

Papua New Guinea
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ERADICATING VIOLENCE FROM PNG SOCIETY

1. Papua New Guinea is approaching the 40TH anniversary of becoming an Independent and Sovereign nation. The rapid transition from a highly decentralized society differentiated into many tribes, clans and language groups, to one that has taken its place among the community of nations has brought benefits but has also highlighted several problems.
2. “The harmful effects of these forms of (family and sexual) violence are both directly or indirectly felt by a large proportion of the population and affect human development and economic growth. Police recognize that family and sexual violence is a major concern, particularly when violence is perpetrated by a family member.” It is not new, but he said “it has been growing silently in our society with our change of culture, in our development phase and has become a major drawback in our economic development.”¹
3. Deeply embedded cultural attitudes, the almost universal treatment of women as inferior to men, cultural practices such as bride-price and polygamy all contribute to the reality of widespread violence practiced against women in the home, the village and wider society.
4. In their concluding remarks following their country visits to PNG, both the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (March 2012)² and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (3-14 March 2014)³ stated that the State has the primary responsibility to prevent and to protect its citizens against violence. Both call for *holistic solutions* that address the individual needs of victims, particularly women, and also the social, economic and cultural factors that enable a culture of violence and impunity to continue. The empowerment of women must be coupled with social transformation, to fully address the systemic and structural causes of inequality and discrimination, which most often lead to violence against women.
5. There is general agreement that violence has grown to alarming levels throughout the country. According to a PNG country gender assessment conducted jointly in 2012 by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the UN, and the Australian and PNG governments, “the high prevalence of such violence in PNG is a cross cutting issue, with very serious implications for public health and social policy, economic

¹ The National Newspaper, June 1st 2015, quotes Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police Operations, Jim Andrews, during the closing of the “Referral Pathways Workshop” in Port Moresby.

²<http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12013&LangID=E.anu.edu.au/burghmann/issue1/pdf/Gender-Based%20Violence%20in%20Papua%20New%20Guinea.pdf>

³ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14373&LangID=E>

development, and justice and law enforcement.”⁴ “Despite booming mineral income there has been continuing stagnation in outcomes for health, education and infrastructure, all of which have an impact on gender inequality, as this CGA shows”.

6. A recent World Bank analysis of crime trends in PNG⁵ indicates that crime and violence tend to be concentrated in ‘hot spots’, of which Lae and Port Moresby are the worst, ranking among the most dangerous cities in the world. These are two of the largest populations in the country which experience much of the drift from the villages to the city. (*The writer can attest to this having survived an attempted armed holdup in broad daylight whilst driving on a Port Moresby street recently*)

Positive Developments:

7. Since Papua New Guinea's last report of its human rights record to the 18th Session of the Human Rights Council on July 11, 2011, some significant progress has been made. In May 2103 Parliament repealed the country’s controversial Sorcery Act which offered a defence of violent crime if it was asserted the accused was acting to stop ‘witchcraft’.
8. In September 2013 PNG parliament unanimously passed the Family Protection Bill 2013, which criminalizes domestic violence and gives police power to arrest and prosecute perpetrators. The state is to be commended for these parliamentary actions, but they have not yet brought significant lowering of the levels of violence, particularly domestic violence affecting women and girls.
9. These significant developments can largely be attributed to the collective action of grassroots organisations to encourage government action. A well- publicised visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in 2012, courageous leadership shown by many women's groups and the *National Haus Krai* movement in March 2013 have no doubt brought pressure which, in turn, contributed to these legislative changes.

Role of the Police

10. PNG police are under-resourced, under-trained, often corrupt, frequently violent, and largely uninterested in the welfare of women their rights to justice. Complaints of police raping women are commonplace, and they are notoriously rough on their wives.⁶
11. Several recommendations were made that would change the culture, training and human rights education of police (79.26 by Costa Rica; 79.40 by United States) in the

⁴ The World Bank, “Papua New Guinea Country Gender Assessment for the Period 2011-2012,” Country Gender Assessment, 31 December 2012 , <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2012/12/17431121/papua-new-guinea-country-gender-assessment-period-2011-2012>

⁵ “Lakhani, Sadaf; Willman, Alys M.. 2014. Trends in crime and violence in Papua New Guinea. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/18971> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO

⁶ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Aid Program Performance Report 2012-13 Papua New Guinea,” Annual Performance Report, 2014, <http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Documents/png-appr-2012-13.pdf>

report of the Working Group on the UPR⁷ during PNG's report to the 18th Session of the Human Rights Council. Much still needs to be done. Police are predominantly males who share, along with other men, cultural attitudes and stereotypes towards women in PNG society.

12. Reports of police brutality and misconduct were widely reported in all parts of the country to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Complaints of violence and sexual abuse of women while in police detention and outside was a systemic issue, including against sex workers. This is mirrored by Switzerland's recommendation Switzerland (79.41 on excessive force used by police).⁸
13. The Australian government pledged to send 50 unarmed police officers to PNG by the end of 2013 to act in advisory roles and help combat the surge in reported violence in the country. This short-term engagement aims to build the capacity of PNG's police force. It is a move in the right direction and to be applauded, but results are sketchy at present.
14. Violence against women in Papua New Guinea begins in the home, with women and girl children subjected to physical and sexual violence, mostly by male family members. With regard to intimate partner violence, according to a 1992 report of the Constitutional Law Reform Commission (CLRC), "two thirds of married women in PNG had been hit by their husbands". An academic study conducted in 2009 shared similar findings, noting that 65.3% of the interviewed women were survivors of domestic violence.

Economic drivers of violence

15. Dr Eric Kwa, head of the PNG Law Reform Commission, drafted early versions of the Family Protection Act more than twenty years ago. It has now only recently become law. Asked recently how to improve safety for women, he said the erosion of infrastructure, the loss of the capacity to grow crops and deliver them to market, and the loss of opportunity to pursue education and jobs all combine to create a culture of idleness, hopelessness, and violence. He sees economic activity as the way to improve safety for women. Put that money into building a road, and you will have less crime, and you won't need more courthouses. *Violence is a consequence. We are dealing with symptoms. But we have to deal with the cause, and the cause is the lack of opportunity.*⁹
16. Despite some notable improvements, the government still seems to lack the political will to address many of the underlying causes of violence in its society. The common government response to many recommendations from other States during the UPR was: "*This is an ongoing effort of the PNG Government*". In the previous UPR in 79.27,

⁷ A/HRC/18/18/Add. 1, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review* Papua New Guinea Addendum

⁸ Op. cit.

⁹ 29 August 2014, Analysis by Jo Chandler, <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/violence-against-women-png-how-men-are-getting-away-murder>

Thailand recommended that PNG develop “proactive strategies for economic development and social cultural transformation, with priority given to addressing problems of discrimination against women, gender-based violence, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, child labour, corporal punishment of children, and sorcery-related killings”¹⁰

17. In preparation for the coming Pacific Games many millions of Kina have been spent on roads, flyovers and sporting facilities while comparatively tiny amounts are being allocated to Provinces to build roads, bridges, markets and port facilities to enable small and micro enterprises to compete in the marketplace. The absence of holistic thinking, linked with continuing high levels of corruption of government officials makes the development of proactive strategies for economic development and cultural and social transformation unlikely.

¹⁰ A/HRC/18/18/Add.1, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review* Papua New Guinea Addendum

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 State must ensure all school curricula stress that all forms of intra-personal violence is unacceptable. To change cultural attitudes of male superiority and female inferiority, students will learn how to address violence. Particular attention will be given to boys in this project. Appropriate levels of funding must be made available.**

- 2. State must allocate resources to educate the community about the Family Protection Bill 2013 and build capacity among those who are given the task to oversee compliance with the Family Protection Act.**

- 3. There is an urgent need to increase the numbers recruited into the police force to match the increase in the population of the country.**

- 4. There must also be a significant increase in the number of women recruited into the police force.**

- 5. Strengthen initial training from 6 to 18 months of police recruits. They must be taught that violence is not acceptable and they have a responsibility as change-agents within the community, starting with themselves.**

- 6. Raise the status of police through provision of better housing, increased salary and stricter accountability practices.**

- 7. Adjust priorities in national and provincial budgets to achieve these goals.**

- 9. Piecemeal solutions do not work. Since there is ample evidence that violence has multiple causes, the State must draw on the insights of all stakeholders through a nation-wide consultation process. This process must include the contribution of people what are the victims of community, family or sexual violence.**

- 10. National and Provincial Administrations must work in close collaboration to create budgets which allocate resources to start to meet each of the factors that contribute to building a non-violent domestic, community and urban life.**

- 11. The State must urgently allocate resources to build or rebuild basic infrastructure to create employment, at the level of the village, micro and small-scale industry.**