

EMBARGOED UNTIL 15 SEPTEMBER 1997**Papua New Guinea: South Pacific Forum discussion on Bougainville essential for regional stability**

Regional governments attending the annual South Pacific Forum meeting in Rarotonga, the Cook Islands, should use the occasion to pressure the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government to address the human rights situation on Bougainville, Amnesty International said today.

“Stability and security in the South Pacific region cannot be achieved without putting a stop to human rights violations on Bougainville”, the human rights organization said.

Since the conflict began in 1988, unlawful killings, “disappearances”, illegal detention, and torture and ill-treatment have been committed by the PNG Defence Force, the government-backed paramilitary Bougainvillean Resistance Forces and by the armed opposition group, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA).

“These abuses have had spill-over effects in the region – including refugee outflows and border incursions – underlining the need for regional governments to recognise that protection and promotion of human rights on Bougainville can only lead to greater security throughout the whole region,” Amnesty International said.

While the issue of Bougainville is not formally on the agenda of the South Pacific Forum meetings – the most significant opportunity for regional governmental discussions – Amnesty International believes that the governments attending must give consideration to how abuses on Bougainville can be brought to an end.

Positive steps towards a resolution of the conflict have been seen in recent months – including talks among Bougainvillean leaders facilitated by the New Zealand government. Amnesty International welcomes the New Zealand government’s efforts and hopes that it will use its influence to ensure the inclusion of human rights in the continuing process.

While the PNG government has not committed to the Burnham Declaration which resulted from the talks, the declaration provides all sides in the conflict with the opportunity to fully consider human rights protection mechanisms as part of any peace process.

“The inclusion and strengthening of measures such as monitoring and verification of human rights violations is essential to the long-term resolution of the Bougainville conflict,” Amnesty International said. “South Pacific Forum governments should therefore use bilateral and informal talks during their annual meeting to pressure the PNG government to take the measures necessary to protect human rights on Bougainville and to ensure that human rights are a fundamental component of any peace talks.”

For further information see Amnesty International, *Bougainville: Human rights and Peace; A Briefing*, ASA 34/09/97, 15 September 1997.