

# OVERCOMING THE RAVAGES OF CIVIL WAR IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Nine years of civil war in Papua New Guinea cost the lives of approximately 20,000 people in the region. Key triggers of the conflict were grievances, political conflicts and disagreements about the unequal distribution of the revenue from and the environmental effects of the Panguna copper mine in Bougainville. Sustained peace cannot be reached without addressing the underlying causes of the conflict.

## **Supporting the implementation of the Peace Agreement**

The UN have been supporting the implementation of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, including the referendum on the future political status of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, the area where the civil war raged until a 1997 truce and a permanent ceasefire in 1998. Since the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001, the former combatants,

the National Government of Papua New Guinea, the Autonomous Bougainville Government and various political factions within Bougainville, have been working to achieve lasting peace in Bougainville.

The PBF funding has come at a crucial time as the UN supports the Governments and people of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville to engage in formal and informal talks. The aim is to advance the implementation of the Peace Agreement and strengthen the relations between the two Governments. Another focus is on establishing good governance and promoting fiscal self-reliance. In this regard, the PBF has allocated more than \$9 million since 2014 to help address key remaining issues and support the implementation of the Peace Agreement. UN agencies on the ground implement the projects in partnership with the Government and the civil society, with guidance from the UN Peacebuilding

Support Office and the Department of Political Affairs.

With PBF support, the UN is also helping to facilitate dialogue between the Me'ekamui faction, which did not sign the 2001 Peace Agreement, and the Autonomous Bougainville Government. This led to the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the parties.

Another much-awaited breakthrough took place following a meeting between senior officials and the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and the President of Bougainville in May 2016. The parties agreed to set a target date of 15 June 2019 for holding the referendum. They also agreed on a referendum work plan and the establishment of an independent agency to oversee the referendum.

*"It shows that the commitment to achieving peace by peaceful means, evident ever since the Bougainville peace process began in 1997, continues to flourish in Papua New Guinea", said Chief Dr. John Momis, President of the Autonomous Region, after the talks. "I salute the Prime Minister for his very positive contribution to this historic outcome."*

The UN have been giving significant prominence to the role of women in political decision-making and their participation in referendum preparations. One important achievement in 2016, facilitated by UN Women, has been the Bougainville Government's decision to establish the Office for Gender Equality in the Office of the Chief Secretary, paving the way for greater attention to women's needs.

### **Healing the wounds of the past**

Meanwhile, with PBF support, UN Women, UNICEF and their local partners are helping to deal with the continuing psychosocial effects of the civil war on communities, especially the adverse effects on family relations. With UNICEF support, 35 trained counsellors have been conducting awareness activities and psychosocial support outreach services in target villages, covering family and sexual violence, child abuse and impact of violence on child development. The project is also helping to strengthen the capacity of the Bougainville Government to coordinate and provide referral and treatment services for those affected by trauma.

In addition, under UN Women leadership, the project is facilitating community dialogue sessions in the

Siwai and Buin districts of South Bougainville on gender-based violence, human rights, trauma healing and peacebuilding. The project has already held 120 community conversations with thousands of participants across 52 locations in the project districts.

Participants in community conversations have indicated improvement in communication among husbands, wives and children; more sharing of domestic chores between men and women; and a decrease in binge drinking and violence. *"After I sat for the conversations, I realised I can't work on my own and needed support from others, especially the communities if we wanted to address issues like homebrew, violence and fighting in the communities,"* says Lucy Kukue, a 47-year-old single mother from the Kararu village assembly in the Buin District. *"I also joined a women's group and became more involved in our church activities. There is stability and peace in my own family as I understand how violence like swearing and physical violence between our own family affects us."*

### **Looking forward**

As Bougainville acknowledges the progress made so far, various issues remain to be resolved on the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Community needs – for example regarding political engagement, socio-economic support and reduction of trauma and violence – also persist. PBF funding will continue to enable the UN to play a crucial support role in taking forward this complex peacebuilding and transition process, at both the political and community level.

## **ABOUT THE PBF**

The UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is the organization's financial instrument of first resort to sustain peace in countries or situations at risk or affected by violent conflict. The PBF may invest with UN entities, governments, regional organizations, multilateral banks, national multi-donor trust funds or civil society organizations. The PBF has allocated \$652 million from 2006 – 2016 to 35 recipient countries. Since inception, 58 member states contributed to the Fund, 33 in the present 2017-2019 Business Plan. The PBF works across pillars and supports integrated UN responses to fill critical gaps; respond quickly and with flexibility to political opportunities; and catalyse processes and resources in a risk-tolerant fashion.