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STATEMENT TO THE UNITED NATION WORKING GROUP ON  
INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS BY JOSEPH KABUI, CHAIRMAN,  
INTERIM GOVERNMENT REPUBLIC OF BOUGAINVILLE.

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Thank you madame chair:

My name is Joseph Kabui. I represent the Interim Government of Bougainville.

Although we understand that our dispute with the government of Papua New Guinea can only be addressed at the higher political levels of the United Nations, we believe that information concerning the human rights situation of our people will be useful to the Working Group. We offer the following information in that spirit and not as a specific complaint.

Bougainville is a tragic example of the human rights consequences of a people, particularly an indigenous people, being denied the fundamental right to self determination and the resulting gross human rights violations which so often typify such unjustified subjugation by alien peoples.

On April 17th, 1990, the people of Bougainville declared their independence from Papua New Guinea. Although independence has always been an aspiration of our people, a series of events beginning in 1988 brought the immediate conflict into being.

In June 1988 a newly elected Panguna Land Owners Association made demands on the Government of Papua New Guinea to honour the provision for renegotiation of the Bougainville Copper Mining Agreement which was supposed to be reviewed every seven years and which Papua New Guinea had chosen to ignore for the past eleven years. The concerns of the land owners were the extreme levels of environmental destruction of the flora, fauna and culture of the people and the fact that for the last seventeen years Bougainville's resources had been extracted for the benefit of Papua New Guinea with little remuneration for the people of Bougainville.

The failure of the Papua New Guinea National Government to address these requests for renegotiation in turn led to demonstrations by the land owners which resulted in the closure of the mine. This in turn led to attacks by Papua New Guinea, utilizing their defense force personnel, on all people of Bougainville and the commission of Gross human Rights violations by those personnel and the Government of Papua New Guinea. The formation and growth of the Bougainvillian Republican Army throughout the entire island was an act of self defense by the people who demanded the right to independence..

The recent history of Bougainville since colonization is one notable for the denial of its right to self determination. The Solomon Islands were first colonized by Germany in the mid nineteenth century, although only for the purposes of blackbirding - ( a form of slavery.)

In an agreement made in 1899 between Germany and Great Britain as noted in conventions and declarations between Germany and Great Britain "for the settlement of the Samoan and other questions", (signed in London November 14th, 1899, and ratified in London and Berlin February 16th, 1890) Bougainville was separated from the other Solomon Islands, remaining a German territory. The other islands were traded to Great Britain. These Samoan dealings also involved the USA who needed an Harbour in American Samoa and so it was convenient for the colonizing powers of the time to make these changes without consideration to the indigenous occupants.

After the defeat of Germany in the first world war the German territories, now collectively termed New Guinea became a part of a league of Nations mandate and were placed under Australian Administration along with the Australian Territory of Papua. At this stage our people began to object to the territorial separation from our brothers in the Solomons. For thousands of years they had been marrying and trading with other Solomon Islands and they were now being told they were no longer Solomonese.

[ During the second world war we were occupied first by the Japanese, then the Americans and once again handed over to Australian administration as a United Nations Trusteeship still separate from Solomons. It was this Australian colonial administration of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea which was responsible for the opening of the Panguna mine in 1964, in conjunction with Rio Tinto-Zinc, which would not only benefit the company and shareholders, but was to be used by Australia to fund the entire territories of Papua New Guinea.

The land owners on and around the sight objected to the proposed mine and were dealt with harshly by the Australian administration, including armed threats. They were forced from their land, their homes and gardens destroyed and no consideration was given to tradition, culture and family life. The rivers and streams were polluted, fish began to die and a process of tragic environmental damage commenced.]

In 1968 elections were held throughout the territory for self government, the leaders so elected from Bougainville immediately called for a referendum on independence for Bougainville, a call which was not considered by the Administration. The matter came to a head in 1975 when Papua New Guinea was to gain total independence. Bougainville issued a declaration of independence and made it known that they did not wish to join Papua New Guinea as a nation. An appeal was made to the United Nations to oversee a plebiscite.

Australia objected because we were expected to bankroll Papua New Guinea's independence with our mine resource. At this stage the enforced unity of Bougainville with Papua New Guinea was a mere 75 years old and a circumstance created as a convenience for colonial powers. Previous to this and for tens of thousands of years we had shared a common currency, culture and trade with the Solomons. This is best demonstrated by the traditional shell currency of the Solomons which is used from the very southern tip of the Solomons to the northern most tip of Bougainville. This shell money differs in all respects from the shell currency of Papua New Guinea.

The denial of access to a plebiscite in 1975 was a denial of the right to self determination according to the freely expressed will of the people concerned (General Assembly resolution 1541, 1960) The Bougainville leaders, who were not then elected, operated under a mandate from the people to attain independence, separate from Papua New Guinea. The resulting limited autonomy agreement between the leaders and Papua New Guinea constituted the continuation of colonization of Bougainville and was a political annexation of our island following our previously declared independence. It did not represent the will of the people and was manipulated by Australia and Papua New Guinea. Up until the current declaration of independence in 1990, the date of the first declaration of independence, September 1st, has been celebrated as a public holiday and a day of hope.

It must be realized that the only contact Bougainvillians had with Papua New Guineans on Bougainville soil prior to independence was after the second world war when labourers visited the islands as indentured contract workers on the established expatriate owned plantations. It is one more stitch in a tapestry of injustice that these people, who arrived on Bougainville as temporary labourers for foreigners, should now consider themselves masters of Bougainville's destiny in an attempt to continue the colonial expropriation of our resources.

[ Woodrow Wilson remarked on February 11th, 1918 that "No right exists anywhere to hand peoples about from sovereign to sovereign as if they were property." This is precisely the history of the people and territory of Bougainville. There has been no respect for our territorial integrity since 1890.

The gross human rights violations committed by the Government of Papua New Guinea against our people during the past three years since the demonstrations began in 1988 are well documented in official reports by Amnesty International, International Red Cross, Australian International Development Bureau, reliable media interviews, photographic documentation and in documents collated by the then North Solomons Provincial Government, [for independence]

Over 6,000 village homes were subject to arbitrary destruction by the Papua New Guinea Defense Force resulting in the displacement of some 24,000 people from their homes and villages.

Women have been raped and murdered, families killed in their homes, children have been shot in the fields. Church goers have been detained, tortured, murdered and dumped from helicopters at sea (Despite well-documented evidence and an admission by the then commanding officer, no attempt has been made to investigate this matter.) (See General Assembly Resolution 44/162 December, 1990) Many innocent men have been summarily executed, bus drivers, environmentalists and many others unlucky enough to have been caught alone, unarmed and unprotected. All these were clear abuses of articles 6(1) and 7 of the International Conventions Concerning Prisoners Rights. Even in a state of emergency Papua New Guinea is not permitted to derogate from any of these rights. (see article 4(1) and 6(3).)

Our democratically elected leaders, including myself who was at that time Premier, were subjected to sub-human degradation. I was dragged from my car coming back from church with my family and commanded to lick Papuan New Guineans blood from the roadside at the hospital after a member of the security forces had been wounded in an exchange with militants. When I refused I was beaten with rifles! I was at that time a member of the Papua New Guinea Government. In fact one of my ministers lost an eye that day due to a beating from the Papua New Guinean security forces.

Our villages and schools were strafed, our hospital staff harassed in the hospital. Villagers were herded from many rural areas into so called "care centres" which were just plastic tents set up in the market place. These matters breach articles 7, 10, 17 and 19.

Farmers from the rural areas were also harassed at road blocks and their women humiliated in searches. Refer to article 17.

Daughters were taken from their homes for the sexual gratification of the soldiers, their parents threatened. (articles 7, 9 & 17)

This behaviour turned the people of Bougainville against Papua New Guinea and what had started out as a localized dispute spread and developed into a self defensive insurrection aimed at freeing ourselves completely from the binds of Papua New Guinea.

X Finally, using our rudimentary weapons against the modern technology and training of the Defense force, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army achieved victory. Papua New Guinea agreed to withdraw their forces on March 1st, 1990. At this time they also withdrew all their Government people from Bougainville and suspended all services whilst promising to negotiate a resolution. On the 23rd of April, 1990 a complete blockade of the island was declared by the Papua New Guinean government. This total blockade and a refusal to negotiate left us no alternative but to declare ourselves independent on the 17th May, 1990.

[ Since that time Papua New Guinea has had us under a siege which exists to this day. Attempts at negotiation have resulted in broken promises and attempts at re invasion. The result of the siege has had catastrophic results for our people. No medical supplies have been allowed into Bougainville, even those supplied by NGO bodies as humanitarian relief. For over a year no body was allowed in or out of Bougainville, including journalists and medical people, we were denied all access to communication (Article 12 & 25 on the right to communicate).

Because of the blockade more than 3000 people have died as a direct result of lack of basic medical supplies. More than 5000 children have not been immunized. Previously benign diseases have become life threatening and old diseases such as yaws, Tuberculosis, polio, leprosy and malaria have become endemic and malnutrition has affected many areas used to surviving on processed foods.

The destruction of schools, the strafing runs and the retrenchment of public servants has meant that our education system has been at a stand still for over three years. This applies not only to primary students but also to matriculators whose dreams of university have been shattered, their pens replaced by weapons to defend their rights from the threat of Papua New Guinea invasion.

Papua New Guinea's greatest weapon and worst shame has been their willingness to sacrifice the lives of thousands of women, children and the aged who suffered easily curable complaints if they had but access to modern medicine. In complete disregard for human rights standards, the Geneva conventions and their own constitution, in an attempt

to attain both political and military high ground Papua New Guinea is and was certainly aware of the consequences of the blockade for innocent people. Arguably this decision to prevent food supplies and medicine reaching Bougainville constitutes attempted genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, 1948.

In conclusion, madame chair, I want to reaffirm the commitment of our people to our right to self determination. Our people, particularly the elders, the women and children have endured much suffering, but we will continue until we are a free people in the international community. There is no turning back.

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