



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Papua New Guinea

Planning Year: 2006

2006 Country Operations Plan for Papua New Guinea

Part I: Overview

1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment

Papua New Guinea hosts up to 10,000 mainly West Papuan refugees, some cases date back to the 1960's, with the largest influx occurring between 1984 and 1986. On 17 July 1986, the Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG) acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. In accordance with article 42 of the Convention, the GoPNG made several reservations with respect to the provision contained in articles 17(1) – wage earning employment, 21 – housing, 22 (1) –Public education, 26 – freedom of movement, 31- refugees unlawfully in the country of refuge, 32 – expulsion and 34 - naturalisation, and GoPNG does not accept the obligations stipulated in these articles. However, in 1996, GoPNG did endorse a “Limited Integration” policy that allowed West Papuan refugees who had been relocated to East Awin to be granted Permissive Residency status. As permissive residents they enjoy (conditional) freedom of movement; engage in business activities; enrol in PNG schools and tertiary institutions; and access health facilities. Restrictions include not residing in the border areas of Western and Sepik Provinces, not engaging in political activities, not having voting rights and not having the right to membership of political parties.

Government officials and the general public are generally sympathetic towards West Papua refugees because of their close cultural ties. GoPNG walks a fine line between supporting its Melanesian kin and maintaining good relations with its neighboring countries. Asylum seekers and refugees from elsewhere face more challenges to locally integrate into Papua New Guinea. .

Unfortunately, GoPNG did not move forward on the development of its refugee policy, legislation and the related refugee status determination procedures following its accession to the convention. Since November 2002, UNHCR has assisted GoPNG to develop draft domestic refugee legislation. It was hoped the legislation would be passed in 2004. However, the PNG Director-General recently informed UNHCR that the draft PNG Refugee Law Act would be abandoned in favour of simplified, basic refugee legislation, based on the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference (PIDC) model, to be included into a newly drafted Immigration Act. For planning purposes, it is assumed that the Immigration Act will be passed during 2005.

Controversy over several government appointments including the Governor General, the poor state of the economy, provincial requests for greater autonomy, and government maneuvering to avoid a “no confidence motion”, occupied the majority of parliament’s time in 2004. It is likely that 2005 and 2006 will continue to be a turbulent period in PNG politics as the government and opposition parties compete for power in the lead up to elections in 2007.

According to PNG’s current Treasurer, Bart Philemon, “The PNG economy has been erratic and uneven for the past 29 years, characterized by phases of moderate growth interspersed with periods of reckless spending”. Furthermore, he admitted that “poor fiscal policy, structural problems and political instability combined with a mentality of heavy dependence amongst the population have been the hallmark of PNG’s economic history”. PGK722 million of PNG’s annual budget goes servicing offshore debts totaling PGK8.6 billion, as well as public sector wages. Relatively little is provided to people for goods and services.

Although PNG's economy continued to show signs of improvement during 2004, GoPNG is still critically short of cash. All government departments, including UNHCR's partners, are effectively paralyzed by the lack of operational resources.

The standard of living in PNG is very low. PNG ranks 133 out of 177 countries in UNDP's Human Development Index, the average life expectancy at birth is 57.6 years, and the World Bank estimates the number of persons living below one U.S dollar per day at 1.2 million persons (22% of the population).

GoPNG relies heavily on foreign aid which usually comes with conditions attached. In 2004, under the terms of Australia's revised aid package, the "Enhanced Cooperation Programme", Australian Federal Police were deployed to PNG to train police and "improve administration of law and justice". Australian bureaucrats were also deployed to enhance governance within PNG's public sector and to monitor the use of Australian aid.

International and national NGOs which are working on refugee issues are virtually non-existent in PNG. Those that have a presence are generally affiliated with missionaries or Christian Churches, their activities in humanitarian assistance sectors are basic because they lack technical expertise and the resources to have a profound impact. In preparing this COP submission, LO Port Moresby has carefully weighed the beneficiaries' overall needs against the limited scope of other actors and the need to respect the low standards which the receiving communities experience, in deciding how much of the needs will remain unmet, and how much of the needs met should be met by UNHCR.

The security situation in PNG is difficult, due to high levels of violent crime. UNSECOORD Phase 2 is in effect throughout the whole country.

PNG's location between Asia and Australia makes it a potential transit country for secondary movers. Its proximity and cultural ties to the Indonesian province of Papua means there is potential for a mass influx of West Papuan refugees. Given the continuing political instability and the security situation in Papua, regular revision of PNG's contingency plans and training of GoPNG officials is considered important.

In May 2003, a Contingency Plan covering three mass arrival scenarios was developed by UNHCR, GoPNG and local stakeholders. Two provincial annexes, covering Sundaun Province and Western Province, were developed by relevant stakeholders during UNHCR-facilitated workshops in 2004. Although the Contingency Plans exist, GoPNG lacks the capacity to respond on its own. There are 4 UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA) currently operating in PNG, that can be relied upon to assist in the event of an emergency. LO Port Moresby will continue to work in 2006 to formulate a strategy for working together to meet the needs of refugees specifically, through bilateral discussions and active participation in UNCT meetings.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

Derived from the Agenda for Protection, UNHCR's Global Strategic objectives, and the UNHCR objectives in Asia and the Pacific, the following are the overall strategic goals of the 2006 Papua New Guinean refugee programme:

- **Support the Government of Papua New Guinea to develop a Protection regime that is in accordance with the Agenda for Protection.**

Through engagement of GoPNG at the political and diplomatic level, UNHCR will encourage GoPNG to review and withdraw its reservations to the 1951 Convention and to amend its existing domestic legislation accordingly, incorporating UNHCR's input (AFP goal 1.1). The same approach will be used to advocate GoPNG ratify the two Statelessness Conventions (AFP goal 1.12). GoPNG's ratification of the Statelessness Conventions will also be pursued, to provide additional protection to West Papuan refugees located in border camps that may be or already are at risk of becoming stateless.

UNHCR will provide technical input into the development of regulations covering RSD procedures once domestic legislation has been enacted. RSD Training for Immigration Officials, and provision of up to date COI and technical support, will improve urban asylum seekers' access to RSD (AFP Goal 1.2) and combat secondary movements by reducing the amount of time asylum seekers must wait for decisions.

Public information activities, with particular focus on World Refugee Day, will be used to enhance awareness of and respect for refugees (AFP goal 1.8) amongst PNG's civil society. Public awareness activities will highlight the positive social and cultural contributions which can be made by refugees from all backgrounds to combat xenophobia often directed against asylum seekers and refugees from Asia and the Middle East.

In 2006, UNHCR will continue to conduct workshops in border areas for local police, immigration and customs officials, to familiarise them with UNHCR, UNHCR's mandate, appropriate standards of treatment and appropriate reception arrangements for asylum seekers (AFP goal 1.9). These workshops should enhance respect for asylum seekers and refugees amongst the workshop participants, equip participants to correctly identify asylum seekers and refugees, and respond appropriately to their needs (AFP goal 2.1).

UNHCR will facilitate meetings of the Permissive Residency Screening Committee to consider applications for new and renewed Permissive Residency by West Papuan refugees living in East Awin. UNHCR's participation in the meetings will ensure that applications by refugee women are considered in their own right and not as dependents of their husband or father (AFP goal 1.11 and AFP goal 6.1). LO Port Moresby will engage UNICEF and the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga (DDK) to ensure newborn refugee children from East Awin receive birth certificates from GoPNG with the vital endorsement/support of the Division of Border Affairs (AFP goal 1.11 and AFP goal 6.2).

GoPNG has been reluctant to address the issue of registration and documentation of West Papuan refugees living in border camps. This issue will continue to be a focus of UNHCR in 2006. It will be necessary to engage GoPNG at a high level to obtain approval for registration and documentation activities. A joint UNHCR-GoPNG registration mission would enable population data to be collected, vulnerable groups to be identified and applications for documents to be completed by the beneficiaries. Registration and the provision of documentation will not only "regularise" the status of the border groups but enhance the quality and effectiveness of UNHCR's programmes involving the border groups by providing baseline data for use in results-based management (AFP goal 1.11, UNHCR Global Strategic objective 8 and RBAP objective 7).

- **Strengthen the capacity of local partners in PNG, including GoPNG, to provide effective protection and assistance to persons of concern.**

Given the potential for a mass influx of refugees from Papua province of Indonesia, it is essential that UNHCR build strong partnerships with agencies on the ground in border areas. Through engagement of the West Papuan refugees, UNHCR has regained credibility, lost when the previous office closed, and formed strategic partnerships with DDK and GoPNG. UNHCR will maintain regular contacts with DDK and GoPNG in 2006, provide programme

training, and invite representatives from partner agencies to participate in the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation phases of programmes. These measures will strengthen UNHCR's partnerships (AFP goal 3.2, AFP goal 3.3, UNHCR Global objective 6 and RBAP objective 7); enhance the quality and effectiveness of UNHCR programmes through Results Based Management (RBAP objective 7) ; and strengthen the capacity of UNHCR and its partners to respond to an emergency (UNHCR Global objective 4).

Contingency Planning activities will continue in 2006. LO Port Moresby will conduct workshops to familiarise local stakeholders with PNG's Contingency Plan. Input will be sought from participants that will enable the contingency plan to be routinely updated. UNHCR will attempt to formulate a strategy for working together with other UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA) to meet the needs of refugees in a mass influx scenario, specifically through bilateral discussions and active participation in UNCT meetings. These activities will strengthen the emergency preparedness and response capacity of UNHCR, GoPNG, other UN agencies and local stakeholders (AFP goal 1.10, UNHCR Global Strategic objective 4, RBAP objective 3 and RBAP objective 7).

LO Port Moresby will conduct SGBV workshops in Kiunga and East Awin to follow on from similar workshops conducted in 2005. The workshops will be targeted at educating the community and church workers about the existence of SGBV, recognising cases of SGBV, and developing strategies for combating SGBV (AFP goal 4.4 and AFP goal 6.1). These SGBV workshops will empower the East Awin community to address a major protection need of refugee women and children (AFP goal 3.4).

Close and regular liaison with donors will be used to seek development funds for UNHCR's partners and refugee hosting communities. UNHCR will also encourage donors (particularly AusAID, NZAid, JICA and EU) to consider extending development assistance to refugee hosting areas. Strategic use of local and international media contacts will ensure refugee issues are prominent on the national and regional agenda and donors' contributions receive appropriate exposure (AFP goal 3.5).

The participation of GoPNG officials in protection related workshops and regional meetings (APC, San Remo Refugee Law Course, e-Centre etc.) will be funded by UNHCR to increase the protection expertise of GoPNG officials, and encourage them to network with colleagues from other countries (AFP goal 3.2).

The Diocese of Daru-Kiunga (DDK) provides health care services to refugees in East Awin. During 2006, in the absence of any alternative, UNHCR will fund refurbishment of the health post buildings that have deteriorated in the harsh climate. This relatively small investment will ensure that a number of primary health care facilities for the East Awin population meets the standard (health core indicator 4) for stable situations and strengthen UNHCR's partnership with DDK.

The average annual rainfall in East Awin is six metres (6,000 millimetres); water is stored in aging tanks for use in the dry season. However, during prolonged dry period, refugees are forced to gather water from shallow, earthen wells. To ensure that the amount of potable water available to East Awin's population meets the standard (water supply core indicators 1 and 2), UNHCR will in the absence of any alternative, fund the replacement of aging, leaking tanks.

- **Pursue durable solutions, with a special focus on local integration of West Papuan refugees in PNG, and facilitate self-reliance of West Papuan refugees.**

Throughout 2005, UNHCR will provide direct assistance to the Vanimo group. Although some direct food and domestic assistance will continue in the first half of 2006, the amount of

assistance will be phased down to encourage the Vanimo group to take advantage of crop production and animal husbandry activities and become self-reliant as a first step towards local integration (AFP goal 5.7 and UNHCR Global Strategic objective 2). UNHCR will follow up with the GoPNG to ensure birth certificates and Permissive Residency Certificates are issued to the Vanimo group. These documents will provide the Vanimo group with secure legal status (AFP goal 5.4). Other mainstream activities will also be conducted to facilitate self-reliance and local integration of the Vanimo group.

The West Papuan refugees who have been living in East Awin for almost 20 years are self-reliant in terms of food and shelter, however their reliance on subsistence agriculture is a significant barrier to successful integration into PNG society. Despite being eligible to settle in other areas of PNG, the refugees' low cash income effectively prohibits relocation outside of East Awin. The ability of refugee children to access secondary education facilities is limited by their parents' low cash income. Activities to increase the cash value of the crops produced will be implemented. UNHCR will also assess the feasibility of income generation activities for refugee women, this would allow refugee women to become more self-reliant in their own right and to increase their participation in decision making due to the increased visibility of their household contribution (AFP goal 5.7 and AFP goal 6.1).

In recognition that education is an important tool of protection for refugee children (AFP goal 6.2), a means to facilitate local integration (AFP goal 5.4), and strengthens the prospects for successful repatriation in refugees country of origin (AFP goal 5.3), UNHCR will fund activities to improve the access of refugee children to secondary education. There will be a special focus on refugee girls who are currently under-represented in secondary schools. LO Port Moresby will continue to promote DAFI scholarships to refugee students, and proposes to HQ the continued inclusion of refugee students from PNG in the DAFI programme.

LO Port Moresby believes between 50 and 100 West Papuan refugees living in East Awin may be willing to voluntarily return to Indonesia. If the right conditions for a sustainable repatriation exist, LO Port Moresby will promote this durable solution and assist the relevant government authorities to facilitate the return (UNHCR Global objective 3).

The prospects for local integration of the urban non-Melanesian caseload are extremely limited. Therefore, LO Port Moresby will actively encourage GoPNG to promptly recognise cases in need of international protection as refugees, so that resettlement becomes an available solution (AFP goal 5.6). Where appropriate, LO Port Moresby will also promote voluntary repatriation utilising UNHCR's resources, or in conjunction with countries of origin (AFP 5.2).