

The Justice and Peace Committee of the Diocese of Bougainville is making an urgent appeal to the National and Provincial governments, to reassess the present crisis in the North Solomons. Any concerned person following the events of the last three months has come to the conclusion that the present policy needs immediate redirection to conform to the reality in the Province.

The National and Provincial governments are to be commended on sincere efforts to solve the present emergency. All persons who are involved in violence are to be condemned. Such actions may never be condoned no matter how just the ends may seem.

The present policy at various levels of government [Post-Courier, Wed. April 12, p.2] of terrorizing the population of the North Solomons through random acts of brutalizing innocent victims [eg: PMV driver of Radio North Solomons, April 7] is not subduing persons, but only increasing hatred and acts of revenge. The riot squad in particular have proven undisciplined through wanton-malicious acts of violence. No government or arm of government has the right to terrorize its citizens (Helsinki Accord on Human Rights): [eg: Youths, judged by the Court magistrate to be innocent, were tortured while in custody at the Arawa jail; severely beaten with rifle butts, attempts were made to break limbs; sometimes deprived of food and water; and put in a crucifixion stance by hanging detainees by one hand from a door with handcuffs, so that they could not recline or sit for 14 hours].

The Government has attempted for several months to capture Francis Ona. To date these attempts have proved a failure, and led to 14 confirmed deaths, and over 100 persons being injured. During the 2nd. World War, 93,000 Japanese troops attempted to capture an expat. coastwatcher - Paul Mason - but this proved impossible. Does the government believe that it can capture an indigenous Bougainvillian with 500 police and Defence force soldiers, when they do not even have a photograph to suggest what he looks like? Might we also remind the government that a dead martyr or a Martyr in prison can be even more dangerous [eg: Steve Biko and Nelson Mandella of South Africa].

The peoples of the North Solomons have had 20 years of empty promises. Twenty years of government and opposition politicians making political capital out of the landowners grievances. One more future promise of action is not going to pacify anyone. The government needs to face that reality.

Justice and Peace Bougainville therefore sends this urgent plea to all concerned to end the bloodshed, the useless killings and torture. We ask the government to take a fresh look at the three point programme of peace outlined by Bishop Gregory Singkai several months ago:

1) End the vicious cycle of confrontation and counter-confrontation which is causing the killings. Remove the riot squad and defence force from the North Solomons. End the escalating violence now.

2) The North Solomons needs reconciliation now, not revenge. The same reconciliation that was extended to rebel leaders during the 1975-76 secession crisis. In the spirit of reconciliation, recognizing that atrocities have been committed on all sides, promise Francis Ona and his followers, freedom from prosecution from any acts committed. This benevolent act costs the government nothing, as the Justice department admits that it has no proof of specific acts committed by Francis Ona or his supporters.

3) The government must immediately propose a comprehensive plan to meet the legitimate demands of the landowners and those suffering from the effects of environmental and socio-cultural pollution. This plan would include:

- a) Immediate money made available to compensate landowners and those suffering from pollution,
- b) Immediate social services (roads, schools, hospitals etc.) made available to landowners and persons suffering from pollution,
- c) A list of future finance and services that are to be guaranteed in the renegotiation of the BCL agreement, and
- d) A place for Francis Ona and his group in the renegotiation.

It will take moral fortitude and political courage to end the strife in the North Solomons. National and Provincial leaders of all parties must set aside their differences and unite behind a policy of reconciliation.

If the government continues its present bankrupt policy then all we can hope for is more violence, which equates to more dead youths and children [eg: a Grade 10 school

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boy from Orami village was bound and murdered in cold-blood by defence force soldiers on April 6..... one example reported to Justice and Peace Bougainville. Such actions gain Francis Ona new supporters each day! The Police and Defence force cannot even hope to protect the Company and Government property [eg: damage to BCL equipment at 11 a.m. as in Post-Courier, Friday April 7 p.1; and the huge powerline tower demolished near Pinei on April 15].

If the Government sincerely wants to end the trouble then we pray that the Peace programme outlined above be adopted which would then allow the Catholic Church to act as a mediator to end the violence, and mediate the surrender of Francis Ona. [Matthew 26:51-52].

In the following days "Post-Courier", the Police Minister was reported to have said that he is not going to take notice of some loud-mouths in the North Solomons province, and that the Catholic Church in Bougainville, ought to get out into the villages, as they do in the Highlands, and help solve the present social and political unrest! sic!

Justice and Peace Bougainville, replies to the Police Minister's statement ... 20th. April.

The Justice and Peace Committee of the Bougainville diocese deplores the statement of the Police Minister, Mr. Mathias Japae, who must be either totally ignorant of the situation on the island of Bougainville, or involved in a cover-up of criminal actions of his police.

Justice and Peace committee has proof of its allegations and will present these to an International organization, Amnesty International, so that this country and the world will know the truth about the tortures inflicted on the peoples of the North Solomons such as savage beatings and terror tactics. The people of the North Solomons are being treated worse than village dogs: shoot first and ask questions later, is the policy of the day.

Justice and Peace Bougainville must appeal to an International body, because of witnesses having their lives threatened by brutal beatings and possible murder. Does Mr. Japae deny the near murder of Bernard Devatan and Steven Ona, who attempted to give information to the police [Times, week 13-19, p.2]? Does Mr. Japae deny that the police are attempting to stifle Radio North Solomons by the cruel, malicious beating of an NBC Kieta news reporter? Does Mr. Japae deny that the public servants of the nation are about to go on strike because of these actions? Does Mr. Japae know that his police wantonly threatened Bougainvillian Mine workers in the BCL mess yesterday, and that the union is meeting to close down the mine if the police are not pulled out? Wake up Mr. Japae, and stop defending the criminal actions by police!

If Mr. Japae was aware of what was happening in the North Solomons then he would know that the Catholic Church has constantly been preaching peace in the troubled areas even though the priests have on occasion been harassed by the police [eg: Tunuru parish]. The people of the North Solomons are getting tired of turning the other cheek when they are constantly brutalized, when the police burn their houses and steal their belongings [Theresa Koibo - Radio North Solomons, April 19th.].

Justice and Peace Committee Bougainville welcomes the constructive comments of Mr. Bernard Narakobi. However, the reality of the situation in the North Solomons demands reconciliation between all parties and not retribution. Francis Ona will continue to make fools of the government and combined security unless Francis Ona and his supporters are given an immunity from prosecution. Does the government want this crisis to carry on until there is a real secession movement. The reality of the situation in the North Solomons is that Francis Ona grows stronger each day as does talk of a secession movement. Justice and Peace committee begs the government to reconsider an immunity from prosecution, to stop the killing. Unless Francis Ona and his youth movement are confronted, any reconciliation movement is doomed to failure.
