



Centre for Democratic Institutions

"AUSTRALIA/PAPUA NEW GUINEA: CRIME AND THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP"

A Conference jointly sponsored by the Australian Defence Studies Centre, Australian Federal Police, the Australian National University's 'State, Society and Governance in Melanesia' Project and the PNG National Research Institute, and held at Old Parliament House, Canberra, on 11 - 12 November 1998.

Preamble

The relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea is a long-standing and important one to both countries. There are strong historic, geographic, economic and strategic links which should be sustained through the identification of areas of mutual interest, the discussion of ways in which cooperation and transparency can be achieved in these areas, and the development of confidence building measures to eliminate, as far as possible, tensions and misunderstandings which might arise from time to time.

In particular, both countries face problems as a result of cross border and transnational crime. This has been recognised through the institution of improved liaison arrangements between the law enforcement agencies of both countries, particularly in relation to the Torres Strait area, through the establishment of the annual PNG/Australia Cross Border Crime Conference and related criminal intelligence exchanges.

However, the problems posed to the interests of both countries go beyond cross border crime issues. They include a range of transnational crime threats, mainly of regional concern, as well as other types of criminal and inappropriate activities which may not necessarily be described as cross border crime, but which may affect the security, stability and, therefore, the trust which exists between our two countries. Within this context, "security" is interpreted in the broadest context to include military, political, economic, societal environmental and human security issues.

The purpose of this conference was to examine some of these issues to determine what impact they might have, or be having, on the relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea, with a view to better advising our respective governments on these issues and, insofar as is practicable, to comment on or recommend areas in which both sides should consider taking action to enhance the trust, understanding and mutual support we should have as neighbours in a potentially unstable and changing strategic environment.

Conference Objectives

1. To raise public and official consciousness of the implications of transnational and cross border crime for the security and stability of the relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea;
2. To consider the nature of transnational and cross border criminal activities affecting Australia and Papua New Guinea in order to review the appropriateness of the law enforcement response;
3. To consider the nature and extent of law enforcement cooperation between the two countries directed at addressing problems posed by transnational and cross border crime, with a view to recommending any additional measures which might be introduced to facilitate this liaison;
4. To consider some of the lessons for both Australia and Papua New Guinea which may have emerged from the 'Sandline Affair' and related issues;
5. To consider the nature and extent of assistance which can be provided by non-law enforcement agencies to address transnational and cross border crime problems affecting the interests of both Australia and Papua New Guinea;
6. To recommend any action which should be taken by either or both countries to encourage regional cooperation in this area.

Our Observations

Overall, it is considered that the main objectives of the Conference were met. Through the professional and goodwill demonstrated by speakers from both sides, it was possible to address some very sensitive issues without rancour or blame being attributed, in a way which, we believe, significantly improved the understanding of the political, strategic and cultural issues behind decisions which were made or positions adopted by both countries. It was clear that the Sandline Affair represented a low point in the relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea and that both sides, recognising this point, have made considerable effort to improve the communication and identification of areas of mutual concern between both countries.

There were six themes addressed at the Conference:

1. Criminal Threats and the Security of the State;
2. Bilateral Cooperation in Cross Border Crime;
3. Financial Crime;
4. Dealing with Corruption;

5. Sovereignty, Security and Outsourcing;

6. Summing Up and Future Prospects.

The Chairs and Speakers addressing these topics were senior and experienced in their respective fields and their presentations were of uniformly high standard. There was also a fairly even balance between the Papua New Guinea and Australian speakers, so that the treatment of the various issues under consideration was handled as fairly as possible.

It was unfortunate that due to his parliamentary commitments, Sir Rabbie Namaliu, KCMG, MP, the PNG Minister for Petroleum and Energy, was unable to address the Conference. From the Australian side, the Conference was opened by the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon. Alexander Downer, MP, gave a major after dinner address on the bilateral relationship, followed by the PNG High Commissioner, H.E. Mr Renagi Lohia, CBE, representing Sir Rabbie Namaliu..

We were particularly grateful that the generous funding was provided by AusAID, the Centre for Democratic Institutions and the National Centre for Development Studies to enable us to bring down from Papua New Guinea eight speakers from Papua New Guinea (in addition to the participation of the PNG High Commissioner to Australia) and to provide the opportunity for 38 post-graduate students from Melanesia and the Asia-Pacific and others who were attending the "Accountability and Corruption in Melanesia" Workshop to attend this Conference.

Although few policy-related recommendations are likely to flow out of the Conference, we believe that it certainly achieved most of its objectives - particularly those relating to improving the understanding and communication between both sides on the sensitive issues covered.

Participants' Evaluation

Of the 130 people (excluding speakers) who were registered for the Conference, 56 completed validation questionnaires. Of this number, 28 described the Conference as "very valuable", 21 as "quite valuable" and 5 as "moderately valuable". Noone said that it was "not valuable".

Not surprisingly, most respondents said that the sessions most valuable to them were those which were most relevant to their particular employment. While only five people chose not to nominate a most valuable session, 27 chose not to nominate a least valuable session. This suggests a high incidence of satisfaction with the quality and relevance of the speakers and topics.

Publication

With the financial support of the ANU's "State, Society and Governance in Melanesia" Project, the ADSC will publish all the papers presented in the first quarter of 1999.

Note

This Conference complements the Seminar "Torres Strait: Policing the Open Border" which was conducted by the ADSC and AFP at ADFA on 24 February 1998.

A J McFarlane

AFP Visiting Fellow

Australian Defence Studies Centre

Australian Defence Force Academy

CANBERRA ACT 2600 AUSTRALIA

Tel: +61.2.6268.6257

Fax: +61.2.6268.8440

E-mail: <j-mcfarlane@adfa.oz.au>