
Papua New Guinea

In 2005, Human Rights Watch conducted research in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the first time. The summary that follows draws from that research—which focused on police violence against children—and does not purport to offer a comprehensive survey of human rights conditions in the country.

Police Violence

The police routinely use violence, including torture, against individuals in custody. Children are frequent targets. Detainees report being beaten, shot, burned, knifed, gang raped, and forced to have sex with other detainees. Police rarely are held accountable, either internally or in a court of law. Government mechanisms external to the police—the public solicitor’s office, the Ombudsmen’s Commission, and civil claims against the state—are not effective in diminishing police violence or providing victims with redress. The Ombudsman’s Commission, however, has taken useful steps to address government corruption.

In November, police fired into a group of students who had thrown stones as police attempted to arrest and beat their headmaster. Up to three students were reportedly killed and roughly twenty injured, some as young as age nine or ten. The Minister of Police promised to investigate and hold guilty officers accountable.

A 2004 review of the police commissioned by the Minister of Police found that breakdown of discipline and loss of integrity had rendered the force largely ineffective. It recommended urgent and widespread reforms, including the appointment of a Police Ombudsman. Almost none of the reforms recommended by the 2004 review were implemented in 2005, except payment of past due compensation to officers and improvement of police housing.

Detention Conditions

At police stations, detainees are held for weeks or months in squalid conditions that violate basic international standards. Police typically provide no medical care even to seriously injured detainees. In some stations, detainees lack bedding and sufficient food and water. Children routinely are mixed with adults in police lockups, even where separate cells are available.

Girls and Women

Violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, is pervasive. Police often ignore complaints of sexual or domestic violence. Instead of assisting women and girls, some police demand sex

from victims. Girls' and women's low status also is reflected in discrimination in education, health care, and access to paid employment; heavy household workloads; and polygamy.

Despite extensive evidence available to the authorities, no officers were prosecuted in 2005 for beatings and gang rape of women and girls arrested in the raid on the Three-Mile Guest House in March 2004.

Juvenile Justice

An interagency working group, with strong support from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is continuing its efforts to develop a juvenile justice system. As of May 2005, seven juvenile courts were operating in some capacity. In 2004 and early 2005, policies were adopted for police, magistrates, and correctional officials that severely limited the circumstances and conditions under which children could be detained. In April 2005, fifteen volunteer juvenile court officers were commissioned to monitor police treatment of children in police stations. Police inaugurated a single processing center intended for all children detained in the capital. But by September, this center was still not operating. The failure to hold police accountable for implementing the guidelines and for using violence against children threatens to undermine these developments.

HIV/AIDS

Experts believe that at least eighty thousand people—around 3-4 percent of the population in the capital, the highest rate in the South Pacific region—are living with HIV. Some face violence and discrimination in their communities.

Police sexual abuse of males and females increases the risk of HIV transmission. By targeting sex workers and men and boys engaged in homosexual conduct, police violence helps drive these individuals underground and away from lifesaving information on HIV prevention and health services. Public shaming of sex workers as "AIDS carriers" prevents people from seeking HIV-related services for fear of being stigmatized. Police continue to harass persons possessing condoms, including by forcing individuals to chew and swallow condoms and their plastic wrappers. Such responses deter condom use and undermine desperately needed HIV/AIDS prevention work by NGOs and the government.

Education

School fees and related costs pose a significant barrier to children's education and are often linked to non-attendance, dropout, and the entry of children into child labor. School fees are high compared with the average annual income. According to the PNG Department of Labor, caps on school fees in 2004-2005 ranged from 100 kina [US\$31.65] through grade two to 1,200 kina [US\$379.75] for day students in grades eleven through twelve. Per capita gross national income was U.S.\$510 in 2003.

Key International Actors

Australia remains the largest foreign donor by far, reflecting its proximity, colonial history, and continuing special relationship with Papua New Guinea. Much of its aid is directed to the police force. In

late 2004 and early 2005, several hundred Australian Federal Police were deployed alongside Papua New Guinea police, but were withdrawn in May, following the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court's decision that the immunity granted to Australian officers was unconstitutional. By November, it was agreed in principle that that some forty officers would be redeployed as advisors only on corruption, training, and prosecutions.

UNICEF has taken the lead on juvenile justice, with AusAID funding several recent reforms. Other donors include the Asian Development Bank, the European Union, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the World Bank.