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**BOUGAINVILLE: INTERNATIONAL ACTION ESSENTIAL AS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE**

**SYDNEY** -- Deliberate and unlawful killings and "disappearances" continue unabated in the province of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (PNG), while the international community turns a blind eye to the ongoing conflict there, Amnesty International said in a report released today.

"Previous promises from the PNG Government to halt the violations have proved empty," Amnesty International said. "It's time the international community called on PNG to account for the actions of its defence forces."

The fifty-page report is based on Amnesty International's first research trip to the province, although the organization was denied permission from the authorities to travel to the island of Bougainville itself.

After eight years of conflict in Bougainville between the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) and the armed secessionist Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), the PNG Government is doing little or nothing to stop the human rights violations in the province, according to Amnesty International.

The PNGDF and members of the government-backed paramilitary Resistance Forces were responsible for at least 44 unlawful or indiscriminate killings or "disappearances" in 1996 alone.

"Poor discipline, a weak chain of command and an unwillingness to hold individuals responsible for their actions have created a culture of impunity in Bougainville and contributed to the continuing cycle of violations," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned that the PNGDF and the Resistance Forces operate virtually free from public scrutiny because of restrictions imposed by the PNG authorities on access for the media and independent human rights monitors. There has been little action by the government to investigate human rights violations -- Amnesty International knows of only one case since 1989 which has been thoroughly investigated by the authorities and no case that has been prosecuted.

The BRA has also committed deliberate and arbitrary killings which are documented in Amnesty International's report on the human rights situation in the province. Amnesty International condemns these abuses, and calls upon the BRA to uphold international humanitarian law, to cease holding prisoners as hostages and to prevent deliberate or arbitrary killings.

The organization is calling on the governments represented at the forthcoming 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to put pressure on the PNG authorities to bring an end to the violations in Bougainville, prosecute the offenders and provide justice for the victims. Although previous resolutions of the Commission have not been fully implemented by the PNG Government, Bougainville was not discussed at the 1996 session.

"The people of Bougainville have a right to justice. The international community cannot close its eyes to the contempt of the PNG Government to human rights on Bougainville," Amnesty International said.

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