



Over 120 participants from 16 countries met from November 30th to December 2nd in Suva, Fiji, to discuss the current state of research on the traditional South Pacific herb kava (*Piper methysticum* Forst., Piperaceae) and the recent economic problems facing nations in the South Pacific region since the ban on kava took place in Europe and other countries.

Under the chairmanship of Ralph Edwards, MD, director of the World

shown any signs of severe side effects.

The conference was supported by the governments of Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, all of which are implementing specific kava legislation to ensure that only high quality kava of the proper botanical varieties, the correct plant parts and the appropriate forms of preparation are used for export.

The International Kava Conference IKC 2004, was organized by the International Kava Executive Council (IKEC), the University of the South Pacific in Suva Fiji, the Fiji School of Medicine, the Republic of the Fiji Islands and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat. Main sponsors of the conference included the Centre for the Development of Enterprise CDE and PRO€INVEST, two institutions of the ACP (African, Caribbean, Pacific) group of states and the European Union (EU).

The participants decided on a resolution with three major provisions and a number of scientific resolutions, which can be found on the IKEC homepage (www.ikec.org). The main conclusions included the following:

- Following the deliberations and presentation of new scientific evidence during the conference, participants agreed there were no grounds for the continuing bans and restrictions. They therefore called for their immediate removal by all the relevant regulatory authorities, including those in the EU.

- The Pacific Island kava-producing countries must be supported in their efforts to strengthen the kava industry and re-establish their export markets.

- Going forward there should be no doubt that the Pacific Island Countries are committed to producing quality products by establishing and maintaining internationally recognized standards and specifications.

Recently kava producers in the Pacific have threatened to file a trade dispute at the WTO against Germany, the U.K., France and Switzerland for banning their products. The Pacific kava producers claim they have collectively lost about \$1 billion over the last several years due to the ban in the European countries. NW

Safety & Efficacy of Kava Re-confirmed

Recent conference calls for the removal of all kava restrictions, with a WTO trade dispute possible.

By Joerg Gruenwald

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Health Organization (WHO) Drug Monitoring Centre in Uppsala, Sweden, and Vincent Lebot, PhD, from CIRAD Agricultural Research for Development (Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement) Vanuatu, 35 presentations focused on the safety of kava, specifically on the alleged hepatotoxic effects of kava extracts.

New results from two German research teams led by Professor Rolf Gebhardt of the University of Leipzig and Katrien Schaefer, PhD, from the University Hannover, who investigated different kava extracts in cell cultures of liver cells, concluded that there was no hepatotoxicity demonstrated in any dosages related to human consumption. The human case reports claiming liver toxicity were also discussed. Researchers agreed that a total of three liver toxicity cases could be directly linked to kava's effects, which is extremely low considering the widespread use of kava, and especially when compared to various conventional pharmaceutical drugs used in the area of anxiety, such as benzodiazepines. There was also overall agreement that the traditional form of kava, i.e., water-dissolved kava powder, has never