

Amnesty International UK

MEDIA BRIEFING

COMMONWEALTH GAMES GLASGOW 2014

PAPUA NEW GUINEA, SOLOMON ISLANDS AND VANUATU:

WHERE ACCUSATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT CAN LEAD TO EXTREME VIOLENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: WEDNESDAY 30 JULY

“Last year, a young mother was brutally attacked and murdered after being accused of sorcery in Papua New Guinea. It is incomprehensible that sorcery-related violence, including murder, is taking place today. Accusations of sorcery and witchcraft are leading to extreme violence, especially against women, and destroying families and communities with the perpetrators acting in an atmosphere of impunity.

“Governments must commit to measures to end this systematic violence against women; ensuring all cases are fully investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice. Political leadership and condemnation of all violence against women; as well as improving education, healthcare and protections for women and women’s human rights defenders are vital in preventing these abhorrent crimes.”

Siobhan Reardon – Programme Director, Amnesty International Scotland

Amnesty spokesperson available throughout the Games

Daily media briefings available throughout the Games

Sorcery-related violence

In February 2013, 20-year-old Kepari Leniata was stripped, tied up, doused in petrol and burned alive by relatives of a boy who had died following an illness in the city of Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea’s third largest city. The attackers claimed Kepari caused the boy’s death through sorcery.

Unfortunately, Kepari’s case is not an isolated one. Amnesty International has received reports of girls as young as eight being attacked and accused of sorcery, and children being orphaned as a result of one or both their parents being killed after accusations of witchcraft.

Just two months after Kepari Leniata’s murder, it was reported that six women and a man were abducted and subjected to acts of appalling cruelty by a group who accused them of witchcraft. The attack is reported to have taken place in Papua New Guinea in an Easter ‘witch-hunt’, according to local media.

Sorcery-related violence in Papua New Guinea as well as other Melanesian countries such as the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, is a significant barrier to progress and development, particularly for women, who are more likely to be accused, and to suffer extreme forms of violence for it, than men.

Amnesty International has called for a number of measures to address this, including: improving education and healthcare; ensuring that acts of sorcery-related violence are fully investigated and prosecuted; clear leadership condemning all acts of violence against women (including sorcery-related violence); and improving protections for women and women's human rights defenders. A key factor to escalating sorcery-related violence is that the perpetrators know they can act with impunity and community leaders often fail to strongly condemn the violence.

In May 2013, in a positive move, Papua New Guinea's Parliament repealed the 1971 Sorcery Act. It provided for a reduced sentence to anyone that committed assault or murder if they said their victim had been committing acts of sorcery. However, the harsher penalties have not reduced reports of sorcery-related violence, nor did they prevent the murder of Kepari Laniata.

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