

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: PNG17770
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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

Could you provide information on the following events and the relevant groups and individuals involved in these events?

- 1. The student riots in 1991 at the University of Technology, Lae;**
- 2. The Highlands United Front;**
- 3. The National elections of 1997;**
- 4. Question deleted;**
- 5. Question deleted;**
- 6. The Papua Besena Group.**

RESPONSE

Could you provide information on the following events and the relevant groups and individuals involved in these events?

- 1. The student riots in 1991 at the University of Technology, Lae;**

Green Left Weekly, an independent Australian paper, launched by activists to report on issues often ignored or distorted by the mainstream press, reported widespread student demonstrations in May 1991 in response to a parliamentary vote to increase pay for politicians on May 22. These demonstrations had the support of the general public. It appears the demonstration started at the University of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and spread to other sites, including the University of Technology in Lae on 28 May. The report stated:

Large and militant demonstrations by university students, which rapidly gained broad popular support, have forced the **PNG government to defer huge pay increases for national and provincial politicians and senior public servants.**

The humiliating back-down may not be enough to defuse the crisis. Students leaders are demanding a complete scrapping of the increases, the resignation of the Namaliu government and fresh elections. ...

The rises came at time of deep recession in the PNG economy. The government had been calling on the country's workforce to make sacrifices for the good of the economy. Wage increases have been blocked. Recent budgets have cut spending on health and education.

Students at the University of PNG boycotted classes and held an angry 1000-strong demonstration on May 24 calling for the rescinding of the rises and the resignation of the government. The demonstration continued and by the end of the next day, 15 government cars and trucks had been burnt. Student leaders began a nationwide campaign of meetings and rallies to win community support.

The trade union movement joined the students and threatened to call a general strike. While the politicians' pay rise ignited the anger, deep dissatisfaction with corruption, unemployment and declining urban services fuelled the outrage to a point where one unnamed government source told ABC radio that the government was facing its "gravest crisis" ever. ...

On May 28, the student demonstrations spread to PNG's second largest city, Lae. University of Technology students forced the education minister, Utula Samana, from his government car and set it on fire [researcher's emphasis].

Public support for the student's demands continued to grow. The Port Moresby local government called on the parliamentary speaker to scrap the rises, saying that the city was close to "open rebellion".

Adding to the government's woes, the Police Association, the ex-servicemen's association and sections of the rank and file of the armed forces expressed opposition to the pay rises. ... In the face of this snowballing protest, Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu backed down on May 28 and announced that the pay rises would not take place until after the next national election, due in 1992 (Dixon, N. 1991, 'Government shaken by PNG student rebellion', *Green Left Weekly*, Issue 15, 12 June <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/1991/15/15p15.htm> – Accessed 17 January 2006 – Attachment 1).

A June 1991 article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* provided this information on the police response to the protests:

The police presence has been stepped up at the 45 tertiary institutions, which are under 24-hour watch.

Three squads of riot police were stationed from dawn today at the Waigani campus of the University of Papua New Guinea in the National Capital District and one squad is at the Lae campus of the University of Technology (O'Callaghan, Mary-Louise 1991, 'Nation Braces For Big Strike', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June – Attachment 2).

No reference to the involvement of the Highlands United Front in this action was located.

No further references to riots at the University of Technology was located in the sources consulted.

2. The Highlands United Front;

The Highlands United Front (HUF) is a student body serving the interests of the student population from the Highland provinces (Woods, Sir Robert Kynnerseley 2001, 'Commission of Inquiry into Students Demonstrations', Office of the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea website, 6 September

<http://www.pm.gov.pg/pmsoffice/pmsoffice.nsf/0/3AC10EA596C9ED254A256C3D002DC6C1?OpenDocument> – Accessed 17 January 2006 – Attachment 3).

The only references to HUF located in the sources consulted relate to student protests in 2001 against the government's privatisation policy. A September 2001 report in the *Post-Courier* mentions HUF as one of a group of student organisations leading the anti-government protests:

Chief Secretary to the Government and the Chairman of the National Security Advisory Committee Robert Igara said ... a coalition of SRC of UPNG, Unitech, Goroka, the **Highlands United Front** and the Voices of Melanesia were involved in organising the campaign against the Government's policies. ...

He said the members of HUF was made up of a Alois Galgu, Philip Kuim, Maera Mane, and David Tambili and added that a student activist Pilyo Newman Maekali and an expatriate Dala Mitramanda from an NGO was also identified [researcher's emphasis]

('Plot to kill Asians', 2001, *Post-Courier* Online, 25 September

<http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20010925/news02> – Accessed 17 January 2006 – Attachment 4).

The student protests were in opposition to the government's plans to privatise public enterprises and on the sixth day of the protests police fired at the protestors killing three students in Port Moresby which triggered further protests (Marshall, W. and Head, M. 2001, 'Papua New Guinea government under siege after police kill three protesters', World Socialist Website, 29 June <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jun2001/png-j29.shtml> – Accessed 18 January 2006 – Attachment 5).

As a result of the shootings an inquiry into the student protests was held. The findings from the inquiry indicated that "between June 16-17, members of the HUF met with Opposition Leader Bill Skate and his officials, as well as certain union officials" although Mr Skate denied his involvement ('Plot to kill Asians', 2001, *Post-Courier* Online, 25 September <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20010925/news02> – Accessed 17 January 2006 – Attachment 4).

The attached transcript of the inquiry into the student's protests provides further details of claims that HUF members met with Mr Skate in connection with planned protest action against the government's privatisation policies. It was also alleged that Bill Skate and other politicians paid accommodation and travel expenses for the students to travel to the highlands to promote their protest action (Woods, Sir Robert Kynnerseley 2001, 'Commission of Inquiry into Students Demonstrations', Office of the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea website, 21 September

<http://www.pm.gov.pg/pmsoffice/PMsoffice.nsf/pages/F21C633D65540CA64A256C3D002DC64C?OpenDocument> – Accessed 17 January 2006 – Attachment 6).

3. The National elections of 1997;

Legislative elections were held from 14 to 28 June 1997 ('Papua New Guinea: Legislative Elections of 14 to 28 June 1997 – Elections to the National Parliament', Psephos – Adam

Carr's Election Archive website, undated <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/p/papuanewguinea/png.txt> – Accessed 17 January 2006 – Attachment 7).

Bill Skate became the country's new prime minister at the head of a highly unstable coalition of parties. The government included the leaders of the two former governing parties which were decimated in the poll, Peoples Progress Party (PPP) leader Andrew Baing and Pangu Pati head Chris Haiveta (Symonds, P. 1997, 'Unstable coalition installed in PNG', World Socialist Website, 4 August <http://www.wsws.org/news/1997/aug1997/png-a04.shtml> – Accessed 18 January 2006 – Attachment 8).

The 1997 article by Peter Symonds on the World Socialist Website, a site with the stated standpoint of "revolutionary opposition to the capitalist market system", provides this background to the election:

Widespread disaffection with the Chan government was revealed in March during the political crisis provoked by its \$46 million contract with the mercenary outfit Sandline International to provide troops and sophisticated military equipment to crush BRA separatist rebels on Bougainville.

Chan, Ijiape and deputy prime minister Chris Haiveta were all forced to temporarily stand aside after PNG military chief Brigadier General Jerry Singirok alleged government corruption and called for the Chan's resignation.

Thousands of students, workers, unemployed youth and soldiers defied police orders and participated in angry demonstrations in Port Moresby and Lae against the government (Symonds, P. 1997, 'Unstable coalition installed in PNG', World Socialist Website, 4 August <http://www.wsws.org/news/1997/aug1997/png-a04.shtml> – Accessed 18 January 2006 – Attachment 8).

The report also significantly notes:

Out of a total of 109 incumbent MPs, less than half, only 54, retained their seats. ... The scope of the electoral defeats was particularly sweeping in the Highlands and Sepik areas where 33 sitting MPs out of a total of 51 lost their seats (Symonds, P. 1997, 'Unstable coalition installed in PNG', World Socialist Website, 4 August <http://www.wsws.org/news/1997/aug1997/png-a04.shtml> – Accessed 18 January 2006 – Attachment 8).

4. Question deleted;

5. Question deleted;

6. The Papua Besena Group.

According to the Encyclopedia of the Nations website the Papua Besena Party, "stands for the secession of Papua from Papua New Guinea and has had fluctuating support even on its home ground" ('Papua New Guinea: Political Parties' undated, Encyclopedia of the Nations website <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Papua-New-Guinea-POLITICAL-PARTIES.html> – Accessed 20 January 2006 – Attachment 18).

The founding member of the Papua Besena movement is Dame Josephine Abaijah. She won the Milne Bay Regional seat in the 1997 elections. The report further notes "Dame Josephine

Abaijah was elected to House of Assembly in 1972 as the country's first woman parliamentarian" ('Results PNG electorates (with published counts, parties to 16/7/97)', 1997, The Coombsweb website <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/PNG/htmls/Votecount.html> – Accessed 18 January 2006 – Attachment 9).

Sources posted on an unverified internet site reveal there is a group called the Revived Papua Besena. It appears that the group was started by Jonathan Baure (also referred to as Jonathan jon' Baure).

The aim of the movement is to fight for Australian citizenship for all Papuans born between 1 January 1948 and 16 September 1975 in the Territory of Papua on the basis that it was Australian territory and that people were not given a choice when the Papua New Guinea state was formed, so they have a right to reacquire Australian citizenship (McLeod, S. 2004, 'PNG residents move to reclaim Australian heritage', Transcript from AM, ABC website, 22 May <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2004/s1113772.htm> – Accessed 23 January 2006 – Attachment 19: jon' Baure, Jonathan 2003, 'Australian Citizen of Papua (sic)', 16 February, Information accessed from *Revived Papua Besena Chat* site <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RevivedPapuaBesena/message/1> – Accessed 23 January 2006 – Attachment 20; Baure, J. 2003, 'Separate Papua, Australia betrayal and discrimination against Papuans', *Niugin Prait Forum* website, 18 June <http://www.network54.com/Forum/226575/thread/1056344248/last-1131582120/Separate+Papua+,+Australia+betrayal+and+discrimination+against+Papuans> – Accessed 23 January 2006 – Attachment 21).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

United Nations (UN)

Non-Government Organisations

International News & Politics

Region Specific Links

Pacific Island Report <http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport/graphics.shtml>

PNG Times <http://www.pngtimes.com/>

Papua New-Guinea Post-Courier <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/>

The National <http://www.thenational.com.pg/>

Papua New-Guinea Books Useful Articles & Information <http://www.pngbuai.com/>

Pacific Media Watch <http://www.pmw.c2o.org/>

Topic Specific Links

Papua New-Guinea Electoral Commission <http://www.pnhec.gov.pg/commonquest.html>

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Online Subscription Services

Library Networks

University Sites

Databases:

Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information

RRT	<i>REFINFO</i> <i>ISYS</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada) RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Dixon, N. 1991, 'Government shaken by PNG student rebellion', *Green Left Weekly*, Issue 15, 12 June. (<http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/1991/15/15p15.htm> – Accessed 17 January 2006)
2. O'Callaghan, Mary-Louise 1991, 'Nation Braces For Big Strike', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June.
3. Woods, Sir Robert Kynnerseley 2001, 'Commission of Inquiry into Students Demonstrations', Office of the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea website, 6 September. (<http://www.pm.gov.pg/pmsoffice/pmsoffice.nsf/0/3AC10EA596C9ED254A256C3D002DC6C1?OpenDocument> – Accessed 17 January 2006)
4. 'Plot to kill Asians', 2001, *Post-Courier Online*, 25 September. (<http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20010925/news02> – Accessed 17 January 2006)
5. Marshall, W. and Head, M. 2001, 'Papua New Guinea government under siege after police kill three protesters', World Socialist Web Site, 29 June. (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jun2001/png-j29.shtml> – Accessed 18 January 2006)
6. 'Woods, Sir Robert Kynnerseley 2001, 'Commission of Inquiry into Students Demonstrations', Office of the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea website, 21 September. (<http://www.pm.gov.pg/pmsoffice/PMsoffice.nsf/pages/F21C633D65540CA64A256C3D002DC64C?OpenDocument> – Accessed 17 January 2006)
7. 'Papua New Guinea: Legislative Elections of 14 to 28 June 1997 – Elections to the National Parliament', Psephos – Adam Carr's Election Archive website, undated. (<http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/p/papuanewguinea/png.txt> – Accessed 17 January 2006)
8. Symonds, P. 1997, 'Unstable coalition installed in PNG', World Socialist Website, 4 August. (<http://www.wsws.org/news/1997/aug1997/png-a04.shtml> – Accessed 18 January 2006)
9. 'Results PNG electorates (with published counts, parties to 16/7/97)', 1997, The Coombsweb website. (<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/PNG/htmls/Votecount.html> – Accessed 18 January 2006)
10. Attachment deleted.

11. Attachment deleted.

12. Attachment deleted.

13. Attachment deleted

14. Attachment deleted.

15. Attachment deleted.

16. Attachment deleted.

17. Attachment deleted.

18. 'Papua New Guinea: Political Parties' undated, Encyclopedia of the Nations website. (<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Papua-New-Guinea-POLITICAL-PARTIES.html> – Accessed 20 January 2006)

19. McLeod, S. 2004, 'PNG residents move to reclaim Australian heritage', Transcript from AM, ABC website, 22 May. (<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2004/s1113772.htm> – Accessed 23 January 2006)

20. jon'Baure, Jonathan 2003, 'Australian Citizen of Papauns (sic)', 16 February, Information accessed from *Revived Papua Besena Chat* site. (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RevivedPapuaBesena/message/1> – Accessed 23 January) 2006

21. Baure, J. 2003, 'Separate Papua, Australia betrayal and discrimination against Papuans', *Niugin Prait Forum* website, 18 June. (<http://www.network54.com/Forum/226575/thread/1056344248/last-1131582120/Separate+Papua+,+Australia+betrayal+and+discrimination+against+Papuans> – Accessed 23 January 2006)