



JANUARY 2007

COUNTRY SUMMARY

Papua New Guinea

In 2006 hope persisted that the Papua New Guinean government's stability would contribute to reform of the government and the violent police force. But despite new resources for police and advances in the juvenile justice system, turmoil in police leadership, entrenched corruption, and weak independent accountability mechanisms remain.

Police Violence

Human Rights Watch investigations in 2006 revealed that police continue to routinely use violence, including sexual violence and torture, against individuals in custody. Children are frequent targets.

Police are rarely held accountable, either internally or in a court of law. As of August 2006 the public prosecutor's office had not received the cases of two officers charged in the October 2005 shootings of unarmed schoolboys in Enga province in which at least one boy was killed and 21 injured. Then-Minister of Police Bire Kimisopa sent an investigatory team that arrested the two officers, following armed resistance from local police.

Despite extensive evidence available to authorities, no police officers have been charged or prosecuted for beatings and gang raping women and girls arrested in a raid on the Three-Mile Guest House in March 2004.

Human and financial resource allocations for police increased in 2006. Several hundred new police officers were recruited. However, implementation of the government's 2004 review of police, which proposed sweeping changes in discipline and structure, was limited to housing and salary increases.

Juvenile Justice and Detention of Children

The government progressed in developing the juvenile justice system in 2006, although actual changes in police treatment of children remain elusive.

Reception centers for processing children began operating in the Port Moresby and Lae police stations, and police established a small unit to divert children from the formal justice system and monitor their treatment by police. Juvenile magistrates agreed to screen children for police violence and to visit places of juvenile detention but had not done so as of August 2006.

Police routinely detain children with adults in police lockups, where they are denied medical care and placed at risk of rape and other forms of violence. Although Human Rights Watch found instances of children being separated from adults in 2006, separation remains the exception, not the rule.

In prisons and other juvenile institutions, children awaiting trial are mixed with those already convicted. Many facilities lack blankets, beds, mosquito nets, clothes, or any education or rehabilitation programs—acute problems, given that children may face months or even years in detention awaiting trial. At least one national court judge inspected prisons and police lockups in 2006 and ordered repairs.

On January 15, 2006, corrections officers at Buimo prison in Lae beat and sexually abused boys by forcing them to have anal sex with each other in the institution's reception center. Although corrections officials told Human Rights Watch that officers were punished, they confirmed that the officers continued to work at the prison.

Violence and Discrimination against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls—including domestic violence, gang rape, and torture and murder for alleged sorcery—are pervasive. Police often ignore complaints and ask victims for money or sex. Girls' and women's low status also is reflected in discrimination in education, health care, and employment; heavy household workloads; and polygyny. The parliament of Papua New Guinea has only one woman member.

HIV/AIDS

With as many as 140,000 people living with HIV/AIDS, Papua New Guinea has the highest prevalence in the South Pacific. Access to antiretroviral therapy is limited, and few have the tools to protect themselves from infection. Violence and discrimination against women and girls likely is fueling the growing epidemic. People living with HIV/AIDS often face violence and discrimination in their communities.

Ill-treatment by police heightens HIV risk. Police target street vendors as well as female sex workers, men, and boys suspected of homosexual conduct for beatings and rape. Police also extort money from such individuals, using the threat of arresting them for illegal activities. Police are also known to abuse people simply for carrying condoms, in the most egregious instances forcing men and women to eat condoms; such actions deter condom use and undermine protection efforts. However, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported some improvements on the part of a few individual officers in 2006.

Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms

The Ombudsman Commission, which primarily monitors government corruption, has a human rights unit, but the latter had only one staff member in 2006. The unit's active cases are against police or corrections officials. Following the commission's referral of several ministers and parliamentarians to the public prosecutor for investigation in early 2006, parliament established a committee to review the office's mandate, raising concerns that the commission's oversight power would be weakened.

Prohibitive costs and procedural difficulties make it all but impossible for many citizens to pursue civil claims against police officers suspected of abuse. Where victims are able to bring successful claims, the penalties imposed fail to deter police violence because the costs are born by the state, not the police force or individual officers.

Revived proposals to establish a National Human Rights Commission again stalled without reaching parliament in 2006.

Human Rights Defenders

NGOs and women's rights activists play an essential role in obtaining services for victims of violence, but some continue to be threatened for their work. Some HIV/AIDS educators again faced police harassment in 2006.

Environmental groups faced threats after they published new reports on the powerful logging and mining industries in 2006. The reports charged that companies paid police who arbitrarily beat, detained, and intimidated landowners.

Key International Actors

Australia continues to be the largest foreign donor. Following the collapse in 2005 of an agreement to deploy Australian Federal Police alongside Papua New Guinea's police, Australia's engagement with the Papua New Guinea police remained under negotiation at this writing.

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.

In 2006 the UN special rapporteur on torture requested an invitation to visit Papua New Guinea. In late 2005, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions wrote to the government regarding the police shootings of schoolboys in Enga province. At this writing, the government had not responded to either communication.

This summary does not address human rights developments in Bougainville.