



***Inquiry into the human rights issues confronting
women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific
region***

Due 22nd May 2014

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1. Executive Summary

The following submission was executed in response to the inquiry conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, into the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region (Parliament of Australia, 2014). Conducted in correspondence with the non-government organisation Amnesty International, this submission draws attention to horrific human rights abuses faced daily by women and girls in Papua New Guinea (PNG). These abuses involve sexual and family violence and the undermining of women within leadership roles and economic opportunities (Parliament of Australia, 2014). These are all issues that are entrenched in the cultural beliefs and traditions of the population. In relation to these four issues, this submission will explore barriers and impediments to improving the human rights of women and girls, and the achievements to date in this area (Parliament of Australia, 2014). The submission will then produce recommendations reflecting Amnesty International’s political focus. This involves a top-down approach that will involve government intervention from the PNG parliamentary level, that will attempt to positively influence the cultural beliefs and traditions that generate the human rights issues facing women and girls in PNG.

2. Overview of the Human Rights Issues Confronting Women and Girls in PNG

Gender inequality is a serious issue confronting women and girls in Papua New Guinea, which sees these members of society being marginalised and treated poorly to the extent of physical harm and abuse. Women and girls make up 48.99% of the population within PNG, with a total number of 3, 138, 438 as of 2013. However, even the most basic of human rights of women are often not met. Impediments to women’s leadership and economic opportunity remain high, while instances of family and sexual violence are rampant. Girls make up “only 47-48 percent of total primary school enrolments” (Drucza & Hutchens, 2008, p.2) and only 0.508 women to the ratio of one man reach secondary education. This has resulted in 40 per cent of women in PNG currently being classed as illiterate. While women make up almost half the population only two per cent of women hold seats in National Parliament, and since PNG’s Independence only four women in total have been elected to National Parliament. Family and sexual violence is embedded in the culture of men in PNG and statistics show that “50 per cent of women have reportedly been raped in their own homes” (Fox, 2014). The UN Special Rapporteur recognises, sexual violence is “a pervasive phenomenon in Papua New Guinea”, with incidents occurring at every level of society – “in the home, community and institutional settings” (Amnesty International, 2013).

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3. Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a non-government organisation with a focus on the protection of human rights (Amnesty International, 2013). The vision of Amnesty International stands to ensure that every individual is treated in accordance with “all of the rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards,” (Amnesty International, 2013). Since the establishment of the organisation in 1961, Amnesty International has “conducted expert research and generated action to prevent and end” (Amnesty International, 2008) violations of human rights by “mobilizing people to put pressure on government and others” (Amnesty International, 2013). The organisation places strong emphasis on its independence and refuses funding by government. Therefore it is not influenced by any political ideology, economic interests or religion (Amnesty International, 2013).

4. Family Violence

Some regions in Papua New Guinea, particularly in the Highland areas, are experiencing high rates of domestic violence against women and young girls (Amnesty International, 2013). Violence is considered by a majority of men to be a valid means for “asserting authority over partners who they think are lazy, insubordinate or argumentative” (Amnesty International, 2013). Domestic violence against women and girls takes on a shocking variety of forms, including rape, being burnt with hot irons, kicking and punching and cutting with bush knives (Amnesty International, 2013). Domestic violence is estimated to be present in two out of three households within PNG, compared to the global estimation of one in three (Killalea, 2013). This affects the victim’s “health, human rights, freedom of movement and ability to work” (Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2014).

4.1 Barriers and Impediments

Women and girls who are victims of domestic violence within PNG face a number of barriers and impediments to accessing help, achieving justice and protecting their human rights. This is particularly displayed within the Rigo District, in the Central Province of PNG. District Planner Murray Konido stated that due to the fact that there are only “six village courts to serve 228 villages,” there are many remote areas within the district that are lawless (Wiseman, 2013). As a result of the limited court coverage, these women and girls are exposed to violence with no criminal consequences for the men who commit the crimes (Wiseman, 2013).

Poverty is a major factor in preventing women and children’s access to legal and medical services. According to Killalea, 37 per cent of the population in PNG live in poverty (Killalea, 2013). Therefore, many women cannot afford to pay a magistrate to hear their cases in regards to domestic violence (Wiseman, 2013). Under PNG law, women require a medical certificate to prosecute violent partners, however cannot always afford one (Killalea, 2013). Due to the male often being the “breadwinner” of

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the family, women and their children often feel compelled to stay with them despite domestic violence (Killalea, 2013).

4.2 Advancements to Date

With a landslide 65-20 votes, the PNG Government passed the Family Protection Bill 2013 on the 18th of September 2013. The implications of this means those violent acts within the home are now criminalized, providing a degree of protection to women and children who remain “vulnerable to human rights abuses” (Amnesty International, 2013).

There are also a number of women’s human rights defenders in PNG, such as the Highlands Women’s Human Rights Defenders Network (United Nations Human Rights, 2011). These groups lead efforts “to prevent violence against women and to improve the services available to victims” (Amnesty International, 2013). Key initiatives include campaigns aiming to “increase public awareness about gender-based violence in PNG,” and “providing human rights training to government employees and community leaders” (Amnesty International, 2013).

Amnesty International has established goals within their campaign on violence against women and girls in PNG. In the short term, the organisation provides “rescue, relocation and shelter” to help women and girls from the “immediate danger of violence” (Amnesty International, 2013). In the long term, Amnesty aims to “end gender-based violence” through working with local activists and pressuring the PNG government to implement legislation based on protecting women and girls (Amnesty International, 2013).

5. Sexual Violence

One of the most prevalent forms of sexual violence facing women in Papua New Guinea is rape. Women in this region are “at high risk of rape, gang rape and other forms of sexual assault and many spend their daily life in constant fear” (Amnesty International, 2013). A study in *The Lancet Global Health* has found that “frequent reasons for rape were sexual entitlement, seeking of entertainment, and as punishment (Jewkes, Fulu, Roselli, & Garcia-Moreno, 2013).

Reports have shown that girls as young as six have been targeted by men, with one case in Lae leaving a young girl with injuries “so severe that she can barely walk and can never have children” (Amnesty International, 2013).

The table below is an extract from the Lancet study (Jewkes, Fulu, Roselli, & Garcia-Moreno, 2013) and indicates the prevalence of rape in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. It also demonstrates that rates of rape are considerably high in comparison to other countries experiencing similar crimes.

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Table 1
Prevalence of perpetration of rape of women who were not partners and of men by country and site

	Rape of non-partner women			Rape of a man
	Never	Single perpetrator rape	Multiple perpetrator rape	
Bangladesh				
Rural	1081/1131 (95.6%, 93.9–96.8)	28/1131 (2.5%, 1.6–3.8)	22/1131 (1.9%, 1.2–3.1)	43/1130 (3.8%, 2.7–5.1)
Urban	1195/1246 (95.9%, 94.2–97.1)	33/1246 (2.7%, 1.8–3.9)	18/1246 (1.4%, 0.8–2.5)	22/1244 (1.8%, 1.0–3.0)
Cambodia	1629/1776 (91.7%, 90.0–93.1)	55/1776 (3.1%, 2.3–4.1)	92/1776 (5.2%, 4.1–6.5)	58/1774 (3.3%, 2.4–4.4)
China	901/980 (91.9%, 89.4–93.9)	57/980 (5.8%, 4.3–7.8)	22/980 (2.2%, 1.4–3.7)	16/969 (1.7%, 0.9–2.9)
Indonesia				
Jakarta	781/854 (91.5%, 89.8–92.9)	56/854 (6.6%, 5.4–7.9)	17/854 (2.0%, 1.2–3.3)	13/855 (1.5%, 0.9–2.5)
Rural Java	753/799 (94.2%, 92.0–95.9)	34/799 (4.3%, 2.5–7.1)	12/799 (1.5%, 0.8–2.7)	14/800 (1.8%, 1.0–3.1)
Jayapura	673/879 (76.6%, 71.9–80.7)	146/879 (16.6%, 13.4–20.5)	60/879 (6.8%, 5.8–8.1)	13/880 (1.5%, 0.7–3.2)
Papua New Guinea				
Bougainville	502/846 (59.3%, 54.6–63.9)	225/846 (26.6%, 23.3–30.2)	119/846 (14.1%, 11.2–17.6)	65/850 (7.7%, 5.6–10.3)
Sri Lanka	1351/1440 (93.8%, 91.7–95.4)	66/1440 (4.6%, 3.4–6.2)	23/1440 (1.6%, 1.0–2.5)	38/1432 (2.7%, 1.9–3.8)

Data are n/N (% , 95% CI).

5.1 Barriers and Impediments

The issue of sexual violence in PNG has proven difficult to overcome. A lack of prosecution has been one of the biggest barriers to preventing sexual violence against women. According to the Lancet study, “only 443 of 1933 men (22.9%, 95% CI 20.7—25.3) who had committed rape had ever been sent to prison for any period” (Jewkes, Fulu, Roselli, & Garcia-Moreno, 2013). As mentioned previously, this is due to the frequent dismissal of complaints relating to domestic and sexual violence from police and authority figures in PNG. A recent report by the ABC also premises that “PNG’s undermanned and under-resourced police force is largely powerless to stop the tsunami of fighting and abuse” (Fox, 2014).

Not only are issues often ignored, but the authorities also perpetrate acts of sexual violence. There are many instances where the police and officials are responsible for committing such crimes. Amnesty International’s 2013 Annual Report found that “in June, a police officer from Port Moresby was found guilty of two counts of rape of a woman in custody.”

5.2 Advancements to Date

The UN Special Rapporteur has “called on government to meet its responsibilities to protect women from violence, including addressing traditional practices that are harmful to women” (Amnesty International, 2013). This is with reference to laws on Polygamy in PNG. Polygamy has been identified as a factor contributing to violence in the household. Despite ongoing debate concerning a call to change the constitution regarding polygamy, changes are yet to be seen. Following the success of the aforementioned Family Protection Bill, the issue of polygamy was further highlighted. However, a division called by the Western Highlands Governer Paias Wingti “showed that only three MPs supported the creation of a new legislation on polygamy” (Islands Business, 2014). Our work at Amnesty International includes working with activist groups and pressuring the PNG Government into recognizing and considering some of these important issues.

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A key finding from ChildFund’s research into family and sexual violence against women also concluded “PNG does not have enough national programs that work with men in order to change prevailing social norms that allow widespread and obvious violence” (ChildFund Australia, n.d.). Amnesty International continues to raise funds in order to maintain our campaign work in an attempt to address and further the message that abuses of women’s human rights are not acceptable.

6. Women’s Leadership and Economic Opportunities

For women and girls in PNG, gender inequality is reflected through the leadership and economic opportunities, as there are cultural and legal constraints on women’s participation. Women in PNG are discriminated against by the populace, when running as candidates for leadership roles in politics. They suffer from, “verbal and physical intimidation, threats of clan and tribal sanctions...limited resources...and pressure to conform to or condone male leadership qualities” (Drucza & Hutchens 2008, p.1). In employment and economic opportunities women are underrepresented and their rights are neglected, and through the constraints on women’s development in economic opportunities it is reflected that this country does not value gender equality and thus human rights issues are being ignored.

6.1 Barriers and Impediments

In relation to leadership roles and economic opportunities, the main barrier that affects women and girls are the traditional and preconceived notions held by both women and men, that women are not suited for these opportunities. This is reflected in attitudes towards women who run for leadership roles in politics.

In the 2012 political elections in PNG, only “135 women candidates ran out of approximately 3,500 candidates in total” (Pacific Women in Politics, n.d.). With only 2.7 per cent of parliament made up of women, PNG is “a region with the lowest rate of women’s participate in formal politics in the world” (Swan & Walton, 2013). For this small number of women participating and also for female candidates who ran in previous elections, they had to “suffer cultural and social discrimination” (Drucza & Hutchens 2008, p.1), through “violent backlash that women often face when speaking up or taking on non-traditional roles” (Swan & Walton, 2013). An exemplar of gender inequality and how traditional customs are still suppressing women within PNG is the “reticence of local women in voicing support” (McDonald, 2012) for female candidates who campaigned for a leadership role.

In PNG, “women are underrepresented in the formal workforce and neglected in the informal sector” (Drucza & Hutchens, 2008, p.2) and with large constraints on women’s economic opportunities and development, gender inequality is largely apparent and basic human rights are ignored (Drucza & Hutchens, 2008). A problem that wholly effects the economic opportunities for women in PNG is the lack of “basic financial skills and knowledge needed to access and manage bank services and

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products” (Druzca and Hutchens 2008, p.3). This is due to PNG’s low rate of women reaching appropriate levels of schooling or education. For women in the workforce, there is gender inequality and women are not sure of their rights, thus they lack the confidence and knowledge on how to ensure their rights are met. Unlike many other Pacific countries, PNG lacks a “women-only microfinance scheme supported by the government” (Druzca & Hutchens, 2008, p.3) and therefore there is large opportunity for education and training in the workforce for both women and men to understand opportunities and rights in employment.

6.2 Advancements to Date

For the development and improvement of women’s rights in politics and leadership roles, there have been initiatives taken to support women running for a political seat. In “December 2011, the equality and participation act was passed to introduce 22 reserved seats for women in the National Parliament – one seat per province, plus one for the National Capital District” (Pacific Women in Politics, n.d.). Unfortunately while this act has raised awareness about the issue and there has been a development in the understanding of what progression is needed for women, the bill was not constitutionally amended due to lack of support, therefore it was not implemented for the 2012 elections.

An initiative taken to empower women in politics was the release the handbook, *A Guide for Women Candidates in the 2013 LLG elections PNG*. This handbook was aimed to help women prepare for the election and increase their credibility and rate of success. Accompanying this guide was a two-day workshop based around the content of the handbook, and involved practice parliament where women were able to gain the confidence to speak up in parliament and demand respect.

7. Conclusion

Amnesty International has prepared this submission in response to the inquiry called by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, to address, analyse and evaluate the issues relating to human rights abuses confronting women and girls in Papua New Guinea (Parliament of Australia, 2014). The issues of sexual and family violence, and the undermining of women within leadership roles and economic opportunities are reflected within the analysis of the barriers and impediments and achievements to date in advancing women and girls’ human rights in PNG (Parliament of Australia, 2014). These issues will be addressed further in Amnesty International’s recommendations for the Joint Standing Committee through the suggestion of a top-down approach, politically focused on government intervention within PNG. This approach will target the patriarchal beliefs and traditions the country holds. Amnesty International has demonstrated the importance of implementing the recommendations by highlighting the grave impact that the lack of governmental involvement is currently having on the human rights of women and girls in PNG.

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8. Recommendations

The recommendations provided here are not exhaustive. Amnesty International is focused on addressing “governments, intergovernmental organisations, armed political groups, companies and other non-state actors” (p.3). Considering the organisation’s focus on and expertise in political lobbying, the following recommendations focus on government intervention at the Papua New Guinea parliamentary level.

The human rights issues facing women and girls in the PNG region are deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs and traditions of the nation’s people, including the officials and public figures who influence and govern the country.

In order to influence cultural change, a top-down approach must be applied, beginning with government representatives that advocate for the improvement of the aforementioned issues. Research into similar methods of cultural change has revealed that this suggestion would be beneficial for the people of PNG.

Amnesty International urges the committee to submit the following recommendations to: the Prime Minister, the Minister for Religion, Youth and Community Development, the Minister for Justice and the Attorney General, the Minister for Housing and Urban Development, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Health and HIV Aids, the Minister for Correctional Services, the Minister for Autonomous Regions and the Minister for National Planning.

8.1 Family Violence

- PNG should ensure that national, provincial and local levels of government each have a plan for preventing violence against women and girls. These plans should be made in consultation with NGO’s and outline the obligations of the State, the measures that should be taken, the timeline of events and the resources that will be provided. The implementation of a common framework for responding to family violence will ensure coherence across the PNG region.

8.2 Sexual Violence

- The government of PNG should work with NGOs in order to ensure that women who have experienced sexual violence have access to healthcare, counseling, emergency accommodation and long-term sustainable housing.
- Measures should be implemented to ensure that crimes related to violence against women are punishable under appropriate and consistent legislation. Such legislation should reflect the severity of these sexual crimes.

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8.3 Women's Leadership and Economic Opportunities

- PNG should implement a mentoring system within parliament in order to encourage and teach young women how to become successful leaders. This could be achieved through creating a national network of young women leaders or a national foundation for youth leadership.
- PNG should also consider including leadership and gender sensitivity training in the higher education curriculum.

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10. Documentation

Inquiry details:

Human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region

On 28 February 2014 the Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Julie Bishop MP, asked the Committee to inquire into and report on *The human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region*.

The Committee invites interested persons and organisations to make submissions addressing the terms of reference by **Thursday, 22 May 2014**. Online submissions can be made on this page.

For information on how to make a submission, go to our [Making a submission to a Committee Inquiry](#) page.

Committee Secretariat contact:

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Terms of reference for the aforementioned inquiry:

Terms of Reference

Issues the Sub-Committee will examine include:

- ▶ barriers and impediments to enhancing the human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region, especially regarding the impact of family and sexual violence, women's leadership and economic opportunities;
- ▶ achievements to date in advancing women and girls' human rights in these key areas;
- ▶ implications for economic and social development in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region of promoting women and girls' human rights; and
- ▶ the effectiveness of Australian programs to support efforts to improve the human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region.