Churches

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7th July 2020

His Grace, Archbishop Peter Loy Chong
Chairman
Conferentia Episcopalis Pacifici (CEPAC)
Nicolas House
SUVA

Your Grace,

It is with deep concern that I write to you in your capacity as Chair of CEPAC with regards to comments made by priest from the Archdiocese of Samoa-Apia over the weekend in a homily during which he applied victim-blaming to justify rape.

The homily was delivered by Fr. Father Muliau Stowers, in his weekly program aired on Upu Mana TV4 in Samoa.

I quote his comments below:

“For example if a man comes home from the plantation.. he is tired.. and he comes across a young girl walking along.. and her body is bursting out of her clothes... Naturally, the opposite sex should respond”

“Firstly what is this young girl even doing there at this time? ... And secondly, why doesn't she wear appropriate clothes?...cover herself?”

Fr. Stowers went on to say that when rape then occurs, all the blame is placed on the perpetrator, without considering the role played by the victim.

I refer you to the following news articles addressing this issue for more information:
https://samoaglobalnews.com/priest-uses-victim-blaming-to-justify-incidents-of-rape/?fbclid=IwARochHhDVVLNZbeQwlVYVHaZ7vKrdv_vG9sVM7Awp3cvNMGWyetB3P8Eq9o

<https://samoaglobalnews.com/there-is-sin-and-there-is-the-occasion-of-sin-priest-stands-by-his-example/>

As an advocate of the elimination of violence against women and children yourself, I am sure you understand the damage this does to the work of all churches to address sexual assault and gender-based violence.

The issue of victim-blaming perpetuates the cycle of violence, objectification of women and the justification of rape based not on the choices and actions of the perpetrator, but on the victim.

As a delegate of the Pacific Conference of Churches 2018 General Assembly, and a member of the PCC Executive Committee you are aware of PCC's stand on this issue, as articulated in the General Assembly Statement on violence against women and children:

We condemn all forms of violence against women and children as a sin and call on the Christian community in the Pacific to ensure that the dignity of our women and children is protected at all times. And we call for the development of specific theology in our colleges and churches to address the protection and dignity of women and children according to God's holy law.

I humbly ask that you use your good offices to raise our concern with the Archdiocese of Samoa-Apia.

May God's blessings be with you as we work together to ensure just and peaceful communities of women and men in the Pacific.

In Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Shri Bhagwan', written in a cursive style.

James Shri Bhagwan (Rev)
General Secretary