

Submission by Society for Threatened Peoples

a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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Papua New Guinea

Over the next three decades Papua New Guinea's gross domestic product is expected to be doubled by revenue from natural gas exploitation done by the American oil company ExxonMobil. But the widespread corruption – the country is ranked 154th of 178 countries in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption perception index measure – is likely to prevent that the public will benefit from it. The land tenure grants control over 97 percent of the land to customary landowners, primarily indigenous people. It is expected that more than 60,000 people own land where gas will be extracted or transported.

55 percent of the forests of the country remain as intact forest landscapes so far. Industrial logging has resulted in the second highest proportion of national greenhouse gas emissions from land use and land use change and forestry in the world. Many communities have not benefitted from the logging; they have lost their forests and waterways. 85 percent of Papua New Guineans live in the forests and nearby rural areas. One third of the population lives on less than 1.25 US-\$ a day.

Land rights

Papua New Guineans comprise hundreds of ethnic groups. On 28 May, 2010, the parliament of Papua New Guinea amended sections of the Environment and Conservation Act 2000, which rules of major resource projects. Through the amendments, the director of the Office of Environment and Conservation is given far-reaching powers to grant various certificates with regards to environmental plans submitted by investors. Furthermore, there are provisions that state that complying certificates issued by the director will be final. These laws protect the interest of investors at the expense of the environment and the owners of the resources.

For years Papua New Guineans had had rights to their property from environmental damages and were allowed to sue for compensation for environmental damage.

Between 1989 and 1999 more than 5,000 people died in the island of Bougainville off the east coast following a fight over compensation between the Australian-owned mining company Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) and hundreds of indigenous landowners displaced by it in Panguna.

Witch hunts

Under the 1976 Sorcery Act sorcery is officially recognised by the government. White magic such as healing or fertility rites is permitted. Black arts are punishable by up to two years in jail, though.

The chairman of the nation's law reform commission had stated that there has been an escalation in sorcery killings. In 2008 alone there were 50 sorcery killings reported in just two highland provinces. Branding someone a witch is crime. Local police estimates that less than 1 percent of cases are investigated in court since witchcraft is a taboo subject.

People who are accused of sorcery are sometimes tried in local courts composed of tribesmen and village councils. Most times the killings are committed by men who first torture the so-called

witches to get a confession and force them to name other witches. In some villages there are vigilante murderers who kill those who are only suspected to be witches. The police often are unable to enforce the law since there is a lack of trust in the police and the judiciary. After men had shot dead a 60-year old male and thrown into a fire in Ban village. His son then was burnt alive. They had been accused to have caused the death of a prominent member of the community by sorcery.

When the police wanted to visit the crime scene, heavily armed locals prevented them from removing the bodies to hospital for autopsies.

The latest case occurred when three men were shot dead and their bodies chopped to pieces in Papua in an ongoing tribal fight that was sparked by a sorcery killing. Eastern Highlands police say the killings took place in Kompri during a dawn raid by an enemy tribe on 5 October, 2010.

Prison conditions

Neither prisons, nor police detention centers have medical care facilities. In some police holding cells, detainees lacked bedding and sufficient food and water. The prisons in the country had a holding capacity of 3,600 beds, though at the end of 2009 the number of inmates was 4,901. Men and women are mostly held separately, but some prisons in the rural area lack separate facilities.

Due to very limited police and judicial resources and a high crime rate, suspects often are held in pretrial detention for lengthy periods. The slow pace of police investigations, particularly in locating witnesses, and occasional political interference or police corruption frequently delayed cases for months.

Illegal logging

All commercial timber production from natural forest areas is owned by privately owned companies. A review by the government of Papua New Guinea showed that none of the 14 forestry operations between 2000 and 2005 could be seen as legal. Only one met more than 50 percent of key criteria for a lawful logging operation. The International Tropical Timber Organisation's criteria for sustainable logging weren't met by any of the logging concessions. A Missing financial accountability and oversight of government ministries were admitted by the Forest Minister in 2008 when he publicly stated that laws are often violated with the support of corrupt administration members.

In 2009 the Auditor General of Papua New Guinea stated that about 360 million Dollars had been stolen annually by corrupt officials.

Forced evictions in mining areas

Between April and July 2009 police raided villages in the highlands and burnt down some 300 homes around the Porgera gold mine. The Porgera gold mine is 95 percent owned and run by subsidiaries of the largest gold mining company in the world, the Canadian-based Barrick Gold Corporation, as part of the Porgera Joint Venture. The residents of the area had no prior warning that their homes would be destroyed.

In 2009, the Norwegian Government divested its Pension Fund of shares in Barrick Gold as a result of findings by the fund of massive environmental damage downstream from the mine caused by the dumping of toxic mine waste into the local 800-kilometre long river system.