

# **Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific**

To the Human Rights Sub-Committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Defence and Trade,

*The following submission is presented by:*

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## Summary

Many of Australia's current policy and legislative frameworks relating to the Pacific region, render the Australian nation state as one of the most serious and substantial actors that can directly influence and impart significant change in the lived and material realities of women and girls throughout the Pacific region. For example, Australia's current seat on the Human Rights Council with a central pillar of gender equality, our enshrinement of the Modern Slavery Act (2018), our role as Papua New Guinea's (PNG) largest trade and commercial partner and Australia's significant aid budget for Official Development Assistance for PNG. As PNG's closest neighbour there are inherent moral and ethical questions that cannot be ignored. It is imperative that Australia's geo-political positioning is activated and remains central in any analysis of our international obligation and responsibility to protect some of the most basic and universal human rights.

This submission will outline some of the critical influences Australia can impact to make strong positive progress toward reducing the extreme violence against women and girls in PNG and West Papua (WP). The key position of this submission asserts that the Australian Government needs to strategically leverage its geo-political power to activate long term structural support for PNG women working on the ground.

There are many PNG women who are empowered agents of change, actively and persistently working across sectors toward outcomes and objectives that centre the role of PNG women.

Our team has produced a study that applied a systems-mapping approach to the issue of violence against women and modern slavery in Papua New Guinea and West Papua (WP). Through conducting this study, we developed a *Systems Map* which demonstrates some of the significant causal relations between key stake-holders such as Government, NGOs, NFPs and Corporate sectors. Importantly the Systems Map highlights how PNG women themselves are situated as the central social drivers required to articulate and implement self-determined and sovereign solutions for their own futures. Our systems map can be accessed here:

Systems Map: <https://embed.kumu.io/fe1f71110c7ac139545b6d80349b5921>.

The analysis and findings of our study highlight some of the unintended negative consequences that high-level policy decisions often have at the community level. Particularly when they are made without community-level engagement at the stage of design, conceptualisation and then how this translates into implementation on the ground. It showed us that the people with the best understanding of the problem are often excluded from the process of norm and structural change. It also showed us how self-determined grassroots action are currently excluded from these policy and program design processes, limiting their effectiveness and retrenching further disempowerment of the women at the heart of the problem.

- **The role of civil society groups in Pacific Islands in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality**

At the community level, Femili PNG and City Mission are the largest NGOs in PNG, providing shelter and legal services to the survivors of violence. In addition to these city-based NGOs, Kafe Women's Association and Kup Women for Peace are key activist networks led by women survivors that work with the communities, especially men as agents of change. They are deliberately using technology like Radio, TV and Facebook to reach out to men and women in the remotest parts of the country.

Churches play an integrating role in the community, bringing together the 800 different languages spoken in PNG. Some churches use a 5-point strategy to tackle abuse by creating social accountability among the perpetrators, diffusing local disputes through early interventions and instilling respect for law through prayer meetings.

While immediate relief measures are necessary to alleviate hardships and protect survivors, the approach of changing mind-sets appears to be more sustainable on a long run.

- **The key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls' in the Pacific context**
- **Engagement of these groups with Australia's Pacific Step-up**

*Layer 1: Stakeholder Type*

The first layer depicts the different types of stakeholders that shape the interactions and experiences of Papuan women related to exploitation and violence. The map has been divided into two types of stakeholder.

*Layer 2: Tier 1 Interactions (Systems Actors)*

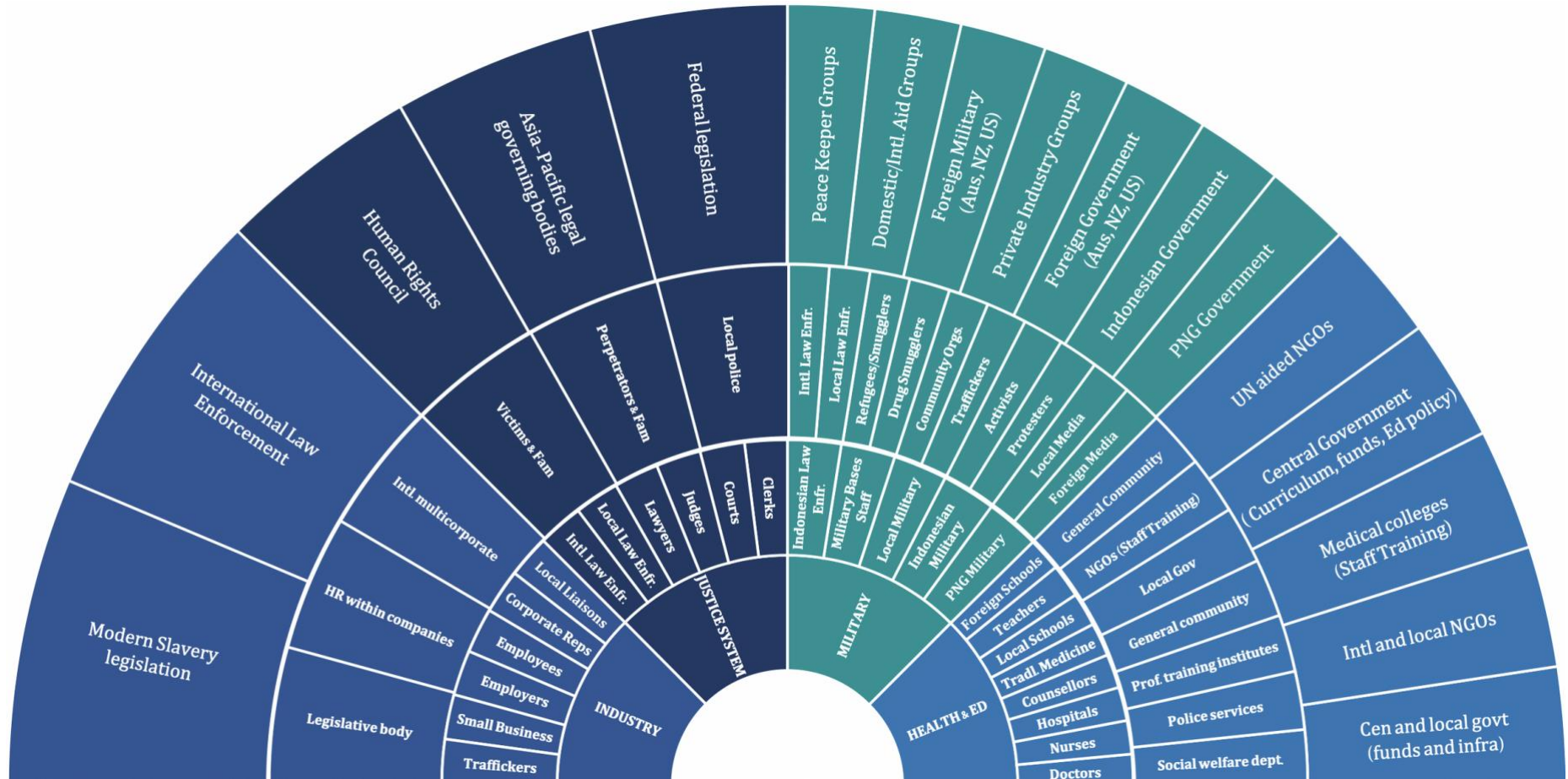
This tier represents stakeholders who the women interact directly with its contributors to either the challenge or solutions landscape. Given the proximity of these stakeholders to the women they naturally bear the most profound impact on the women themselves yet control a relatively low level of power in the system.

*Layer 3: Tier 2 Interactions (Systems Drivers)*

This tier represents individuals, organisations, or institutions who have direct and authoritative interactions with Tier 1 actors, but not necessarily with the women themselves. Tier 2 stakeholders are seen to impact the system of exploitation by incentivising/disincentivising or enabling/disabling Tier 1 actors in their direct interactions and impact on women.

*Layer 4: Tier 3 Interactions (Systems Steerers)*

The outer layer of the map represents organisational and institutional stakeholders who hold governing authority in the system and interact directly in varying forms with Tier 2 actors. Layer is characterised as having the highest level of systematic power yet the lowest amount of direct interaction with women, displaying a clear disconnection between systemic power and personal impact.





- **The effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls**

The overseas development assistance Australia budgets for PNG each year is substantial at \$578.0 million for the 2018-19 Total Australian ODA Estimated Outcome, according to the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade* (DFAT). Currently this assistance is not integrated with the most effective levers of change including trade and industry. A significant amount of the violence is perpetuated around the operations of mining companies due to the large masculine culture and norms surrounding this industry. This sector is also a heavily male-dominated industry further perpetuating the inequality in employment the region.

It is pertinent that we look deeper to some of the complexities which shape and contextualise the role of Australia's Pacific Aid program. As the aid program has intended outcomes that are currently not working effectively with the key levers of change throughout the region. As DFAT describes, Australia is PNG's largest trading and commercial partner and major imports to Australia from PNG are gold, crude petroleum, silver and platinum, which is the resource sector (DFAT, 2020). This means that Australia has a significant amount of influence to be able to directly engage this issue at the points where it is the extreme. If Australia were to engage with the resource sector, including mining companies, in a business dialogue through the *Australia-Papua New Guinea Ministerial Forum Business Dialogue* or through the *Bilateral Business and Officials Working Group*, then this would ensure Australian overseas development assistance programs are effectively supporting its obligation and responsibility to protect human rights of women and girls.



- **Other related matters**

Policy recommendations regarding trade and foreign affairs:

1. Australia should **create specific targets for Aid contributions that focus on increasing women's representation in leadership positions in institutions** from all parts of Papua New Guinea including local government, policing, health services, legal services and program delivery.
2. Australia should use its strong relationship and influence with Indonesia to create regional stability in the West Papuan population. Australia can do this through **funding data collection projects focused on collating data about the incidence of violence and classify this within our implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality** plan which aims towards the reduction of violence against women. There is currently little to no evidence of the conviction rate of violence against women in Papua New Guinea and there is no clear data on the number of women killed by witch-hunts annually. This **paucity of data further removes any possibility of accountability, rendering the women more vulnerable and invisible to the international community and national government.**
3. Australia should use the **newly acquired seat on the Human Rights Council to push broader reform of the trade relationship with the Pacific Islands.** This can be addressed through working closely with industry to ensure that all companies doing business within Papua New Guinea have strong human rights principles and have Community Liaison Officers who are well accustomed and culturally sensitive to the issues in the region.
4. Australia should **leverage its position as PNG's largest trading and commercial partner** with bilateral trade worth A\$6.7 billion in 2018 to **ensure that any company directly engaged with goods and services that are traded to Australia are free of modern slavery and have no issues with violence against women.** This includes ensuring that all employees, contractors and sub-contractors within or related to these companies,

especially the resource sector worth A\$17 billion (2018) have not had any reported incidences of violence against women.

5. Australia should **seek out representation of West Papua at international institutions including Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** and CEDAW which Australia sends a delegation to each year.
6. Australia should continue to support cultural change programs targeted at young men to ensure generational cultural change.
7. Australia should ensure that any programs that are funded under the considerable aid budget have a **strong understanding of the Wantok system** and the role this plays in traditional PNG culture. The Wantok system can sometimes be a barrier to the reduction in violence against women in PNG as it **encourages favours that help men avoid state sanctioned punishment for crimes committed against women**, threatening good governance. However, the system could instead be utilised to shape discourse on gender-equality.
8. Australia should use its aid budget to ensure that there is **collaboration across institutions** to make lasting progress and it is imperative that solutions are collaborative. This involves building platforms where best practices can be shared and nurtured across power hierarchies.