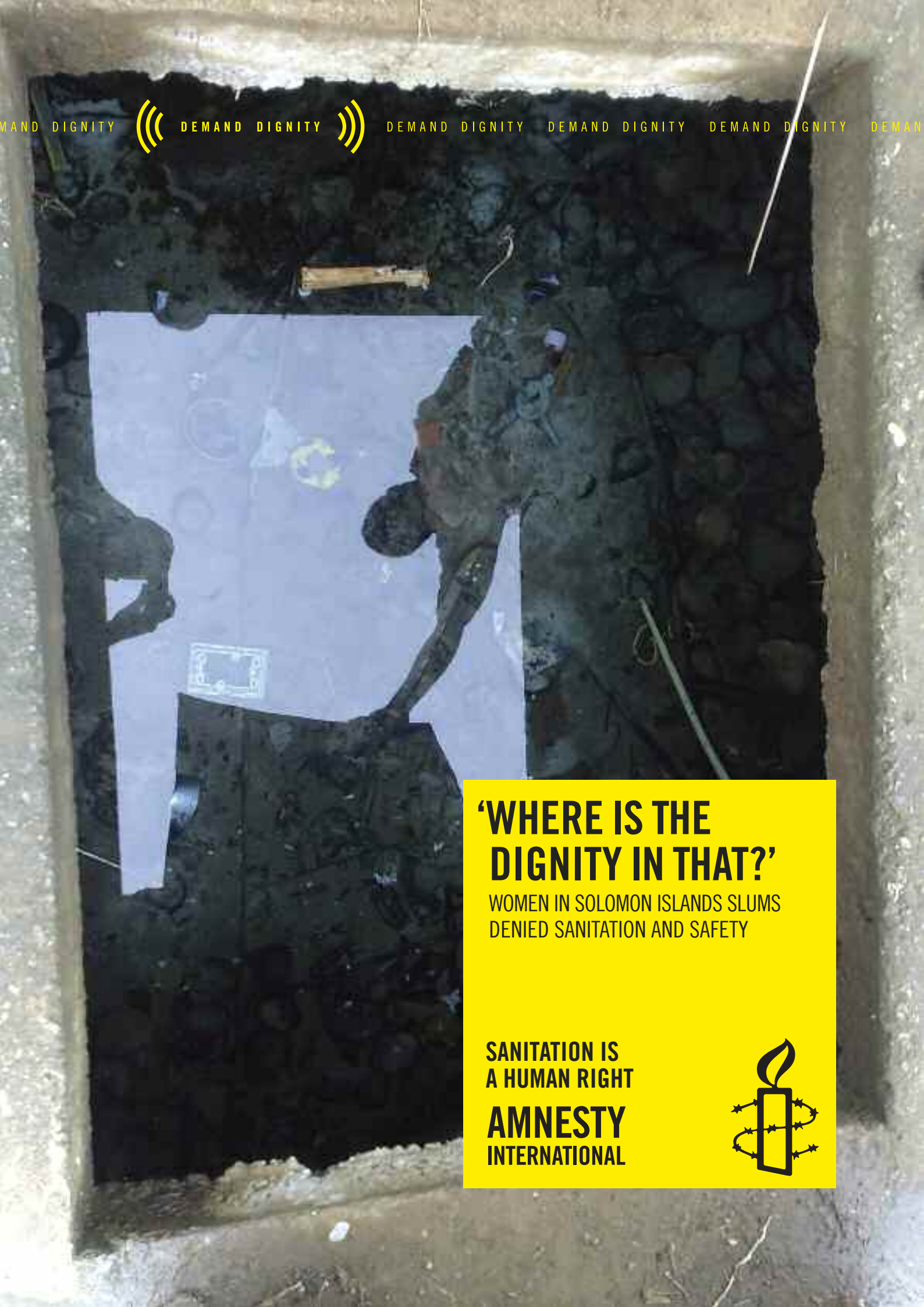


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## ‘WHERE IS THE DIGNITY IN THAT?’

WOMEN IN SOLOMON ISLANDS SLUMS DENIED SANITATION AND SAFETY

SANITATION IS  
A HUMAN RIGHT

**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL





***I wake up around 4.30am everyday. After my morning devotion, I begin preparing for breakfast and make my children's school lunches. If there is no drinking water left, I have to walk to the pipe which is quite a long way away to collect the water.***

***I always dread walking in the morning because some of the men in the settlement will be up drinking from the night before and more often than not they will turn their attention to me and harass me.***

***I know these boys well so I always tell them politely that they should have respect for me as I am older than them.***

***I am always very frightened when they harass me as I know they have assaulted and raped some of the younger girls in the past...***

***We share a pit toilet<sup>1</sup> with another six households, it is about 60 metres from our house and it's on a steep slope.***

***When we go to the toilet, we have to be very careful so that we don't slide down the hill and hurt ourselves.***

***The toilet itself is very dirty but what other choice do we have?***



Maria, a 38-year-old civil servant and mother of two girls, aged six and eight<sup>2</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Maria's daily experience is typical of most women living in slums in Honiara, capital of Solomon Islands. For them, clean water is a luxury obtained at great risk. Slums have few sources of clean water nearby. So residents, mainly women and girls, must walk long distances – often 1km or more – to the nearest pipe or stream, returning with heavy loads. It is during that journey that many are harassed, attacked and raped.

Faced with long and possibly dangerous journeys to get water, inhabitants often end up washing their clothes, dishes and themselves in dirty, contaminated water, exposing themselves to disease. Several families have to share what few toilets there are – and these, as Maria explains above, are invariably grim. Deprived of their rights to water and sanitation, these communities are subjected to a myriad of indignities. They are communities denied a choice.



## RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION

Overcrowding is the norm in Honiara's slums<sup>3</sup>. All together, there are 10 people in Maria's household, including relatives who have come to stay with her while they search for work in the capital. This pattern has recurred in many slums in the country since the 1970s and 1980s as young people flocked from rural areas to the city centre in search of opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

Armed conflict and ethnic violence between Malaitan and Guadalcanese groups from 1998 to 2003 also displaced large numbers of the civilian population.<sup>5</sup> Once the conflict ended, those who had been displaced from rural Guadalcanal moved to Honiara to seek jobs, many of them to slums, which led to further overcrowding. This put pressure on infrastructure and services as new migrants moved to established and already overpopulated settlements or set up new settlements which had no basic infrastructure.

Although faced with significant challenges, the government's response has been one of neglect. Solomon Islands is obliged under international law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, to which it has been a state party since 1982) to ensure the rights to

**Cover:** A polluted water source, Kobito 2 settlement, Solomon Islands. © Amnesty International

**Above:** Honiara, capital of Solomon Islands. Honiara's population is estimated at 64,600 people, with about a third of them living in slums (CC by 2.0).

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adequate housing, water and sanitation, without discrimination, for its people.<sup>6</sup> However, it has not taken adequate steps to regularize the housing situation in slums and to provide public services such as water, sanitation, waste management and electricity. Consequently, these settlements have little or no access to clean water and basic sanitation.

Under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which it has been a state party since 2002, Solomon Islands is required to take appropriate measures to guarantee women their fundamental rights and freedoms "on a basis of equality with men". This means that it must take immediate and effective action to address laws and practices which disadvantage women. These include customs, traditions and stereotypes which impose disproportionate burdens of work on women because they are women (including work in the home) and which excuse or accept acts of violence against women as inevitable and unavoidable.

## THE RIGHT TO WATER

General Comment 15 on the right to water, adopted in November 2002 by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, sets the following criteria for the full enjoyment of the right to water.<sup>7</sup>

**Availability.** The water supply for each person must be sufficient and continuous for personal and domestic uses.

**Quality.** The water required for each individual's personal and domestic use must be safe, therefore free from micro-organisms, chemical substances and radiological hazards that constitute a threat to a person's health.

**Accessibility.** Water and water facilities and services have to be accessible to everyone without discrimination, within the jurisdiction of the state party. Accessibility has four overlapping dimensions:

- **Physical accessibility:** water, and adequate water facilities and services, must be within safe physical reach for all sections of the population. Sufficient, safe and acceptable water must be accessible within, or in the immediate vicinity of each household, which includes a permanent or semi-permanent dwelling, or a temporary halting site.

- **Economic accessibility:** water, and water facilities and services, must be affordable for all. The direct and indirect costs and charges associated with securing water must be affordable.

- **Non-discrimination:** water and water facilities and services must be accessible to all, including the most vulnerable or marginalized sections of the population, in law and in practice, without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds; and

- **Information accessibility:** accessibility includes the right to seek, receive and impart information concerning water issues.

International human rights standards require states to take active steps to ensure that everyone can enjoy the right to water as soon as possible. States must prioritize as part of their immediate obligations, that everyone has access to the minimum essential amount of water, that is sufficient and safe for personal and domestic uses to prevent disease. State parties have to adopt the necessary measures directed towards the full realization of the right to water, including by taking positive measures to assist individuals and communities to enjoy the right.



The burden of living under such conditions is described in painful detail by residents themselves in this briefing. Amnesty International interviewed 80 residents from 11 slums during visits to Honiara on Guadalcanal Island in August 2009 and 2010. Amnesty International also met with government officials, health care providers and women's organizations. As this briefing will show, two of the major concerns that continue to blight communities in these settlements are: an almost total lack of clean water and proper sanitation close to their homes and a high prevalence of violence – notably sexual violence – against women.

This briefing is part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign, which focuses on human rights violations that drive and deepen poverty. As part of the campaign, Amnesty International is focusing on human rights violations against people living in slums, or informal settlements. Amnesty International is calling on all governments to end forced evictions, ensure equal access to public services, and promote the active participation of people living in slums in decisions and processes that impact their lives.



“Since we came here 20 years ago, there has been no water. Government and SIWA [Solomon Islands Water Authority] are not doing anything. We have to walk for kilometres to the small stream because the pipes in the settlements are very unreliable.”

Michael, a 50-year-old resident of Green Valley

Two women collect water at a broken pipe about 1km from their homes in Kobito 4 settlement. Features have been blurred to protect the identity of the woman in the foreground.

## WATER AND SANITATION IN HONIARA’S SLUMS

Honiara’s population is estimated at 64,600 people,<sup>8</sup> with at least a third of them living in slums.<sup>9</sup> A 2009 paper presented in Australia based on a survey of 208 households in these settlements reported that 92 per cent of households did not have a water supply in their homes. Instead they collect water from neighbours or from community-owned pipes; 20 per cent of them collect water from wells, rivers or streams.<sup>10</sup> The survey did not report how long it took to carry the water, whether the cost was affordable and how often supply was interrupted by water shortages.

Amnesty International’s observations in several settlements in Honiara echoed the survey’s findings. Amnesty International visited slums in Kobito 1, 2, 3 and 4, Kobiloko, Kaibia, north-east of central Honiara, and settlements in Kola Ridge, Adiliwa, Green Valley, Border Line and Naha, east Honiara. The vast majority of these settlements do not have any proper water supply or sanitation system. Many settlements such as Kobito 2 and 3 have had community fundraising drives for a communal tap. This, however, has not guaranteed water supply as there

are chronic water shortages in Honiara and the settlement areas are often the first affected.

## UNRELIABLE WATER SUPPLY

During Amnesty International visits to Honiara in August 2009 and August 2010, there were frequent water shortages, affecting thousands of people in surrounding settlements.

On one occasion, the community pipes in Adiliwa, Green Valley and Border Line ran dry due to a water shortage, depriving approximately 3,000 residents of their only local source of clean water. Most of the residents Amnesty International interviewed said that since the settlements began, there had been no regular water supply and sanitation conditions were poor.

“Since we came here 20 years ago, there has been no water,” said Michael, aged 50, of Green Valley settlement.

“Government and SIWA are not doing anything. We have to walk for kilometres to the small stream because the pipes in

## THE RIGHT TO SANITATION

The right to sanitation is an integral part of the right to an adequate standard of living, defined in Article 11(1) of the ICESCR. It is also fundamental to the rights to health, housing and water.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, including access to sanitation.

The UN Independent Expert on human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, have elaborated some of the criteria for the right to sanitation:<sup>12</sup>

**Availability.** There must be a sufficient number of sanitation facilities (with associated services) within, or in the immediate vicinity, of each household, health or educational institution, public institutions and places, and the workplace.

**Quality.** Sanitation facilities must be hygienically safe to use, which means that they must effectively prevent human, animal and insect contact with human excreta. Sanitation facilities must further ensure access to safe water for hand washing and personal hygiene. Regular cleaning, emptying of pits or other places that collect human excreta, and maintenance are essential. Sanitation facilities must also be technically safe to use, which means that the superstructure is stable and the floor is designed in a way that reduces the risk of accidents and they must be safe to use at night. Special attention should be paid to the safety needs of those with disabilities, as well as the safety needs of children. There must be adequate hygiene promotion and education.

**Accessibility.** Sanitation facilities must be physically accessible for everyone within, or in the immediate vicinity of, each household, health or educational institution, public institutions and places, and the workplace. Facilities must be in a safe location and be accessible at all times.

**Affordability.** Access to sanitation facilities and services must be available at a price that is affordable for all people without limiting their capacity to acquire other basic goods and services, including water, food, housing, health and education guaranteed by other human rights.

**Acceptability.** Sanitation facilities and services must ensure privacy and dignity. They must be socially and culturally acceptable. In most cultures, acceptability will require separate facilities for women and men in public places, and for girls and boys in schools. Women's toilets need to accommodate menstruation needs.

States must move as quickly and effectively as possible towards ensuring universal access to safe, affordable and acceptable sanitation, which provides privacy and dignity. States must realize their human rights obligations related to sanitation in a non-discriminatory manner. They are obliged to pay special attention to groups particularly vulnerable to exclusion and discrimination in relation to sanitation. States are also obliged to ensure that concerned individuals and communities are informed and have access to information about sanitation and hygiene and are enabled to participate in all processes related to the planning, construction, maintenance and monitoring of sanitation services.

the settlements are very unreliable. Most of our days are spent finding and getting water from the stream. This water problem is really affecting sanitation as we cannot flush our toilets. We are forced to go to the bushes and use it as a toilet. How bad is that? I am worried about my three children who are forced to use these bushes. Where is the dignity in that?"

People living in other areas often have water tanks in their homes to store water, but most people in slums cannot afford these tanks or the piped water connections necessary to fill them. Some rely on relatives and friends to give them water. In many situations when there is a drought, even the water tanks are empty.

## NOTHING BUT DIRTY WATER

With frequent water shortages, and for those with no piped water at all, the only alternative is a contaminated stream or well.

In Kobito 4 settlement, the community has to use the local stream for bathing as well as for cooking and washing. A small dam was built a few years ago by community members with funding from the Honiara Town Council and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). While it has provided several thousand people with access to water for washing and bathing, the water is contaminated with domestic waste. This, however, does not deter people from using this water for drinking as the alternative water source is almost 1.5km away, which means that they would have to walk 6km daily to get water for morning and evening use.

Households live in particularly unhygienic conditions in Mamanawata settlement on the seafront just outside of Honiara’s central business district. The vast majority of houses in the settlement are made with corrugated iron and pieces of timber. The residents use the sea and the river that runs alongside the settlement for bathing, washing and as a toilet.

Some of the settlements near the Honiara coast towards Henderson International Airport, 7km from Honiara’s central business district, have no access to a communal or individual piped water connection. Residents have to use very dirty well water for drinking and domestic use. During a visit to these settlements, Amnesty International observed residents drawing water – which was green, polluted with rubbish and foul smelling – to wash utensils and clothes.

Poor sanitation coupled with unsafe water sources increase the risk of water-borne diseases. As Michael, resident of Green Valley, pointed out, “Many of the children in these settlements [Naha, Green Valley and Borderline] suffer from diarrhoea. It is quite normal here for people to have diarrhoea. The situation is unbearable as we cannot clean our toilets and have no water.”

Health professionals interviewed by Amnesty International in Honiara expressed similar concerns that many slum residents suffer from diseases such as dysentery, diarrhoea and cholera due to contaminated water sources and the lack of sanitation.

## UNHYGIENIC TOILETS

According to the 2009 study of Honiara settlements referred to above, only a quarter of residents surveyed had adequate toilet facilities: 22 per cent used toilets that had a stone slab covering a pit and 2 per cent used flush toilets. Some 55 per cent relieved themselves either in the sea, a river, or nearby bushes and 20 per cent used pit toilets (that is, toilets without a slab or other platform).<sup>13</sup> Pit toilets and open defecation are unsafe as they do not ensure hygienic separation of waste matter from human contact.<sup>14</sup>

During its visits to Honiara, Amnesty International found that residents in several slums share pit toilets with five to six other households. These toilets are often constructed on the sides of steep ridges and hillsides, and are a 5 to 15-minute walk away.

***My friends and I are always worried that we will be punched or raped by the drunk men. Because they don’t have jobs, these men drink kwaso and look for girls to have sex with them. If we refuse we can be beaten or raped. We have no other place to go to so we don’t complain and just keep quiet about it. We are already in overcrowded homes living with relatives. If we cause trouble, we can be kicked out.***

A 21 year-old unemployed woman in Kobito 4 settlement

Such toilets pose a number of risks. They can contaminate the streams which are often at the bottom of these ridges and are used for drinking water, cooking and other household purposes. They are also dangerous to use at night: the toilets are not lit, as there is no electricity, and kerosene lamps are used to get to and from them. Amnesty International was told of many incidents where people had injured themselves while losing their footing on the path to the toilets or, worse, falling into an open pit toilet.

## COLLECTING WATER – WOMEN BEAR THE BURDEN

As noted above, the majority of settlements do not have a regular source of clean water in or near their homes, meaning that residents – almost always women and girls – must walk several kilometres to get water.

More than 4,000 people living in Kobito 1, 2, 3 and Kobiloko settlements have to share water from just one leaking pipe that is located in the valley in Kobito 1 settlement.<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International interviewed several women who have to walk 1 to 1.5km twice daily to collect water from the broken pipe.

In one afternoon, Amnesty International observed close to 100 young women and girls who came to get water at a broken pipe in Kobito 1 settlement. In two and a half hours, only two men, both elderly, came for water. Each person carried between 10

and 12 bottles of water (1 to 2.5 litres each) back to their households. When asked why only young women and girls were collecting water and not men, they said that the men were either playing sports or drunk on *kwaso*, the local home-brewed alcohol. (This experience was echoed in Mamanawata settlement, where some of the men appeared to spend their days drunk on *kwaso* and high on drugs.)

A 26-year-old child care worker from Adiliwa in East Kola Ridge carries up to 20 bottles of water on the 4km walk home. She has looked after a relative's children for the last four years and earns 60 Solomon Islands dollars per week (approximately US\$8). She often bathes at her relative's place and takes water from there back home. She described the conditions in her settlement:

***“ We live in a very small house. There are 10 of us in our household and sometimes we sleep in shifts. We use the streams beside our settlements for bathing, washing and as a toilet. It is very dirty but what other choices do we have? I'm glad that I can take some water from my relatives so we don't have problems with drinking water. Other families have to walk for kilometres to Malele to get drinking water from a relatively clean stream. But a businessman is developing the area around the stream so we are not sure whether the stream will still be there in a few years' time.***

***It's very heavy to carry water home but what can I do? Sometimes, a friend and I will walk home together and share the heavy load but most of the time I have to carry these. It's a hard life and water is so important for our survival.*** ”

The lack of adequate water supply and proper sanitation in Honiara's slums contributes to disease, threatens safety and denies dignity to these residents. The government must take immediate steps to ensure access to clean water and adequate sanitation for people living in slums.



Women and children in a Honiara slum use a dirty stream to bathe themselves and wash clothes.





## WOMEN ATTACKED AND ABUSED

Violence against women in Solomon Islands is widespread. A 2009 survey conducted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the government revealed that 64 per cent of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 had experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their partners and other family members.<sup>16</sup> The government itself has acknowledged the pervasiveness of violence against women and in 2010, approved a national policy to eliminate violence against women.

Women in Honiara's slums face particularly high risks of physical and sexual violence, especially when they are collecting water in the early evening, bathing, or using toilets at night. As described above, they often walk long distances, usually through the bush to get to a water source or to use the toilet. Because there is no electricity, settlements are generally poorly lit at night, with many dark spots which are dangerous for women.

Amnesty International spoke to a number of women who said they were physically or sexually abused by some men outside their household, but were too frightened to make formal complaints to the police for fear of reprisals from their attackers. Women were also afraid to use communal toilets at night, which were relatively far away from their homes, especially if they did not have lanterns or torches.

In August 2010, when Amnesty International met with women's organizations dealing with violence in Honiara, it was evident that there were a large number of sexual assaults happening in slums, many of which went unreported. Women's rights activists in Honiara said that women did not report these assaults for fear of retaliation by their attackers, especially since everyone in the settlement knew each other and women were apprehensive about causing rifts by complaining about their assault.

Violence against women within the family continues to be seen as a private issue and the police and other officials are often reluctant to intervene.<sup>17</sup> In a number of settlements, including Kobito 1, 2, 3 and 4, the existence of a police post in the area has done little to prevent the harassment and assault of women and girls.



Women talk about sexual violence at the Solomon Islands Parenting Association centre in Honiara. A 2009 study found that 64 per cent of women and girls in Solomon Islands have experienced physical or sexual violence.



## BEATEN AND RAPED

Amnesty International interviewed a number of women who had been assaulted while bathing, going to the toilet or collecting water. In August 2010, a 37-year-old woman who lives in Mamanawata settlement told Amnesty International that six months previously she had been severely beaten up and raped by two men in the settlement after relieving herself in the sea:

**“The two men were standing by the beach when I finished. I recognized them immediately from their voices. I knew they were drunk because I saw them drinking in the dilapidated house close to the road in the early evening.**

**They came and one of them grabbed my arm and one closed his hand over my mouth. They held me down and took my clothes off and raped me. They were very violent and I had bruises all over my body. I wanted to die desperately and I was crying and crying thinking of my children. After they raped me, they warned me that if I told anyone they would cut me up. I was so afraid but couldn’t do anything. I see them around the settlement but I wouldn’t dare tell the police. They’re very violent and lawless and will not hesitate to hurt me again.**”

An 18-year old woman from Kobito 4 settlement told Amnesty International about her experience of sexual violence:

**“I dropped out of school five years ago because we couldn’t afford to pay the fees, uniform and my bus fare to school every day. Since then, I have stayed at home and helped my mother and father with the house chores. We are very poor and my father sells betel nut at the market up the road. Every day I walk to the broken water pipe in Kobiloko to collect water. I walk in the morning for the water to be used in the day and then walk in the afternoon for our evening drinking and cooking water.**

***About a year ago, while walking to collect water in the afternoon, I was gang-raped by six boys from the nearby settlement. They always drink kwaso by the roadside and when I walked past them, they started calling me to go and say hello to them. I didn't say anything and kept on walking. I was also worried that it was going to get dark soon and I still had a long way to walk to the pipe.***

***On my way back with the water, I met the same boys up the hill. It had gotten dark and they began to harass me. One of them said that they could carry the water for me. When I said no, he got angry and said that I had insulted him. He demanded that the only way to compensate for that was to have sex with him. I refused and he punched me in the stomach. The others then grabbed me and carried me to the bush where I was raped. They each raped me and then left me there after threatening to kill me and my family. I had a black eye and was sore.***

***I was so ashamed for being raped. I vowed not to tell my family because it would bring shame to them. I took the water home and didn't tell my family anything. I couldn't trust the police because they will not help me. I have to live with this shame for the rest of my life. I still walk to the pipe to collect water but this time I have a friend or relative that walks with me. I see those boys sometimes but they don't talk to me and look down when I walk past them.***

A 23-year-old woman said that she was raped in Adiliwa settlement when she came home late after university classes in September 2008. She had gone for a bath at dusk in a stream about 100m from her home.

"The man came from nowhere," she said. "I was quite shocked! I did not have any undergarments and just had my sarong on. I



couldn't scream because he warned me not to scream. It was very easy for him to rape me! *Mifala crae crae nomo!* [I just cried and cried]. I can't believe that it happened to me... I was so stupid to come alone. He was from a neighbouring settlement."

These types of crimes of sexual violence are common, especially for unaccompanied women.

## NO PRIVACY

While gender-based violence is endemic in Solomon Islands, women in settlements also face a great deal of indignity in collecting water, going to the toilet, bathing in the river or streams and changing in front of men who are often playing in adjacent fields. In Kobito 2 settlement, for instance, women and children bathed publicly in the same stream where they washed their clothes and cooking and eating utensils.

Women also told Amnesty International that it was sometimes difficult for them to wash themselves properly in the open streams, particularly when they are menstruating, because of the lack of privacy. Such conditions violate women's right to privacy.



**A house built from cardboard boxes is typical of the dwellings found in Honiara’s slums. To the right is a pit toilet with “walls” fashioned from black plastic bags.**

“Young men often spy on us and we can hear them laughing and whistling,” said a 29-year-old mother of two. “*Mi les long olgeta* [I don’t like it when they do that]. I have no choice because it’s too heavy to carry the water a long way to my home on the ridge!”

Women in some settlements in Honiara told Amnesty International that not having any toilets to use is embarrassing and demeaning. “When we have heavy rain, our pit toilets are unusable so we have to do it in the open,” explained one 32-year-old housewife. “We try and walk to the bush and do it there but we are always wary of men who will come and spy on us. It is easier to do this at night but then we can’t walk too far from our homes because we can be harassed and in some cases, assaulted. I wish we had a good, clean and safe toilet with electricity so we can feel much safer.”

## FAILURE TO PROTECT WOMEN FROM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Amnesty International welcomes the government’s adoption of a Gender Policy in March 2010 and its intention to adopt specific legislation to address violence against women. These initiatives, following a 2009 survey, came as a result of lobbying efforts by women’s groups and the strong commitment of officials in the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs.

In an August 2010 media report, the mayor of Honiara stated that two thirds of women in Solomon Islands experience violence from their partners during their lifetime. He said that often domestic violence is not reported to the police and that even when suspects are investigated and prosecuted, their cases are given a low priority. He reported that the government is stepping up efforts to combat such violence through legislation, improved law enforcement, and better services for victims.<sup>18</sup>

Amnesty International welcomes such statements; however, Amnesty International’s investigations also revealed that some lawyers in the Public Solicitor’s Office (PSO) had refused to represent victims of domestic violence seeking a restraining order from the court unless the victim had visible injuries to her body.<sup>19</sup> The Family Support Centre in Honiara told Amnesty International that several battered women from Kobito 2 and 4 who had approached them for assistance were refused representation by the PSO lawyers because they did not have “black eyes and bruises on their bodies”.<sup>20</sup>

In other cases, women seeking assistance in obtaining a restraining order after being threatened by their partners with a knife had been asked to come back to the PSO several days later because their complaint was not seen as important enough or requiring urgent attention due to the absence of physical injuries. In such circumstances, women fearful of returning to their homes had sought refuge at the Family Support Centre, who then intervened with the police and the PSO on their behalf.

In a 2008 Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) report, it was noted that the Penal Code covers only some forms of domestic violence, that there is no specific crime of domestic violence, and marital rape is not a criminal offence.<sup>21</sup> To Amnesty International’s knowledge, the Penal Code has not yet been amended to criminalize these offences although a legislative reform task force has been set up to reform laws to address domestic violence.

## STATE NEGLIGENCE

The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey is responsible for the planning and administration of all land in Solomon Islands. However, Honiara's slums fall within the jurisdiction of the Honiara City Council and some of the settlements have spilled over to land belonging to the Guadalcanal Provincial Government.

In August 2010, Amnesty International held meetings with senior representatives of the Honiara City Council about the situation in Honiara's slums. However, both national and local government officials said that the solution to overcrowding and lack of basic infrastructure in slums was for residents to return to their villages. The officials interviewed stated that the problems faced by people in slums were the fault of the people concerned and not that of the government.

"It is the responsibility of the government to enforce the law and evict those who have settled on our land," said a Guadalcanal provincial government official. "If we don't do this, then we can have a repeat of the [ethnic] tension."<sup>22</sup>

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Solomon Islands must take steps to ensure that each person has access to sufficient, safe, physically accessible and affordable water, especially for personal and domestic uses.<sup>23</sup> It must also ensure that everyone, without discrimination, has physical and affordable access to sanitation which is hygienic and safe.<sup>24</sup> The government is required to ensure provision of security of tenure and access to essential services.<sup>25</sup>

In discussions with Amnesty International in August 2010, one of the senior planners in the Honiara Town Council stated that it was very difficult for the Council to enforce any of its by-laws relating to water and sanitation in slums. He said that a building code has been in draft form for a long time but that there has been no agreement to adopt it. He also told Amnesty

International that the Council did not know where to start in addressing the challenges in slums and faced difficulties because of the increase in the population of the settlements. There was an attempt by the government to introduce a credit scheme in 2007 so people could borrow money to build their houses. However, this has not taken effect.<sup>26</sup>

Solomon Islands Water Authority (SIWA), which is owned by the government, is responsible for providing water to communities throughout Solomon Islands, including to the people of Honiara. However SIWA has not addressed the problems of water and sanitation in slums. Residents have to pay SIWA connection fees to set up a piped water connection to their community, but these fees are usually too expensive for them.<sup>27</sup>

The health department sends out health inspectors to the settlements to raise awareness on health issues and the use of water and sanitation. But as one inspector explained, little can be achieved without adequate water and sanitation facilities.

"No one knows what to do," he said. "We talk to the people [residents] about health and sanitation but we know that they can't do anything because there is no water, they have no money to build better toilets. Diarrhoea is widespread. It is so sad to be helpless and without hope."

***We talk to the people [residents] about health and sanitation but we know that they can't do anything because there is no water, they have no money to build better toilets.***

Health inspector from the Department of Health, August 2010

## CONCLUSION

Deprived of one of the most basic requirements for survival – an accessible source of clean water and safe toilets – residents in Honiara’s slums are condemned to live in squalid conditions.

Women and girls bear a disproportionate burden in this tragedy, which affects their ability to live in safety and dignity. Every day, they must struggle alone to provide clean water for themselves and their families. In doing so, they are targeted for

harassment, sexual violence, and rape. Even when they go to the toilet or bathe, they risk being harassed or attacked.

It is an unsustainable situation which needs urgent attention from the authorities. The response so far has ranged from outright refusal to acknowledge a problem to toothless gestures. It is time for the government to step up to its responsibilities and restore some hope to these neglected communities.

## ENDNOTES

1 A toilet without a slab or other platform over the pit.

2 All names have been changed to protect the identity of those interviewed.

3 UN-HABITAT (UN Human Settlements Programme) defines a “slum” as “an area that combines, to various extents... residents’ inadequate access to safe water; inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure; poor structural quality housing; overcrowding; and insecure residential status. See UN-HABITAT, *Enabling shelter strategies: Review of experience from two decades of implementation*. UN-HABITAT, 2006, p. 4.

4 Jack Maebuta and Helen Esther Maebuta, “Household Livelihoods in Solomon Islands Squatter Settlements and its Implications for Education and Development in Post-conflict Context” (paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education International Education Research Conference, Canberra, 29 November – 3 December 2009).

5 See Amnesty International, *Solomon Islands: A forgotten conflict*, (September 2000, Index: ASA 43/005/2000); and “Fear for safety,” Urgent Action, (3 July 2000, Index: ASA 43/004/2000).

6 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN CESCR), General Comment No. 15: The right to water (2002), UN Doc. E/C.12/2002/11 (2003), para 3.

7 UN CESCR, General Comment No. 15: The right to water, UN Doc. E/C.12/2002/11, 20 January 2003, paras 12, 18, 37 [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/water/docs/CESCR\\_GC\\_15.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/water/docs/CESCR_GC_15.pdf).

8 Solomon Islands Government, *Report on 2009 Population and Housing Census*, p. 8. This figure does not include people in settlements on the outskirts of Honiara that are under the responsibility of the Guadalcanal province.

9 In 2006, it was estimated that approximately a third of Honiara’s population (17,000 out of 50,000) lived in informal settlements and were growing at a rate of 26% a year. Satish Chand and Charles Yala, “Informal land systems within urban settlements in Honiara and Port Moresby” in *Making Land Work, Vol.2*, Australian Agency for International Development (Canberra 2008), p. 88.

10 Jack Maebuta and Helen Esther Maebuta, “Household Livelihoods”, p. 6.

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*to safe drinking water and sanitation* (2009), UN Doc. A/HRC/12/24, paras 64-66 and 70-80. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/Sanitation.aspx>

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14 World Health Organization and United Nations Children’s Fund Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, *Progress on Sanitation and Drinking-water: 2010 Update*, p. 12.

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24 UN CESCR, Statement on the Right to Sanitation (2010) UN Doc. E/C.12/2010/1, para 8.

25 UN CESCR, General Comment No. 4, The right to adequate housing, UN Doc. E/1992/23, para 8 <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/%28Symbol%29/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e?Opendocument#%20Contained%20>.

26 Amnesty International interview with Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey official, August 2010.

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Staff from the Young Womens Christian Association of Solomon Islands at International Women's Day celebrations in Honiara, 8 March 2011 (CC by 2.0).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International urges the Government of Solomon Islands to take the necessary steps to respect, protect and fulfil the right of women to live free from violence and discrimination and the rights to water and sanitation for all. Where these steps are within the mandate of the Honiara Town Council and the Guadalcanal provincial government, the government should ensure that they implement such steps.

### Water and sanitation

- Take urgent steps to ensure at least the minimum essential levels of safe water for personal and domestic use and sanitation in all slums, including by ensuring access to clean water within the vicinity of each household, providing assistance to residents to establish water storage tanks, build safe toilets and private washing areas, and by providing information on hygienic water storage and use of toilets.
- Adopt a policy which sets out clear and time-bound targets to ensure access to clean water and adequate sanitation for all those who lack it, especially people living in slums.

- Immediately begin talks with slum residents and NGOs working there to discuss ways to ensure provision of sufficient, safe, accessible and affordable water and sanitation. To develop a co-ordinated approach and ensure implementation, the government should set up a task force comprising slum representatives, including women, youth, elderly and those with disabilities; government representatives; members of Honiara City Council; and the Guadalcanal provincial government.

- Recognize the rights of every person to water and sanitation as enforceable rights in national law.

### Violence against women

- Initiate a consultation with women in slums so that those affected can identify key concerns for their safety and well-being, and take into account such views when designing a plan of action to address violence against women, whether such violence is perpetrated in the home or the community.
- Enact specific legislation to criminalize all forms of violence against women, including within households, as a matter of urgency.

- Ensure that the police, prosecution, Public Solicitor's Office and support services are given adequate resources to combat violence against women through training, awareness raising and practical support to women to pursue their cases, including effective witness protection.

- Ensure that police posts (community policing) in the settlements are well resourced with both men and women police officers based in these posts. Officers should conduct regular patrols in the settlements and should be provided with regular training in gender and violence.

- Ensure that the police immediately and impartially investigate, and where substantiated, ensure that all complaints by women of physical and sexual violence are prosecuted.

- Provide policy directions to the Public Solicitor's Office to ensure that women and young girls seeking its assistance be given the attention and support they need.

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