

Death Penalty in PNG - Versus the Well- Being of our People

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Parliamentarians are duly elected to represent 7.1 million people in this developing country, Papua New Guinea, to govern and to lead. The government of the day does have the power to amend existing laws and to make new laws for the best interest of the people, the resources of the country and the environment. It is sad to see many innocent people becoming victims of many kinds of violence within our society. Violence at this alarming rate is a symptom and a signal that sends a message that needs urgent attention and response at all levels of society.

On Tuesday, 28th May, 2013 the Parliament of Papua New Guinea passed laws allowing execution by a range of methods, including hanging, electrocution, lethal injection and firing squad. This raises questions in the minds of many people, as to the effectiveness of this kind of violent response in bringing about a lessening of violence in our society. Some other questions that come to mind:

- Is an individual's right to life as protected by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights being respected by this law?
- Is the Death Penalty breaching the fundamental rights enshrined in our Constitution, the five National goals and directives of PNG?
- What went wrong in the last 36 years of Independence for the government to come up with such tough law for its citizens?
- What does "democratic country" mean? How widely did the government consult with the people before passing this law?
- The Death Penalty is talking about you and your life, your family and your future generation. How does it feel for you as a citizen when you were not invited to participate in the decision making?
- Where is our moral support for those who most need us? This includes all victims of violence, our young people as they grow into adulthood and even those who resort to violence themselves.

The passing of the Death Penalty by the current government on 28th May 2013 is a massive challenge in history for the country, the government and its people. We need to look again at the country's development record, such official documents as the PNG Vision 2050, the PNG Development Strategy 2010-2030, a report published by the National Research Institute titled "Papua New Guinea Development Performance 1975-2008" as well as reports published by various donor agencies and the International organisations such as World Bank, the United Nations and Transparency International. Eight basic development indicators taken from the above sources call everyone to wholeheartedly take action: response is needed from the government, bureaucrats and responsible citizens from all walks of life.

- The Infant Mortality Rate, which shows the number of infants who die before the first birthday out of every 1,000 babies born in the country in a year, is 57. Infant mortality in Fiji is 18 per 1,000 births, and the whole of East Asia and the Pacific is 31.

- The Maternal Mortality Rate is 733 per 100,000. This means that 733 women die out of every 100,000 women during child birth in PNG. This is four times higher than the countries in the Pacific.
- PNG's life expectancy at birth is 57 years. This compares with the average of 67 years in developing countries and the 72 years for East Asia and the Pacific. People in neighbouring countries live longer than Papua New Guineans.
- Only 57% of the adults are literate. This compares with 93% in East Asia and Pacific region and 82% in the world. More people cannot read and write in PNG than anywhere else in the world.
- Unemployment is very high. Only 500,000 people (13%) hold paid jobs out of a working-age population of some 3.8 million. The implicit level of unemployment is 87%.
- School drop- out rate at grades Grade 8, 10 and 12 are 50%, 80% and 70% respectively. This means only half of Grade 8 students go on to Grade 9: 20% of Grade 10s go to Grade 11: and 30% of Grade 12s get accepted to tertiary institutions. The main reason for the very high dropout rates is lack of facilities and the spaces in Educational Institutions.
- The Human Development Index (HDI) is a measure used by the United Nations to assess countries in three areas of human development - life expectancy, adult literacy, and school enrolment. It also takes into account people's standard of living as measured by the gross national product per capita. In 2010 PNG was ranked 137 out of 169 countries, making it the 33rd least developed country in the world.
- The proportion of the population living below the international poverty line of US\$1.00 per day (or approximately K1, 000 per year) was 40% in 2010. Estimates in 1996 and 2006 respectively were 25% and 37%, meaning that an increasing proportion of the population has been progressively becoming poorer. PNG is a rich country full of poor people.

When people are smart, wise, fair, and healthy and have a happy society, there will be no death penalty in this country.

Sr. Maryanne Kolkia RSM

On behalf of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea

Institute Centre - STANMORE

33 Myrtle Street Stanmore NSW Australia 2048

PO Box 284 Petersham NSW Australia 2049

Phone: (02) 9572 5400 Fax: (02) 9560 5435 Email: ismapngcentre@mercy.org.au

Website: institute.mercy.org.au