



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea – PNG39847 –
Assemblies of God – Western Highlands –
Targeted Harm – Kimbin Remi – Kumbu
Maip – Kundka – Akelka

3 February 2012

1. Is there evidence that some violence in the western highlands of PNG is religiously motivated? Specifically, is there evidence that individuals and villages are targeted due to their membership of the Assemblies of God?

No objective sources were located that suggest that some of the inter-tribal violence in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG) is religiously motivated. No sources were located that argue that individuals, villages, clans or tribes are targeted due to membership of the Assemblies of God (AOG) or any other religion or religious denomination.

Religion, or more accurately, religious figures, occasionally participate in competitive politics in PNG, including in the Western Highlands. This participation has the potential to expose particular individuals to politically-motivated violence. A 2004 paper published by the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, states that a Catholic priest, Father Robert Lak, stood against former Prime Minister Pius Wingti in the Western Highlands. To avoid potential problems for the church, the Catholic Bishop of Mount Hagen was forced to make a public statement of the church's political neutrality.¹

Sources do not present a portrait of the AOG in PNG as a congregation at risk of harm. Rather, sources indicate that the AOG in PNG has enjoyed dramatic growth in popularity in almost all provinces. According to Philip Gibbs, a former associate of State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project at the Australian National University (ANU), the AOG in PNG had 357 registered churches in 1989; however this grew to 1,080 in October 2001 and 1,475 by April 2004, representing “a growth rate of 413 per cent over 15 years or an average of 28 per cent a year”.²

In 2011, the US Department of State reported that persons belonging to various Pentecostal churches (including the AOG) constituted 8.6 percent of the population. The State Department did not report any attacks or threats on parishioners or pastors from the AOG in 2010. The State Department's *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Papua New Guinea* does state that the proliferation of “new missionary movements” has caused the established churches to publicly question “whether such activity was desirable”. The report also states that “Pentecostal and charismatic Christian groups have found converts within congregations of the more established churches”. However, there is no suggestion that the

¹ Gibbs, P. 2004, ‘Politics, Religion, and the Churches: The 2002 Election in Papua New Guinea’, Research School Of Pacific And Asian Studies, Australian National University, SSGM Working Paper 2004/2, pp.3-6
http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/ssgm/papers/working_papers/04_02wp_Gibbs.pdf – Accessed 13 January 2012

² Gibbs, P. 2009, *Papua New Guinea*, PhilipGibbs.org, p.111
<http://www.philipgibbs.org/pdfs/PNG%20globalization.pdf> – Accessed 16 January 2012

questioning of these missionary movements and the conversion of former mainline parishioners have caused violent conflict.³

Clan violence is common in the highlands of PNG, including in the province of Western Highlands. *IRIN News* wrote in 2001 that arguments “over women, pigs and land can easily spiral into murder, mayhem and civil conflict”.⁴ A 2001 report by *TVNZ* states that tribal fights over politics and property are the most common causes of conflict; “[a]lmost invariably, the tribal fights are over ‘property’ - land, women, a husband, a dead pig or a human body or even a once-shared agricultural implement. That, and politics, which is probably the father of property, since the ‘Big Man’ and his adherents control it all”.⁵

Payments made to tribes by governments and companies for the use of land for resource exploitation is a major source of conflict, particularly when a neighbouring tribe lays claim to the land, or wants to be included in a compensation package. A report published by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development states that “competing claims to the benefits of mining and logging activities by rival clans, sometimes result[s] in violence and/or disruption to exploration, mining or logging by foreign companies”. These state-sponsored agreements are signed between companies and the so-called ‘rightful’ land owners, causing conflict between tribes, or within clans themselves.⁶

A 2004 paper suggests that the intensity of these tribal conflicts can be explained by a number of factors, not least the potential wealth to be derived from royalties as compared to traditional subsistence farming. The author also argues that the Highland’s high population growth exacerbates tensions between neighbouring tribes regarding land tenure. Philip Gibbs, explains that “[w]ith population growth, there is now intense pressure on land in some areas. Groups expand their claims into what were previously vacant buffer zones between groups, and disputes arise as a consequence.”⁷

However, evidence also points to conflicts in the highlands caused by minor offences, or for reasons no longer apparent. In 2010, the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s* PNG correspondent Liam Fox quoted an AusAID worker who told him that “[s]ome of these tribal fights have been going for 15, 20 years. Sometimes people have no idea what the original matter was but they continue. It could be a minor criminal breach to begin with but because people are clan members, the clan gets dragged into the fight. And it may mean a large number of deaths. It will often mean huge displacement of people, damage to houses, burnt houses, burnt medical centres, burnt schools, destroyed bridges, gardens”.⁸

³ US Department of State 2011, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Papua New Guinea*, 13 September, Sections 1 & 3

⁴ ‘Papua New Guinea: Tackling clan conflict’ 2011, *IRIN News*, 7 January
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91559> – Accessed 15 April

⁵ ‘Lethal PNG tribal skirmishes’ 2001, *TVNZ*, 19 December <http://tvnz.co.nz/content/72937/425822/article.html> – Accessed 11 December 2009

⁶ Anere, R. 2004, *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Papua New Guinea*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development website, pp.10-11
[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/8F3694968DBEBFE9C1256ED90042620B/\\$file/Aner_e2.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/8F3694968DBEBFE9C1256ED90042620B/$file/Aner_e2.pdf) – Accessed 25 June 2009

⁷ Gibbs, P. 2009, *Papua New Guinea*, PhilipGibbs.org, p.84
<http://www.philipgibbs.org/pdfs/PNG%20globalization.pdf> – Accessed 16 January 2012

⁸ Fox, L. 2010, ‘PNG’s Wild Highlands’, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 19 September
<http://www.abc.net.au/correspondents/content/2010/s3015512.htm> – Accessed 28 September 2010

An example of how a conflict can erupt from a seemingly innocuous incident is relayed in the 2004 publication, *The Name Must Not Go Down: Political Competition and State-Society Relations in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea*. The author recounts that fighting in Kumdi, Mul district began in the 1980s following an incident during a ceremonial dance. According to the author, part of the performance included male dancers shooting coffee beans at one another. However, one bean “missed its intended target, hitting a male dancer’s eye, and the alleged culprit was attacked by the victim’s kinsmen. The boy’s kinsmen retaliated, leading to armed conflict, now known as the Kumdi *kopi mongel* (Kumdi coffee bean fight).”⁹

A major conflict in Kumdi in 2010 was averted after compensation of 3000 kina was paid. The conflict began when a member of the Kumdi tribe attacked a member of Kopen Kopi tribe, reportedly cutting “off his right arm with a bush knife at the Junction market in Baiyer”. Members of the Kopen Kopi retaliated by kidnapping three men at Kombolopa, including a member of the Kumdi tribe. The tribe, however, decided to release the men and pay them the money in order to avoid an escalation into tribal war. The report states that the Baiyer region is “well known for tribal fights”, adding that the payment of compensation was hitherto unheard of in the region.¹⁰

2. Is there evidence that AOG members are harmed in Port Moresby, Lae, and Wewak?

No sources indicate that AOG members are targeted in Port Moresby, Lae or Wewak.

The AOG does have a significant presence in Port Moresby. One source states that from one original church in Port Moresby, now known as the Harvest Centre, the number of AOG churches reached 90 in the southern region of PNG by 1999.¹¹

The large urban centres of Papua New Guinea share significant law and order problems, often involving violent crimes. Members of most of PNG’s major Christian groups could therefore easily fall victim to violent crime. A 2010 profile report of Port Moresby by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) states that “[p]eace and order is a concern in all levels of the community. Increase in crime has led to a lot of insecurity among resident of Port Moresby”. The report states that pick-pocketing, armed robbery, vehicle theft, carjackings, and aggravated assault are all common crimes, while gang rapes and homicides are “increasing in number”. Consequently, “[m]ovement of residents is restricted after dark due to the high crime rates and there are certain ‘no-go’ areas which can only be accessed under heavy security protection”.¹²

⁹ Ketan, J. 2004, *The Name Must Not Go Down: Political Competition and State-Society Relations in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea*, University of the South Pacific. Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva, p.189

<http://books.google.com.au/books?id=dqDd1PJ-x9kC&lpg=PA171&ots=dmrK1tnQmW&dq=%22western%20highlands%22%20Kundka%20OR%20Akelka&pg=PA170#v=onepage&q=%22western%20highlands%22%20Kundka%20OR%20Akelka&f=false> – Accessed 31 January 2012

¹⁰ Lari, E. 2010, ‘Baiyer tribe frees captives’, Western Highlands Online, 2 September http://whponline.blogspot.com/2010_09_02_archive.html – Accessed 17 January 2012

¹¹ Gibbs, P. 2009, *Papua New Guinea*, PhilipGibbs.org, p.111 <http://www.philipgibbs.org/pdfs/PNG%20globalization.pdf> – Accessed 16 January 2012

¹² UN-Habitat 2010, *Papua New Guinea: Port Moresby Urban Profile*, p.38 www.unhabitat.org/pmss/getElectronicVersion.aspx?nr=2966&alt=1 – Accessed 11 August 2010

There are AOG missions in both Lae and Wewak.^{13 14} No reports were located indicating that AOG persons or property are targeted for harm in these towns.

3. Is there evidence of a dispute between members of the Kinbim Remi and the Kumbu Maip tribes anywhere in PNG?

An article posted on the Western Highlands Online website in July 2010 describes a number of tribes in the Western Highlands as “former warring tribes”, including the Kumdi, Kimbin Remi, and Kumbu Maip tribes. The article indicates that the tribes were negotiating peace settlements, and as a consequence, the Western Highlands governor Tom Olga committed 55,000 kina to the Mul-Baiyer Students Co-operation Association (MBSCA) for new instruments for the Kombolopa High School in Baiyer district.¹⁵

An article in the *Post-Courier* states that a “huge peace ceremony” took place in March 2011 “when two warring tribes”, namely the “Dry Wara Maip Kumbus and the Kimbi Ramies” made peace at Baiyer River. The peace deal included “[m]ore than 300 pigs and cash money in the thousands”. The report states that “[t]he Dry Wara Maip Kumbus and the Kimbi Ramies, will make peace after fighting against each other over land for more than 10 years which claimed the lives of many young men, women and children... The peace ceremony, which has been initiated by the Mapoa Peace and Prosperity Association, involves some of the prominent elites of Baiyer who have funded the foundation and the peace ceremony itself”. According to the report, many of the ‘elite’ of the district contributed cash towards the peace settlement deal.¹⁶

A 2009 article in the *Post-Courier* reported that the conflict between the parties in the Baiyer district had been ongoing for fifteen years. According to the report, the war was between the traditional land owners. It does not suggest that the conflict was related to religious allegiances. According to the *Post-Courier*, PNG’s Internal Security Minister Sani Rambai threatened to “shift the Kombolopa High School from its present location in the Baiyer district in Western Highlands” if peace was not restored. The school was reportedly closed for five years, during the worst of the fighting.¹⁷

¹³ ‘Business Directory Listings: Churches & Mission’ (undated), Papua New Guinea Business & Tourism website http://www.pngbd.com/directory/category/Churches_and_Missions – Accessed 1 February 2012

¹⁴ ‘Papua New Guinea – Participating Member’ 2010, Assemblies of God World Fellowship <http://worldagfellowship.org/fellowship/countries/wagf-participating-members-m-r/papuanewguinea/> – Accessed 16 January 2012

¹⁵ Lari, E. 2010, ‘K55,000 for student group’, Western Highlands Online, 12 July http://whponline.blogspot.com/2010_07_12_archive.html – Accessed 30 January 2012

¹⁶ Kolo, P, 2011, ‘WHP’s warring tribes to make peace’, *Post-Courier*, 31 March <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20110331/news15.htm> – Accessed 30 January 2012

¹⁷ Palme, R. 2009, ‘Warring clans warned’, *PNG Post Courier*, 23 February

4. Is there evidence of clans or tribes known as the ‘Kundka’ or ‘Akelka’ in the Western Highlands?

One reference was located to sub-clans known as the Akelka Raimamps and Akelka Pulgamumb. According to the source, these are clans of the Kentiga tribe.¹⁸ A 2011 source referred to the Mogeï Akelka tribe.¹⁹

A reference was located to the Kumdi Akilka. In November 2006, Papua New Guinea’s *Post-Courier* reported the killing of a woman and the severe injury of her daughter at Kombolopa, on the Baiyer River in the Western Highlands. Both mother and daughter are reported as members of the Kumdi Akilka tribe. The dead woman’s husband told the *Post-Courier* that his wife was shot by a member of the Rimi Kokis tribe “because his Kumdi Akilka tribe had allowed the Drai Waras to seek refuge in their land”.²⁰

A number of sources refer to the Kundka, including *The Name Must Not Go Down: Political Competition and State-Society Relations in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea*.²¹

¹⁸ ‘Kentiga Tribe’ (undated) Oocities website <http://www.oocities.org/skyfdn/kentiga.html> – Accessed 1 February 2012

¹⁹ Poiya, J. 2011, ‘Meninga blasts Hagen leaders’ Abal threat’, *Post-Courier*, 19 July <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20110719/hpost02.htm> – Accessed 1 February 2012

²⁰ ‘Regina, a living scar of tribal fighting’ 2006, *PNG Post Courier*, 10 November

²¹ Ketan, J. 2004, *The Name Must Not Go Down: Political Competition and State-Society Relations in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea*, University of the South Pacific. Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva, p.171 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=dqDd1PJ-x9kC&lpq=PA171&ots=dmrK1tnQmW&dq=%22western%20highlands%22%20Kundka%20OR%20Akelka&pg=PA170#v=onepage&q=%22western%20highlands%22%20Kundka%20OR%20Akelka&f=false> – Accessed 31 January 2012

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Gibbs, P. 2009, *Papua New Guinea*, PhilipGibbs.org <http://www.philipgibbs.org/pdfs/PNG%20globalization.pdf> – Accessed 16 January 2012.

Ketan, J. 2004, *The Name Must Not Go Down: Political Competition and State-Society Relations in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea*, University of the South Pacific. Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=dqDd1PJ-x9kC&lpq=PA171&ots=dmrK1tnOmW&dq=%22western%20highlands%22%20Kundka%20OR%20Akelka&pg=PA170#v=onepage&q=%22western%20highlands%22%20Kundka%20OR%20Akelka&f=false> – Accessed 31 January 2012. (MRT-RRT Library)

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