



News Release

For Immediate Release

## **“MENTAL HEALTH IS EVERYONE’S BUSINESS”**

**Port Vila, Vanuatu 12<sup>th</sup> March 2007** – FSPI with the support of the Vanuatu Minister of Health Hon Mr. Mokin Stevens Iatika today launched two important mental health documents “*Masculinity Mental Health and Violence: A Synopsis of four Pacific Island Country Studies: Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji and Kiribati*” and a “*Mental Health Resource Kit for Training of Trainers*”. The launch of the two documents, are timely as Ministers from around the region meet to decide on a regional health strategy of which mental health should be a key component in line with the Tonga and Samoa commitment.

“As host country for this important 7<sup>th</sup> Pacific Health Ministers Meeting, I look forward to the deliberations of the Regional Health Strategy, said Hon Mr. Mokin Stevens Iatika. “I urge all of us leaders and decision makers to ensure that mental health is central in the Health Strategy as outlined in the Tonga and Samoa commitment” said Hon Mr. Stevens Iatika.

Analysis carried out in 2004 and collated into this Synopsis highlighted the growing incidence of violence among youth in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji and Kiribati. Limited economic opportunity to participate in the emerging modern lifestyle has led to personal mental stress, social exclusion, unemployment, the development of a subgroup of disaffected youth who as a consequence resorted to a range of means of acquiring the resources for daily living. Given the high proportion of young people in Pacific Island nations, this trend should be of concern to leaders and policy makers.

“Youths are struggling to find a place in an era of rapid social change and many young people are vulnerable to a high level of stress, which is exacerbated by the absence of family support and the social safety nets that exist in communities”, said Mr. Rex Horoi, Executive Director for FSPI.

Mental health remains a low priority in many Pacific Island Countries. Stakeholders need to ensure mental health becomes a regional priority by ensuring there is appropriate support and protection to

prevent increased levels of stress among youth and their families, to promote good mental health and support systems and to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness.

“FSPI acknowledges the host country Vanuatu and in particular the ministry of Health and commend its effort as a key partner along with other players such as WHO and NGO partners in the field of mental health. By each one of us making mental health our business we can be assured of a healthy Pacific community”, said Rex Horoi.

The FSPI project on mental health is made possible by funding from NZAID

For further information contact:

Mr. Rex Horoi, Executive Director FSPI - + (678) 74473

Maureen Penjueli, Communication and Advocacy Coordinator - + (678) 74055

**Notes for Editors:**

1. Samoa (2005) commitment identified mental health as a key focus area. WHO took the initiative to establish the Pacific Islands Mental Health Network (PIMHNet). These networks aim to maximize available resources within countries and areas and reduce unnecessary duplication and fragmentation of activities.
2. In general, the four FSPI studies define youths as between the age of 15 – 30 years, and as associated with single marital status.
3. The international literature on community mental health (Schultz 2001), cites ‘a close association between the mental health and the general productivity of a community’ (Pardes 1989); ‘a close link between unemployment, poverty and diminished mental health’ (Warr 1987) and a similar link ‘between modernization, rapid socio-cultural change and diminished mental health’ (Dressler 1985).
4. Poor mental health is now widely regarded as an important non-communicable disease (Murray & Lopez 1996) and violence is now regarded as an important public health issue.
5. Around 20 percent of the population in the Pacific is aged 15 – 24.