

# **PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

## **Open letter to Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan concerning the recruitment of foreign military personnel for Bougainville**

Dear Prime Minister,

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the use of foreign private military personnel in support of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) operations on Bougainville, a move which could contribute to further human rights violations.

Amnesty International understands that your government has entered into an agreement with Sandlines International to provide military training, expertise, advice and equipment for operations on Bougainville and that 40 foreigners, subcontracted by Sandlines International through Executive Outcomes, an organization which engages in mercenary-like activities, are already in PNG training the PNGDF Special Forces.

Amnesty International opposes all military, security and police transfers, including transfers of personnel, which contribute to human rights violations. Amnesty International believes that the use of foreign military personnel in support of the PNGDF on Bougainville could contribute further to an already serious human rights situation. What Bougainville needs is human rights monitors, not mercenaries.

You will by now have received a major report Amnesty International released on 26 February 1997 documenting serious human rights violations on Bougainville by members of the PNG Defence Force and the government-backed paramilitary Resistance Forces, as well as abuses by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA).<sup>1</sup> In 1996 alone, Amnesty International documented at least 44 unlawful killings and “disappearances” by the security forces on Bougainville.

PNG’s military and political leadership have been unwilling to hold members of the PNGDF and the Resistance Forces to account for their involvement in human rights violations on Bougainville. This lack of accountability is one of the major contributing factors to these continuing atrocities and has been exacerbated by problems of discipline and chains of command.

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<sup>1</sup>Papua New Guinea: Bougainville: The Forgotten Human Rights Tragedy, 26 February 1997, AI Index ASA 34/01/97.

Mercenaries operate outside the normal criminal justice system and on the fringes of military command structures. If human rights violations result from their deployment it is much harder to hold them to account than regular members of a country's security force, not least because such personnel can leave the country at any time and thus escape any accountability. The problems of Bougainville show that the PNG Government must move to strengthen discipline and accountability for forces deployed on the island, not undermine it further by the possible deployment of foreign private military personnel.

Throughout the Bougainville conflict many real and suspected members of the BRA have been unlawfully killed by the PNGDF and the Resistance Forces on Bougainville, in contravention of international humanitarian law. Given the record of such violations on Bougainville, Amnesty International is concerned that special operations targeted at the political and military leaders of the BRA could lead to breaches of these international standards, the use of unjustifiable force and the killing of non-combatants. The history of the conflict on Bougainville has shown that human rights violations, including indiscriminate attacks against civilians, have increased at times of heightened military activity.

Your government claims that the private foreign military personnel have been recruited to conduct training for members of the PNGDF. What the security forces operating on Bougainville need is training in international human rights standards and humanitarian law. What steps has your government taken to ensure that training contains a human rights component, including international human rights standards and humanitarian law? What human rights expertise do the foreign trainers you have recruited have? Have any members of the PNGDF undergoing training been involved in serious human rights violations and if so, what action has been taken to make them accountable? What procedures are there in place to monitor the human rights impact of the training, especially in relation to the future conduct of those members of the PNGDF who will receive the training?

The recruitment and deployment of foreign military personnel by the government ignores the many calls for access to Bougainville to be opened up to human rights monitors and the media. It runs the very real risk of escalating human rights violations on the island still further.

Amnesty International urges you to implement the recommendations made in its recent report and those made by UN human rights bodies and experts, which could end the cycle of human rights violations on Bougainville.

Yours sincerely

Pierre Sané  
Secretary-General