

Dialogue

Perspectives on the Crisis

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*Statement to the United Nations
Working Group on Indigenous Populations*

Read by Charles W. Lepani

The Papua New Guinea Government welcomes this opportunity to present to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities its position on the Bougainville crisis.

It may seem Papua New Guinea is moving against the euphoria generated by democratic and independence movements now holding center stage in international geopolitics and on the face of what the subcommission may have been led to believe by the representatives of Bougainville rebels. However, the Papua New Guinea government wishes to put before this subcommission the need to distinguish clearly the historical facts and current political forces underlying the Bougainville crisis, as against what is now transpiring in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.

At the outset, we wish to reaffirm that Bougainville is an integral part of Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is a nation of many tribes, languages, and ethnic groupings. We have as many as eight hundred languages. No one ethnic or tribal grouping dominates government or power in Papua New Guinea. This is the unique development challenge with which our nation is faced. In this regard, all of Papua New Guinea is a nation of indigenous minorities. We have come together as a free, united, and independent nation with one central government but *also* a system of provincial governments allowing for our rich diversity.

Bougainville is not a tribe, nor does it constitute a single linguistic or cultural entity. In precolonial times, Bougainville was never ruled by a single chief. It was like any other region in Papua New Guinea, each having its chiefs and tribal laws and customs. Bougainville people were never a cohesive indigenous people or a single entity of people and they were never marginalized by an independent sovereign Papua New Guinea.

On 16 September 1975, Papua New Guinea achieved independence with Bougainville as a part of the newly independent sovereign nation.

The question of secession was settled when Bougainville became one of the nineteen single administrative units, on the adoption of a system of provincial governments under an indigenous administration.

The record of the government in its handling of secessionist sentiments in Papua New Guinea is one of which we are proud. Far from what you have been led to believe by the representatives of the rebels, the Papua New Guinea government has been very patient and has not been oppressive. The government has continued, to this day, to seek a peaceful resolution through negotiations.

Your subcommission is urged to clearly distinguish between actions by the government of Papua New Guinea, in response to actions of secessionist rebels, which constitute matters of law and protection of sovereign integrity of a nation, as against actions which constitute political oppression.

On the first occasion in 1974-75, when Bougainville secessionists moved to secede from Papua New Guinea, the Papua New Guinea government resorted to lengthy negotiations resulting in agreement to demands of the secessionists for greater power sharing through decentralization and better distribution of benefits of the mine projects in royalties and other development infrastructure for Bougainville. No force was used on the first occasion in 1974-75.

In 1988, secession was again discussed. Mr John Bika, Provincial Minister for Commerce, North Solomons Provincial Government, was appointed to head a select committee on constitutional developments in Bougainville.

Mr Bika filed a report to the North Solomons Provincial Government Assembly whose members were freely elected by the people on a free franchise. The Assembly unanimously accepted his report, rejected secession, and opted for greater decentralized powers. We wish your subcommission to note that all these were achieved without interference whatsoever from the national government.

Mr Bika was assassinated by the militants in 1988, probably for the findings in his report and for reasons known only to them.

The current crisis has developed into a series of armed confrontations from time to time between the rebels and the Papua New Guinea govern-

ment security forces. Such armed confrontations began because the Papua New Guinea government responded by deploying security forces to Bougainville in response to armed aggression of the rebels in the destruction of property and increasingly the terrorizing and killing of Bougainvillians themselves.

The procrastination and vicissitudes of the rebel leaders to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the government have led to unnecessary suffering for the people of Bougainville. Their following has dramatically declined over the recent past. Increasingly now, Bougainville people desire the flow of goods and services from the national government and the reestablishment of legal authority on the island.

The militants have no legal or moral basis or legitimacy to speak for the whole of Bougainville. None of them has been elected by a popular vote to press or fight for independence.

Mr Kabui, Mr Miriori and Mr Ona are close relatives. All of them are from the villages affected by the Panguna copper mine. Mr Sam Kauona is also from the Central Bougainville area. He formed and led the Bougainville Revolutionary Army when his brother was killed during the height of the crisis in 1989.

Mr Kabui, a former seminarian, accuses Papua New Guinea of human rights violations. He chooses to forget the atrocities and vicious attacks by the militants on innocent lives on Bougainville. Mr Kabui does not even have the decency to admit his militants have committed atrocities such as rape, violent attacks on innocent persons, destruction of property, armed robbery and stealing, intimidation by force, trickery, and deception.

A few illustrations will prove the point. The militants carried out summary executions on Mr John Bika, the Provincial Minister for commerce; Mr Joel Naisi, Cocoa Board Chairman and Accountant; Messrs Peter Sisiou and James Iroto, two senior civil servants; Mr Matthew Kove, Ona's uncle; Mr Patrick; Mr Peter Kaipas, and others.

Last year, both Foreign Minister Sir Michael Somare and Attorney General and Justice Minister Mr Bernard Narokobi offered to invite an international commission of jurists team to make an objective assessment of human rights violations by any persons or group on Bougainville during the talks leading to the signing of the Endeavour Accord. Mr Kabui did not accept the invitation. He clearly had atrocities to hide.

The Papua New Guinea National Government has repeatedly stated that it stands ready to make good any violations of human rights where

the courts of law determine such violations. The government has taken a further step. Last week, the attorney general announced the preparation of terms of reference for a coronal inquest into the deaths of all Bougainville people during the period of the crisis.

The so-called Bougainville Revolutionary Army is not a passive, non-violent peace-loving democratic organization as claimed by Mr Kabui. Rather, it is a militant insurgent, racist, illegal, and violent organization, committed to and bent on the use of violence to achieve the destruction of a free, democratic, and independent Papua New Guinea.

The Bougainville Revolutionary Army has neither the democratic legitimacy nor any degree of respectability to establish legitimate authority in Bougainville.

The people from Buka, Nissan, and the adjacent islands have completely rejected secession, in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Buka chiefs and the national government in September 1990 in Kavieng. This MOU has enabled the government to restore and maintain essential government services to these islands.

The creation of the Buka Liberation Front on Buka is a clear rejection of Mr Kabui and the reign of terror perpetrated by the rebels. Other parts of Bougainville would do the same, but for the militants' vicious attacks on those who oppose them.

The Papua New Guinea government had always acknowledged the harmful effects of an open-cut mine, such as was the Panguna mine. The government also acknowledged that the landowners did not get adequate benefits from the mine exploitation. But the fact is that the North Solomons Provincial Government *did* get its share of the royalties.

In spite of the problem, Bougainville, unlike most other provinces, was on the way to being a well-off, progressive province with the largest budget of any provincial government in Papua New Guinea. The bulk of this provincial budget was coming from the royalties from the Panguna mine.

During Mr Kabui's term of office as premier of the province, he ignored and failed to serve the true interests of the landowners. This resulted in open conflict between the young and old landowners. Kabui's leadership did not attend to the situation so it spilled over into the province and the nation.

Any sovereign state has absolute power to defend its sovereign territory and integrity against internal or external threats.

The Papua New Guinea security forces have the legal and the constitutional and moral duty and the right to be on the island of Bougainville.

The Papua New Guinea security forces were never defeated. On the contrary, they were specifically restricted by the government to defensive and protective roles, and now, to the restoration of goods and services.

Since the withdrawal of the security forces, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army has lost its legitimacy and its claim for self-defence. Even after the withdrawal of the Defence Force personnel, the militants continued their violent attacks and murdered a policeman.

Under the Withdrawal Agreement, observed by the Commonwealth Secretariat personnel, the militants were to surrender weapons, which were then to be destroyed. This never occurred. The militants handed in a handful of home-made weapons, which they picked up again and used as soon as the Commonwealth personnel left Bougainville.

The Papua New Guinea government has been extremely tolerant and understanding. It continues to persevere to bring about a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The government has always gone to the negotiations table with an open mind and listening ears. It has given assistance to Bougainville where this has been possible and it has allowed international aid organizations to give humanitarian assistance.

The government is willing to forgive and forget and build together a new and stronger future. But the militants insist on secession and division, using racism as the basis for the creation of a new state. No nation can ever stand on racism alone as its basis for nationhood. Yet there is no cultural or historical basis for an independent Bougainville.

Many states in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific are colonial creations. Papua New Guinea is no exception. Most newly independent states have found it absolutely necessary to maintain the colonial boundaries. Any attempts to redraw boundaries always lead to revolutions, bloodshed, and destruction.

As long as the militants continue to pursue their secessionist goals, peace and security in this region will continue to be threatened.

In this regard, Papua New Guinea may use such measures as it determines necessary to maintain peace, unity, and territorial integrity. It is in the interest of regional security and national prosperity that no false hopes are held out to militant elements.

The government has indicated its willingness to grant greater autonomy to Bougainville, within the context of a united Papua New Guinea. The government has also indicated its willingness to increase the level of benefits flowing to the landowners from the mine development and to seek international assistance to address the environmental issues.

All available evidence shows that the national government's patience and determination to avoid confrontation has led to hardships. The militants have caused severe suffering to the people of Bougainville through their uncompromising commitments to anarchy, racism, and violence.

As mentioned earlier, Papua New Guinea has many customs and languages. In the custom of Mr Kabui among the Nasioi people, the land-owning unit is based on matrilineal descent. Women clan members have the legal right to speak on land issues. Neither Mr Kabui, Mr Ona, nor Mr Kauona have the customary legal legitimacy even to speak for the landowners.

Mr Kabui and Mr Ona have refused to honor the Honiara Declaration which Mr Kabui signed. In particular, they have refused to cooperate in setting up an interim legal authority, as agreed to in Honiara.

A multinational supervisory team cannot be assembled until Mr Kabui agrees to cooperate with the government in setting up the interim legal authority. Simply put, no foreign personnel will go to Bougainville unless they know who they will report to and are sure of their safety.

Let it be made clear once more. The Papua New Guinea security forces were never defeated because Papua New Guinea did not go to fight a war against Bougainville. The militants waged a war against the security forces which were and are now discharging their constitutional duties to protect lives and property on Bougainville.

Indeed, their current presence on Bougainville is a direct response to requests from chiefs in Buka as well as the northern part of mainland Bougainville.

The withdrawal in 1990 was effected at the request of the militants to pave the way for peaceful talks and a nonviolent settlement of the conflict. The result of the withdrawal is that the innocent women and children and old folks of Bougainville are the biggest losers. Contrary to the claim by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, no one is the winner.

Papua New Guinea has demonstrated its capacity to withstand the continued closure of the Panguna mine. It evidently can live without the

Panguna mine. But Bougainville will continue to suffer, unless Mr Kabui can persuade the militants to come to the negotiating table with an open heart to heal the past which hurts and find a new future, and a new hope within the framework of a united Papua New Guinea.

Any heed, direct or indirect, your subcommission gives to the illegal activities of Mr Kabui and the rebels will contribute to the current confusion and suffering of the people of North Solomons Province and Papua New Guinea.

Furthermore, it will not assist the national government's efforts to restore services, restore legitimate authority, and rehabilitate the whole province.

It is the fervent hope and sincere request of the government and people of Papua New Guinea that your subcommission and other international agencies allow the legitimate and democratic government of Papua New Guinea to deal with the Bougainville crisis through the processes already set in train.

Bougainville will continue to remain an integral part of Papua New Guinea, so the issue is an internal matter for my government to resolve.

In conclusion, I put before your subcommission, a summary of the key points of the Papua New Guinea government's position in respect of the Bougainville crisis.

1. Papua New Guinea reaffirms that Bougainville is an integral part of Papua New Guinea.
2. The Papua New Guinea government is not an oppressive government. Our track record of adherence to basic human rights since our country attained independence is open for examination to any international body competent in such matters.
3. The Papua New Guinea government urges this subcommission not to associate the Bougainville crisis with the historical events and developments taking shape in the Soviet Union and the East European countries.
4. Papua New Guinea consists of eight hundred linguistic and ethnic groupings, and more particularly, no one single linguistic and ethnic grouping can rightly claim dominance over others in government, political, and economic life of our country. We are a nation of indigenous minorities, duly constituted through democratic processes as a sovereign independent nation. The government is committed to maintaining and protecting the sovereign integrity of Papua New Guinea.

5. We are proud of our track record for meeting the challenges of democracy in diversity. Decentralization, the renegotiations of the Bougainville Mining Agreement in 1974, and the robust judiciary all attest to our commitment to respect for human rights and democracy.

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THIS STATEMENT was read to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations on 28 August 1991 by Mr Charles W. Lepani, Ambassador for Papua New Guinea to Belgium and the European Community, at Brussels, Belgium.