



A SNAPSHOT OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S KEY HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

This is a brief snapshot of some of the human rights issues in the Pacific that Amnesty International has been working on recently, which are relevant to the Pacific Parliamentary and Political Leaders Forum (hereafter called "The Forum") taking place in Wellington 18-22 April 2013.

This briefing does not represent an exhaustive list of human rights concerns in the Pacific.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Pacific continues to have some of the highest rates of violence against women (with PNG and Solomon Islands amongst the highest in the world) and lowest representation of women in Parliament.

Last year Pacific Island Leaders committed to a Gender Equality Declaration, which included specific measures to address violence against women and low representation rates of women in leadership positions.

All of the Pacific Island Countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Tonga is the only Pacific Island Country that has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, citing cultural reasons. Pacific Island countries have a relatively low ratification rate of other core human rights treaties.

Amnesty International has raised concerns about sorcery related violence in PNG and the disproportionate effect this has on women. Amnesty International has called on the government to repeal the Sorcery Act 1971 and strengthen protections to end violence against women.

For more information:

- [Briefing on sexual and gender based violence in the Pacific](#)
- [PNG: Appalling violence in Easter 'witch-hunt'](#)
- [PNG must act after woman burned alive for 'sorcery'](#)
- [PNG: Police must act urgently to save captured woman accused of 'sorcery'](#)

Relevant Forum session:

Session One: Friday 19 April, 9-10am

Topic: Gender equality and the gender balance of parliaments

DEATH PENALTY

In practice the Pacific has effectively remained death penalty free for around 20 years. However this is now in jeopardy with the Attorney General for Papua New Guinea looking for ways in which people can be executed under the criminal laws which reintroduced the death penalty in 2008. This goes against global trends, which has seen more countries abolish the death penalty in recent years.

A number of Pacific Island countries still have the death penalty in archaic laws, but have not implemented them in years. Priority should be given to repealing death penalty laws which are not in use. If this is done, there is a real possibility that the Pacific could be a shining example to the rest of the world as the first death penalty-free region.

For more information:



- Facts: The death penalty in the Pacific Islands

Relevant Forum session:

Session Six: Saturday 20 April, 10-11am

Topic: Good governance, human rights and workable democracy in the Pacific

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Amnesty International remains concerned about restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly in Fiji and that the current proposed draft constitution would entrench decrees which limit these rights.

A number of organisations have been prevented from holding peaceful gatherings or marches under these regulations.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the number of human rights advocates, unionists and former politicians who have been subject to arbitrary arrest and detention by the Fiji government.

For more information:

- Amnesty International's recommendations for Fiji's Universal Periodic Review 2010
- Fiji: Paradise Lost

Relevant Forum session:

Session Six: Saturday 20 April, 10-11am

Topic: Good governance, human rights and workable democracy in the Pacific

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Tuvalu recently passed a law requiring the registration of religious organisations, which requires the consent of the community. Amnesty International is concerned that these restrictions in effect discriminate against certain religious minorities in Tuvalu and would prevent the establishment of new religions. Through Tuvalu's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), these concerns will be raised with the UN Human Rights Committee.

For more information on Amnesty International's recommendations to Tuvalu's UPR please contact advocacy@amnesty.org.nz

Relevant Forum session:

Session Six: Saturday 20 April, 10-11am

Topic: Good governance, human rights and workable democracy in the Pacific

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE

In December 2012 and March 2013, it was reported that a number of prisoners were tortured following their recapture in Fiji and a video was released apparently showing escaped prisoners being tortured by the police. The NZ parliament responded to this situation by condemning the torture and calling for an independent investigation.

For more information:

- Fiji: Shocking video depicts alleged torture of prisoners



- Open Letter Concerning Reports of Torture of Recaptured Prisoners

Relevant Forum session:

Session Six: Saturday 20 April, 10-11am

Topic: Good governance, human rights and workable democracy in the Pacific

A HOME FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Informal settlements are growing at rapid rates around urban centres in a number of Pacific Island Countries. As part of the right to adequate housing, governments have a responsibility to ensure that people are not left homeless and vulnerable to other human rights violations. A forced eviction is the removal of people against their will from their homes or the land they occupy without due process and legal safeguards, including adequate notice, legal remedies and compensation for their losses.

Amnesty International has reported on access to water and sanitation in the Solomon Islands and the link to violence against women. The Special Rapporteur on Water and Sanitation visited Kiribati and Tuvalu last year and is yet to release a final report. As part of the right to adequate housing, governments have a responsibility to ensure that minimum essential levels of water are provided.

For more information:

- Solomon Islands report: *Where Is The Dignity In That? Women In Solomon Island Slums Denied Sanitation and Safety*

Relevant Forum sessions:

Session One: Friday 19 April, 9-10am

Topic: Gender equality and the gender balance of parliaments

Session Four: Friday 19 April 3-4pm

Topic: Health

Session Six: Saturday 20 April, 10-11am

Topic: Good governance, human rights and workable democracy in the Pacific

A REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISM

Fiji has a national human rights institution which has been widely regarded as compromised following the 2006 coup. Papua New Guinea and Samoa have recently made commitments to set up their own national human rights institutions. While positive steps are being made on the establishment of national human rights mechanisms, this should not preclude discussions of a regional human rights mechanism.

When many Pacific Island Countries may be unable to establish and maintain an independent national human rights mechanism of its own, a regional mechanism could play a valuable role in terms of making human rights more accessible to Pacific Island peoples.

Relevant Forum sessions:

Session Three: Friday 19 April, 2-3pm

Topic: Problems of isolation and delivery of services to remote communities

Session Six: Saturday 20 April, 10-11am

Topic: Good governance, human rights and workable democracy in the Pacific

Refugees and the 'Pacific Solution'



Amnesty International has raised concerns over Australia's 'Pacific Solution' to the issue of refugees, in which refugees/asylum seekers are transferred to Nauru and Manus Island where they are held under a 'no advantage' policy. This approach is a violation of international human rights and is inadequate in its bid to prevent people from seeking refuge in Australia or New Zealand. Amnesty International has inspected detention facilities on Nauru and expressed its concerns about the mental health, indefinite and mandatory detention and delays in processing asylum seeker applications. The UNHCR has found both Nauru and Manus Is to be harsh and in violation of international refugee laws.

For more information:

- [Australia: Asylum camp cruel and inhumane](#)
- [Amnesty International: Expert panel recommendations a major setback for refugee policy](#)
- [UNHCR Mission to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea 15-17 January 2013](#)

Relevant Forum sessions:

Session Three: Friday 19 April, 2-3pm

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Session Six: Saturday 20 April, 10-11am

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Amnesty International encourages Pacific Island leaders to meet their commitments made last year at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) meeting. Follow this [link](#) for our comment from last year's PIF.

For further information on human rights in the Pacific please contact our office using the details below.