



PAPUA NEW GUINEA
WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER
ANNA BENNY APPEAL CASE
(ASA 34/005/2006)

In the second week of November 2005, Anna Benny, a human rights defender from Goroka town in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, disappeared. Her family did not report her missing and the police did not look for her. When a friend inquired after her, she was told by Anna's family that Anna had gone to a dance somewhere and hadn't returned. Further inquiries revealed a different story.

"She was one hell of a woman, my friend and sister Anna Benny."

Reliable sources have now reported that Anna went to the assistance of her sister-in-law who was being held in a house and attacked on suspicion of practising sorcery. Along with her sister-in-law, Anna was reportedly shot and killed.

Witch-hunt and human rights abuses

Sorcery related killings are common in parts of Papua New Guinea. Sarah Garap, another human rights defender from the Highlands explained:

"No one is safe in the Highlands. If one person dies of an illness, or car accident, or any kind of accidental death, it inevitably gets related to some sorcery practices. For every one death, one or more other people must die 95% of the time it is women who get accused, tortured and killed. It is a community verdict against an individual, and in most cases the family and relatives have to give their consent or approval for such torturing and murder to happen."

Like Anna, those who intervene are themselves at risk of being accused and killed. A conspiracy of community silence

surrounds these killings, and those who speak out or seek justice are, according to Sarah Garap, *"at risk of being attacked for 'unburying' what was 'buried'."*

Official Silence

The police in Papua New Guinea have done little to penetrate this silence. Very few sorcery related deaths are investigated by police and the perpetrators are rarely brought to justice. In Anna's case, the police in Goroka refused to take any action to investigate her death, claiming that they had received no complaint from the family to act upon. When a friend of Anna's went to the police she was reportedly told: "Have you seen it happen? How do you know? We cannot act on hearsay reports."

A local women's organisation is now conducting its own investigation into Anna's death and keeping a register of others who have been killed and the circumstances of their deaths. Already their work has resulted in threats against the organisation's members. They are determined, however, that by pursuing justice in this case they can set a precedent. They consider that this is the least Anna deserves after the way she herself so often struggled to ensure that violence against women and girls was not ignored or condoned by the community.

"Have you seen it happen? How do you know? We cannot act on hearsay reports."

For example, her friends recall one typical occasion when Anna intervened after three young girls, from 7 – 11 years old, were abducted and raped in the context of tribal

fighting in the Eastern Highlands. Anna went with a team of community leaders to negotiate the release of the three girls. She refused, however, to take part in so called "peace negotiations" designed to resolve the matter by way of a compensation payment between the fighting tribes.

"It is not your business"

She refused to allow the rape of the young girls to be viewed merely as a "pay back" tool used by one tribe against the other to avenge some perceived wrong. Instead she insisted that the police must be involved and that those responsible for the abduction and rape must face charges. She was repeatedly told, "It is not your business. This is a family matter. You are minding other people's business." On this occasion, despite her efforts none of the perpetrators were charged or faced trial, although Anna was able to ensure the girls were returned to their families. Anna was

not deterred, however, and continued to advocate for violence against women to be treated as a serious criminal matter, to be dealt with by the police and formal courts.

Working Alone and Without Support

According to her friend Sarah Garap: "She was one hell of a woman, my friend and sister Anna Benny. She is an example of (the) social actors who are working virtually alone and unsupported. In many instances they work against victim's own families and a community which supports violence as a way of meting out so called 'justice'".

Anna Benny's death should be investigated by the police and those responsible should be brought to justice. Take Action Now to call on the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary to ensure that Anna Benny's death, like that of so many other women accused of sorcery, does not go uninvestigated and unpunished.



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Anna Benny (back row, second from left) at a Human Rights and Village Courts training session in Papua New Guinea, July 2005, where the issue of sorcery beliefs and human rights abuses was discussed.


BACKGROUND COUNTRY INFORMATION

To learn more about the failure of the State to meet its obligations to women in Papua New Guinea see Amnesty International's report "*PNG: Violence Against Women: Not Inevitable; Never Acceptable!*" (ASA 34/002/2006). Although violence against women is pervasive in Papua New Guinea, few steps have been taken by the police and other government agencies to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women or to provide reparations to survivors of such violence. Healthcare, counselling and legal services for women who have suffered gender based violence are almost non-existent outside the capital, Port Moresby. Women reporting gender based violence to the police are frequently sent away and told their cases are not of a criminal nature. Even when their complaints are recorded, prompt and thorough investigations rarely follow. In addition to their inaction, the police have also been directly implicated in acts of violence against women. Women have indicated their reluctance to report crimes to police for fear of being asked for sexual favours, or in the worst case, for fear of being raped.

Women human rights defenders in Papua New Guinea refuse to accept that violence against women is inevitable and have taken a leading role in:

- campaigns to increase public awareness about the prevalence and negative consequences of gender based violence in Papua New Guinea;
- efforts to provide human rights training to government employees and church and community leaders;
- projects dedicated to supporting and providing protection to victims of intimate partner violence and sexual violence;
- campaigns to secure more equitable representation of women in all areas of public life; and
- projects to provide women with the skills and opportunities to achieve economic independence and advancement.

In taking on and sustaining their work in support of women's human rights, women human rights defenders face numerous challenges. In fact, as *women* human rights defenders working on *women's* human rights they often face both the same and additional challenges to their male counterparts working in other areas of human rights activism. Firstly, in order to be heard, they must overcome their lack of representation in public life. They must overcome excuses that violence against women is justified on ill-defined 'cultural' grounds or that the Government simply does not have the resources to address the problem. They are required to attempt to fill the vacuum left by the Government's inadequate response to gender based violence, especially in caring for victims, without the means or mandate to do so. In this respect, they must juggle a desire and need to cooperate with and aid the capacity building of government agencies while simultaneously demanding accountability from them; a task made

Papua New Guinea Factbox	
	
Head of state	Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Paulias Matane
Head of government	Michael Somare
Population	approx. 5.7 million
Death penalty	Abolitionist in practice
UN Women's Convention	Ratified ¹
Optional Protocol to UN Women's Convention	Not signed

¹ Although Papua New Guinea signed the convention in 1994 and ratified the treaty in January 1995, the Government of Papua New Guinea has never submitted its initial report or subsequent periodic reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

even more difficult by the fact that independent mechanisms designed to ensure such accountability are non-existent or largely ineffective. Finally, in an environment where awareness of women’s human rights is limited, they must struggle to ensure that the manner in which they assist women who are survivors of gender based violence does not in itself reinforce gender stereotyping and discrimination. And in all of this, as Anna Benny’s case demonstrates, their own personal safety is at risk.

TAKE ACTION!

Write to the Commissioner of Police, Sam Inguba and the Highlands Division Police Commander,

- Calling on the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) to conduct a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the death of Anna Benny and her sister-in law.
- Calling on the Commissioner to issue a directive to all members of the RPNGC, that violence against women and girls is regarded as a serious matter by the police services, and that failures to respond to or investigate allegations of violence against women and girls **wherever it occurs and whoever is the alleged perpetrator** will be considered a serious disciplinary offence and dealt with accordingly.
- Calling on the RPNGC to work with community and church organisations and other relevant government agencies to challenge views and beliefs which contribute to violence against women and girls, and to work together to end impunity for perpetrators of such violence.
- Calling on the RPNGC to provide protection to human rights defenders and to investigate threats and acts of intimidation against them so that they are free to carry out their legitimate human rights activities in Papua New Guinea without fear of reprisals.

The Issue and the Promise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × In Papua New Guinea, women disproportionately suffer human rights abuses in sorcery related cases × Often, the family of the victim has to give its consent to the human rights abuses × The Police hardly take up any serious investigation; the perpetrators are rarely brought to justice ✓ However, as the case of Anna Benny shows, women human rights defenders in Papua New Guinea refuse to be silenced. They demand justice and fight for women’s rights, providing support for each other and encouraging change in society 	

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