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The Human Cost of Environmental Neglect

When "Values" Trample Over Rights

A Failed Approach to Corporate Accountability

Papua New Guineas (PNG) significant oil, gas, and gold reserves are powering strong economic growth. In the last four years, the countrys gross domestic product has doubled. Yet poor governance and corruption prevent ordinary citizens from benefitting from this wealth. Large-scale extractive projects have generated environmental and human rights concerns that the government has failed to address, and disputes over compensating landowners impacted by these projects trigger protests and occasional violence.

One year after the United Nations special rapporteur on torture released a report on PNG, the government has failed to adequately respond to his recommendations. Police and security forces continue to commit abuses with impunity. Violence against women is rampant.

In 2012, political turmoil paralyzed the government. Parliament re-elected Peter O'Neill as prime minister after Julys general election despite a December 2011 Supreme Court ruling that the change of government in August 2011, in which parliamentarians first elected him prime minister, was unconstitutional. Former Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare, the countrys dominant political figure for more than 40 years, joined O'Neills coalition. While the new leadership has made positive strides in instituting a more transparent political culture, much work remains in reversing the legacy of corruption and unaccountable governance.

Extractive industries are PNGs key economic driver. The US\$15 billion ExxonMobil Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project, currently under construction, is expected to begin output by 2014. LNG contractors had disputes in 2012 with local landowners over land use compensation, as well as with workers protesting benefits.

The Porgera gold mine, 95 percent owned by the Canadian firm Barrick Gold, accounts for approximately 11 percent of the countrys GDP. A 2011 Human Rights Watch report implicated the mines operators in serious abuses. The report documented gang rapes and other violent abuses at the mine site by private security personnel. In January 2011, Barrick fired six employees for involvement in, or failure to report, alleged sexual violence. In October 2012, Barrick began implementing a remediation framework to provide compensation and assistance to women who suffered sexual violence at the hands of its personnel. The company said that the program would include financial reparations, legal aid, and access to medical and psychological support services.

Human Rights Watch has previously documented widespread abuse by PNGs police, including use of excessive force against demonstrators, torture, and sexual violence, including against children.

In September, a police officer was suspended from duty and charged with assault after attacking a school administrator for sending his son home from school. In October, an officer received a 15-year prison sentence for sexually assaulting a woman in police custody. That

same month, another officer was found guilty of sexually assaulting his daughter. Yet despite these signs of progress, police impunity remains the norm.

Women and girls are victims of rampant sexual violence in PNG. In March, the UN special rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, visited the country on a fact-finding mission and observed that violence against women is a pervasive phenomenon in the home, the community and institutional settings. Manjoo also documented the governments failure to hold perpetrators to account. In June 2011, the draft Family Planning Law, which would criminalize domestic violence, was sent to the attorney generals office. More than a year later, the bill had yet to be sent to parliament for a vote.

Corruption remains a serious problem in PNG. In October, Task Force Sweep, the government-appointed team tasked with investigating institutional graft, estimated that close to 3.8 billion PNG Kina (US\$1.7 billion) from the countrys budget was lost due to corruption between 2009 and 2011.

Earlier in May, the task force submitted its report on its seven-month investigation into corruption across government agencies including the departments of Health and National Planning and Monitoring. The report documented 20 politicians who had been referred to the ombudsman commission for further investigation and 24 public servants who had been suspended for facilitating or benefiting from corruption. Systemic graft continues to negatively impact the countrys ability to provide basic social and economic services, such as infrastructure improvements and access to health care and education.

Australia is the countrys most important international partner and provided over \$500 million dollars in development assistance in 2012.

In September, after the Australian parliament approved legislation that authorizes the transfer from Australian territory of irregular maritime arrival Australia and PNG agreed to reopen a processing center on Manus Island for asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat. However, that agreement does not release PNG from its obligations as a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention for ensuring a fair refugee status determination process and respect for the principle of non-refoulement (non-return to persecution), as well as being responsible for humane treatment of migrants and durable solutions for refugees.

In October, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres sent a letter raising concerns about PNGs capacity to act as a regional processing country for asylum claims, including the absence of any national legal or regulatory framework for asylum processing, and its failure to sign international treaties against torture and in favor of protecting stateless people. At this writing, PNG authorities expected the processing center on Manus Island to begin operating in late 2012.

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people in 90 countries worldwide, spotlighting abuses and bringing perpetrators to justice

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