

Early interventions

Peter Sohia

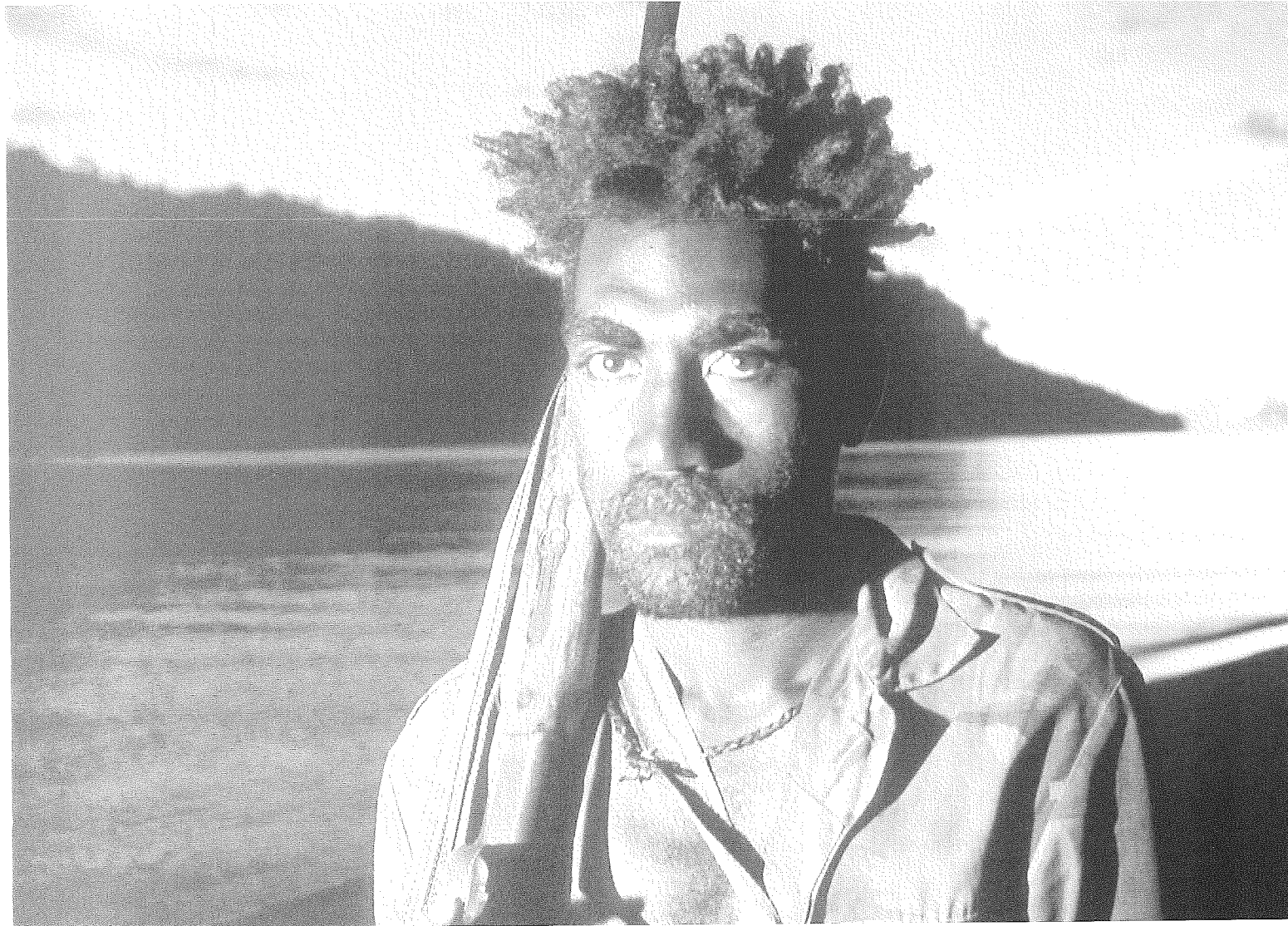
Peter Sohia was a radio broadcaster with the National Broadcasting Commission of Papua New Guinea from 1973-1984, before he entered politics as the Provincial Government Member for Buka Passage. He is presently Bougainville's Peace Coordinator and the Administration's Representative on the UN Peace Process Consultative Committee.

Efforts to prevent the Panguna crisis

The Panguna crisis of 1988 was a direct result of the Papua New Guinea government's reluctance and perhaps to a certain degree, fear, to empower provincial governments to deal with their own local issues. The North Solomons Provincial Government (NSPG) had exhaustive powers given to it by the Papua New Guinea government through the process of decentralisation in 1976, but it had consistently asked for more authority in order to deal with grievances arising out of mining activities, including the hiring of non-Bougainvilleans by Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL).

Between 1982 and 1989, three successive provincial administrations, led by Leo Hannett, Sir Alexis Sarei and Joseph Kabui respectively, had requested that the PNG government review the *Bougainville Agreement* of 1976. If a higher form of autonomy had then been agreed, this may have paved the way forward for the NSPG to address the disputes over land, environmental damage, mining, forestry, economy and fiscal self-reliance, squatter settlements and unemployment. The NSPG had also asked for a review of the *Bougainville Copper Agreement* of 1976 between the PNG government and BCL. If agreed, the provincial authorities would have dealt directly with BCL on matters relative to the Panguna landowners problems and demands. A resolution to the Panguna crisis could perhaps have been found, thus preventing the bloodiest conflict in the South Pacific since World War II, the large-scale destruction of property and the death of thousands of Bougainvilleans.

The second opportunity to prevent the escalation of the still non-violent Bougainville conflict presented itself in September 1987 when NSPG Premier, Joseph Kabui, informed BCL Managing Director, Bob Cornelius, of the demands of the new militant Panguna Landowners Association (New PLA). The BCL management refused to entertain Joseph Kabui or the New PLA leader, Francis Ona, despite the certainty of impending conflict.



In November 1988, the first power pylon was blown up with the company's own stolen supply of dynamite, several buildings torched and equipment damaged. Francis Ona, the government's most wanted man, began to recruit what later came to be known as the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) initially from around the Kieta area, and later from Siwai and Nagovisi in the south.

The Bougainville crisis

What seemed an ordinary law and order problem for the PNG government was blown out of proportion by its own ill-disciplined and poorly-advised law enforcement agency, the Police Riot Squad, and later the PNG Defence Forces. The suppression of the militants by the Riot Squad and the army quickly turned the localised dispute into a more generalised ethno-nationalist revolt and these inter-ethnic tensions and incidents contributed to the escalation of the crisis. More and more Bougainvilleans became victims of police and military threats, intimidation, and even death.

The NSPG and the PNG government however, continued to pursue a peaceful road to end the crisis. The Provincial Premier Kabui continued consulting Francis Ona, and in December 1988, PNG's Prime Minister, Sir Rabbie Namaliu, appointed a Special Committee headed by his Deputy Akoka Doi, to address the problem. Doi, and

others including Bougainville's own longest-serving Member of Parliament and champion of decentralisation, John Momis, met with Ona at his Guava village. On 8 December 1988, the Special Ministerial Committee, on behalf of the national government, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Ona committing the government to addressing the issue of improving community services for the Panguna landowners. The PNG government undertook to support the projects to the tune of K1.98 million (A\$2.91 million (1988 value)).

On the night of the signing of the MOU, and acting under the directions of their Commissioner, police arrested key landowners. Francis Ona was fortunate not to have attended the signing ceremony. The genuine and honest efforts of the PNG government to prevent the conflict were undermined by its own law enforcement body. Dialogue efforts with both the Panguna landowners and BCL were also actively pursued by the churches led by the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Bougainville, Gregory Singkai. These government-authorised efforts were equipped with three promises: (1) a comprehensive programme aimed at meeting landowners' 'legitimate' demands; (2) removal of the police and PNGDF from the province; (3) amnesty for Ona and his followers. These played an important part in the search for an early peaceful settlement of the conflict.

NSPG peace efforts in 1989

As the conflict between the company and the militant landowners escalated, the Provincial Government sought to play a 'third-party' role. In the initial stages the NSPG acted as an intermediary, communicating the landowners' demands for better compensation and community services to BCL.

The NSPG met with landowners in Arawa and Panguna, and Premier Kabui wrote numerous letters to both Ona and BCL's Bob Cornelius in an effort to address the landowner demands peacefully. In May 1989 the NSPG established the Bika Select Committee, under the Chairmanship of John Bika, Minister for Commerce in the provincial government, to collect, analyse, and compile a comprehensive report on the long-term solutions to the Panguna crisis and the concerns of the North Solomons people. Both the NSPG and the national government shared the perception that forced secession was not an answer to the crisis and were confident that the concerns could be addressed by improving government policy – for example on Bougainville autonomy. The Bika report would later form the basis for the NSPG negotiating position on autonomy for Bougainville. John Bika's assassination by BRA at the end of that year was clear evidence of the breakdown in trust between the BRA and the NSPG.

National government attempts to avert the crisis

The national government of Papua New Guinea through Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu, continued its search for a lasting solution to the Panguna crisis. It established the Special Committee on the Crisis in the North Solomons Province, led by Hon. Sir John Kaputin in January 1989.

The national government sought to deal fully and fairly with the grievances of both the landowners and the North Solomons Provincial Government. It produced a package of measures that would have greatly benefited the landowners and the people and government of Bougainville. Through greater autonomy, which it had agreed in principle to give Bougainville, the Government would address concerns about the environment and other basic grievances. The Government was, however, firm that the issue of secession was non-negotiable. In October 1989, members of the PLA and 'New PLA' held a *karekara*, a 'traditional' Nasioi peace ceremony in Arawa, calling on all parties to cease hostilities and to restore law and order. Present at the ceremony and signing the *Namaliu Agreement* were PM Namaliu and several of his ministers, the Premier Joseph Kabui and ministers of the provincial government, the chairman and manager of BCL, church and traditional leaders. Francis Ona did not attend and the sabotage continued.

The crisis becomes war

In mid-1990 the PNG government declared a State of Emergency on Bougainville. In his address to the nation, relayed through the State-owned National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and all the local newspapers, Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu said: 'you will probably have heard that one of the demands of the militants has been secession, or breaking away from Papua New Guinea. No national government in its right mind could ever agree to such a demand. The North Solomons Province is an important, and inseparable, part of the nation of Papua New Guinea.'

'Sadly, the genuine offer by my government to bring about meaningful negotiations with the militant groups on Bougainville, has not been accepted by the leaders of the militant groups, even though provincial leaders gave their total support.'

'By attempting to impose conditions such as secession, the withdrawal of security forces, and the continued closure of the mine, the militants have proven that they have not been genuine in seeking peaceful resolutions of the serious situation on the island.'

'My government has now been left with no alternative. Our security forces must now use additional powers that have been given to them to restore law and order in the province, to bring those responsible for criminal acts to justice, to enable the mine to resume operations as soon as possible, and to protect the lives, and freedom of all the people who live in the province.'

'If it is necessary for the security forces to respond to the use of weapons by militants, they will do so.'

Unfortunately for the peacemakers and for the entire population of Bougainville, that is exactly what happened following the declaration of a State of Emergency.

The first international and 'unofficial' interventions

Following the expulsion of most non-Bougainvilleans during 1989 and the ineffective PNGDF 'Operation Footloose' in the Kongara area, the BRA forced the withdrawal of the PNG police and soldiers from that area. By early 1990 the PNG government had withdrawn public servants and all banks, offices and services were closed down. The BRA saw independence within reach. Their focus shifted towards asserting their control over Bougainville. The wealthy, the educated and government public servants were harassed, imprisoned, assaulted and sometimes killed by the largely young and resentful BRA men in a long period of violent mayhem. In the process, there was ample opportunity to settle past disputes over such things as land and personal relations. Old tensions, both within and between groups, were exacerbated and new ones developed.

As the conflict expanded to encompass the whole of Bougainville a think-tank was created by the University of PNG Extension Centre, led by the Director, Graeme Kemelfield, which included people working in the office of the Provincial Government. This unofficial initiative was intended to find ways to overcome the military deadlock and help secure a ceasefire. They engaged Professor Peter Wallensteen (Uppsala University, Sweden), who was contacted through the London-based conflict resolution NGO International Alert. Wallensteen's role was as a neutral third party, meeting both sides, supported by and supporting the work of the think-tank. He facilitated face-to-face meetings between BRA military commanders and the PNG government, which eventually culminated in a ceasefire agreement. Wallensteen was also involved in setting up an international team to supervise the ceasefire. He also pointed to greater autonomy as a potential solution to the issue of the island's status within PNG.

Wallensteen recalled that it was the think-tank that did most of the basic work in working out the details of the ceasefire. He said: 'My presence helped to make the work more visible, seen to be more serious and brought in an international concern without vested interests.'

The first ceasefire

The Bougainville Ceasefire Initiative was signed by PNG and BRA on 2 March 1990. Under the terms of the agreement, the BRA were to hand their arms in under the supervision of international monitors. 'At the same time' the PNGDF was to withdraw from Bougainville. The understanding between the parties was that the ceasefire would be followed by talks on the substantial issues, such as the status of Bougainville and the future of the mine. The international observers arrived in Bougainville shortly after the signing and presented their first report by March 16. The International Observers Team (IOT) was led by the Commonwealth Secretariat, London. It included representatives from Sweden, Canada, Denmark, Austria and Finland, under the chairmanship of a Ghanaian.

The report of the international observers concluded that the ceasefire had been successfully put in place and that the next steps could be taken. PNGDF had left the island. BRA weapons were to be inventoried and kept in three separate storage areas on the island. There was no time limit to the ceasefire. Unfortunately, before early May, the ceasefire was broken and the BRA sought to take control of the entire island.

Professor Wallensteen later commented that a key opportunity had been lost: 'There was a ripe moment... The government had tried a military offensive, which had not resulted in the victory the military had promised. Thus the balance in the Cabinet seemed to have shifted to a peace initiative. For the BRA, the offensive was tough, but they were proud to have survived it. Thus, they were

also interested in a peace initiative. Unfortunately, the window closed, primarily due to the reluctance of the armed forces to accept the outcome, thus withdrawing prematurely. Also the initiative was difficult to sustain due to a belief on the BRA side that they could win the war. The ideas we had in those days were very much the same ideas that were used in the final agreement. That is the sad story of this conflict.'

New Zealand offers its good offices

The months following the breakdown of the March ceasefire saw increasing polarisation, with the BRA's *Unilateral Declaration of Independence* and the imposition of an economic and communications blockade on Bougainville by the national government. With an impending humanitarian disaster, the government of New Zealand, through its High Commissioner in Port Moresby, John Hayes, sought to play a third-party role. New Zealand offered to facilitate talks aboard their naval supply ship *HMNZS Endeavour* anchored off Kieta Harbour. The BRA, along with their newly formed political organisation the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG), accepted, as did the national government. Between July and August, talks were led by Foreign Minister Sir Michael Somare for the national government and Joseph Kabui for BIG and BRA. The talks included three 'advisers' to the PNG government team from the non-governmental organisation Moral Re-Armament and observers from Canada, Great Britain, Vanuatu and New Zealand.

The Endeavour Accord, signed in August 1990, represented an agreement to end the blockade, leading to the opening up of some limited Government and NGO-sponsored services to help ease the conditions of the economic blockade. However, a few months later, the PNGDF were re-deployed on Nissan and Buka, after arguments over responsibility for the delivery of restored services.

As with the breakdown of the first ceasefire agreement, the collapse of the *Endeavour Accord* led to a deepening of the conflict. The resulting disputes helped to motivate groups opposed to both secession and the BRA regime to form the Bougainville Resistance Forces (BRF). The return of the PNG security forces on 21 September 1990 helped concretise their formations, commencing with the Buka Liberation Front (BLF) on Buka Island. This was the beginning of serious internal conflict between Bougainvilleans. The 'Resistance' as they were later known, grew district by district and the conflict became increasingly complex.

The months and years that followed left a trail of devastation from which Bougainville has yet to recover. Thousands were killed or wounded, families were torn apart by conflict and there was mass destruction of both government and privately-owned properties. Today, the run-down economy and a generation of young adults

who lost out on their education are but some reminders of this bloody conflict. The war also left a legacy of fear and a gun culture that was totally foreign to the once peace-loving people of Bougainville.

A second round of peace talks

The Solomon Islands Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni became increasingly concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation of their close cousins in Bougainville. The Government decided to send two eminent persons, Minister for Provincial Government Alan Qurusu and Minister for Police and Justice Albert Laore, across the border to consult the Bougainville leaders about their proposal to facilitate another round of talks with the PNG Government. Their response was favourable and arrangements were quickly put in place to convene the talks in the capital, Honiara, in January.

These talks were seen as a 'second round' (the first being the *Endeavour* talks) with the national government led by Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare. The main issue on the agenda was the deployment of an international peacekeeping force, which the Bougainvillean side had strongly insisted on due to their complete breakdown of confidence in the national government. The Somare government responded positively and offered to approach the Commonwealth Secretariat with the proposal. The talks, which were chaired by the Bishop of the United Church in Solomon Islands, Rev Leslie Boseto, successfully concluded with the signing of *The Honiara Declaration* on 23 January 1991. The agreement provided for a Multinational Supervisory team that would supervise a truce, disarm the BRA and oversee an amnesty for BRA combatants. The agreement was also intended to annul the *Unilateral Declaration of Independence* by the BRA, and to restore services to Bougainville. The Commonwealth Secretariat representatives were subsequently invited to carry out several visits to central Bougainville where they held talks with the BIG and BRA leadership including Francis Ona. The period immediately following the signing saw mixed responses by various BRA spokespersons variously accepting and rejecting the agreement, thus indicating a leadership dispute. On the one hand there were those who rejected the agreement because it failed to address the basic grievances and claims for self-determination. On the other hand, those opposed to the Ona regime wanted the return of government services, irrespective of the question of independence.

Both the *Endeavour Accord* and the *Honiara Declaration* further helped to open up some limited humanitarian access by overseas NGOs through Solomon Islands. But like the facilitators of the *Endeavour Accord*, the Solomon Islands Government ignored the fact that BIG and BRA were no longer entirely in control of the province.

Bougainvilleans opposed to the BIG and BRA had emerged and presented an important challenge to any negotiation with the rebels.

Separate settlement for Buka island

Signed by representatives of the chiefs of Buka Island and by the national government in February of 1991, *The Kavieng Agreement* responded to the numerous calls by the people of Buka for the return of government services. It was agreed that the PNG government, by withdrawing the security forces and implementing a blockade, had abandoned its constitutional responsibilities and needed to act to regain legal authority of the island. The Buka people also wanted the return of the PNG security force to provide protection for themselves and government property.

Thus, Buka Island came under national government control and basic government services were restored. But more money was spent on the military and on displaced people than on the restoration of schools, health services and roads. For the Buka people it seemed the PNG government had abandoned them once again. It was left to the islanders to rebuild their schools and health centres and restore their cash crops.

The re-establishment of the North Solomons Provincial Government

With the North Solomons Provincial Government under the leadership of Joseph Kabui formally suspended, the Somare government sought to re-assert its political authority first by restoring the administrative structures (i.e. public servants and service) and then by the creation of district-level interim authorities. Following the return of the PNGDF and government authority to Buka Island, the Provincial Administration was re-established. Sam Tulo, a popular former MP for Buka Island and national government Minister, was chosen as Administrator. By the end of 1991, Tulo had engaged a total of 1,040 restoration workers, including public servants of the former NSPG – ranging from clerks, teachers, health workers, builders, emergency workers – for duties in the atolls, Nissan Island, Buka, North East and North West. Essential government services were filtering through to the villages, made possible by both the security forces and these public servants.

By 1992 Tulo had reopened 19 sub-health centres, eight health centres, the Sohano hospital and 67 village aid posts in north, south and parts of central Bougainville. Reports reaching the Administrator's office from Honiara in October 1992 indicated that the old Arawa hospital was operational 24 hours a day. In the education sector, 61 out of 92 community schools were reopened in north Bougainville, though south and central Bougainville schools remained closed for security reasons.

The Bougainville Administration was successful in its efforts, despite the magnitude of the crisis and the ongoing hostilities. At times planning was almost impossible and projects continued on an ad-hoc basis.

The Bougainville Interim Legal Authorities

The establishment of the Interim Authorities was in response to the Buka Chiefs' request to the government during talks that formed *The Kavieng Agreement*. The people wanted a legal government through which they would have their own elected representatives. Initially, the Bukas had wished to break away from mainland Bougainville to form their own province and remain an integral part of PNG. The government's intention, however, was to maintain provincial unity by establishing the Bougainville Interim Legal Authorities (BILA). This was a local level government structure with fewer powers than the provincial government system, but specifically tasked to bring unity, peace and normalcy to Bougainville.

1992 saw the establishment of the Interim Authorities beginning in Buka and moving on to the Nissan/Atolls, north-east and north-west (all in north Bougainville) and then moving south at the end of December 1992 when the South West Interim Authority (Siwai) was established at a great cost. The former MP for south Bougainville, Anthony Anugu, was invited by Sir Michael Somare to go to Port Moresby through Solomon Islands to sign an agreement to establish the first South Bougainville Interim Authority (SBIA) in the Siwai district. A few days following his return through Solomon Island, Anugu and five other men were kidnapped, robbed and killed by the BRA. He was carrying with him funds for the newly established SBIA.

The Central Bougainville Interim Legal Authority (CILA) and the Telei (Buin) Interim Authority were established in 1993 and the Bana (Nagovis/Torokina) Interim Authority was the last to be formed in 1994, basically due to differences between the Siwai and Nagovis leaders. The Interim Authorities and the Councils of Chiefs played a vital role in returning peace to Bougainville. Though not reaching the entire Bougainville communities as first expected, their influence over national government decisions and the role of the security force in Bougainville was significant. In south and central Bougainville certain members of the Interim Authorities collaborated with the BRA. The care centre food supplies, medicine, store goods and even PNGDF army camouflage soon found their way into rebel territory for more secret meetings and sharing of information on the welfare of those in the bush and those at the PNG controlled care centres. Many of those meetings ended with more and more BRA soldiers surrendering which in turn meant an increase of the care-centre population, which was maintained at 300

maximum, although the largest care-centre in Buin had over 2,000 men, women and children.

For Sam Tulo and the Bougainville Interim Legal Authorities, the Bougainville unity they desired was beyond their means. At this stage unity depended heavily on Francis Ona and the BRA and the unanswered question of independence.

The Honiara Commitments to peace

The collapse of the Wingti administration in August 1994 led to a radical change of peace policy on the part of the national government. Sir Julius Chan was elected vowing to resolve the Bougainville conflict during his term in office as Prime Minister. Initial agenda-setting talks (the Tambea talks) in June 1994 between senior officials of the PNG government and Sam Kauona of the BRA were followed by a second round of peace talks in August in Solomon Islands later described by Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, as 'tense and emotional'. The talks concluded with the signing of the *Joint Commitment to Peace on Bougainville*.

Unlike the *Endeavour Accord* and the *Honiara Declaration*, the resulting two agreements the *Honiara Commitment to Peace* (3 September 1994) and the *Ceasefire Agreement* (8 September 1994) were signed by the PNG Prime Minister, BRA Commanders and representatives of the national government-sponsored Bougainville Interim Legal Authorities. The agreements set down a rapid timetable for a ceasefire and the insertion of a regional peacekeeping force (the South Pacific Peace Keeping Force, SPPKF), and were to create a 'neutral zone' paving the way forward for an 'all-Bougainvillean' peace conference in Arawa. The purpose of the Peace Conference was for all sides of Bougainville to meet and freely express themselves on the issues that affected the province in the hope of reaching a common position for a settlement of the Bougainville war. Issues left to be addressed at the Arawa Peace Conference included pardon, amnesty and temporary refuge, reconciliation and compensation, and restoration and reconstruction. Unfortunately, the BRA's Sam Kauona did not return to Bougainville to brief the BRA on the agreement and this was to have unfortunate consequences.

The Arawa Peace Conference

Bougainville had been anxiously waiting for an opportunity to enable its people to meet, talk and decide the province's destiny. With only half of the population in government-controlled areas, Bougainville was torn between the two warring parties. Independence was still a contentious question, and the people on both sides wanted to use an 'all-Bougainville meeting' as the space to thrash out the issues, in the hope that a road map to peace could be drawn up and followed.



PNGDF patrol southern Bougainville, 1996

Source: Ben Bohane/Wildlight

As agreed in the *Honiara Commitment to Peace*, the 'all-Bougainvillean meeting' was held in Arawa on 10 October 1994, under the watchful eye of the SPPKF. An estimated 4,000 Bougainvilleans from all over Bougainville, PNG provinces and Solomon Islands attended the meeting. To them, simply attending the Arawa Peace Conference, and talking to lost friends and members of the clan, was an achievement. Chiefs, villagers and moderate members of BRA and BIG attended the event, but the leadership was absent. Despite the intervention of the Bougainville women and even the SPPKF, BIG leaders like Joseph Kabui, Francis Ona, Sam Kauona, John Zale, David Sisito, David Onavui, Bernard Tunim, Jonathan Ngati, Andrew Miriki and Martin Miriori refused to come. They gave several reasons. For example, Kabui had said that the BIG, although a signatory to *The Honiara Commitments to Peace*, was not consulted on the membership of the SPPKF and its mandate. Kabui said that Prime Minister Chan had rushed the arrangements without consulting the BIG. They also objected to the presence of PNGDF in the 'neutral zone' in violation of the agreements reached in Honiara.

The Arawa Peace Conference, however, proceeded without the BIG. The BRA was represented by its front man, Ishmael Toroama, the Chief of Staff, who made it

plain that peace could only be achieved if the government was ready and willing to discuss the independence question. The meeting finally resolved, on the fourth day, that the Bougainville Leadership on both sides would continue to hold meetings outside of PNG.

North Nasioi Peace Committee

After the Peace Conference, the North Nasioi Peace Committee, headed by Theodore Miriung, remained in Arawa. The Peace Committee had been established the previous year and included traditional leaders from several north Nasioi villages who were desperate for peace. The North Nasioi Peace Committee signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* with Bougainville Administrator, Sam Tulo and the Secretary of Prime Minister Chan's Department, Brown Bai. The signatories also included senior BRA commanders of the area. Signed on 25 November 1994, this Charter re-affirmed the commitment of all parties to the *Arawa Resolution* and to a political settlement of the conflict. Importantly, it also established 'Transitional Political Arrangements' for Bougainville in the form of the Bougainville Transitional Government. This body was to operate within the legal framework provided by the *Organic Law on Provincial Government*.

Bougainville Transitional Government

In April 1995, the national government's suspension of the NSPG was lifted and the Bougainville Transitional Government (BTG) was established with Theodore Miriung elected as the Premier. The BTG had a special objective. It was a transitional arrangement aimed at uniting the Bougainville leadership (BIG/BRA and BTG/BRF) and the people of Bougainville together to resolve the Bougainville conflict. It had become obvious to Bougainvilleans that for real peace to be achieved, the issue of independence had to be addressed despite the unwillingness of the PNG government to do so. The resolutions from the Arawa Peace Conference provided a guide for the BTG. The leadership, both at the BTG and the BIG needed to come together, an issue Theodore Miriung fully appreciated.

His government's constitution preamble read: 'The BTG is established as a transitional arrangement to restore civil authority of the people of Bougainville under the *Organic Law on Provincial Government*. Apart from running the affairs of the province, the BTG will be responsible for negotiating a political settlement with the national government. It is not intended that this body becomes the ultimate form of government for the Province.'

The Charter of Mirigini for a new Bougainville was signed on 25 November 1994. In this the Bougainville leaders and leaders of the National and Bougainville Transitional Governments agreed that the Assembly of the Transitional Government should act as a constituent assembly to review the constitution of the North Solomons Provincial Government and enact a new *Constitution*. The leaders also committed themselves to 'a new spirit'. 'The BTG and the national government will be committed to working out a new deal for Bougainville which, the leaders of both governments agree, must address the basic grievances of the people and of the province, politically, socially and economically.'

More inter-Bougainvillian dialogue (Cairns I & II)

Miriung had argued that 'before any talks could be held in Port Moresby, the people of Bougainville must make their own peace' and within a few months in September 1995, another round of Bougainvillian dialogue, this time without the direct presence of national government, was held at a resort in Cairns, Australia. Representatives of the provincial government, the BTG (including the Provincial Council of Women) and the BIG, BRA and BRF factions met to seek ways and means of restarting peace negotiations. The week-long talks (later referred to as Cairns I) benefited from the support of many external actors, both official and unofficial. Australian-sponsored and facilitated, PNG government approved and with a

prominent role from the NGO Moral Re-Armament (MRA) and the International Commission of Jurists.

The second round of 'peace talks' held in Cairns (Cairns II) three months later, was facilitated by representatives of the UN Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretariat and resulted in the *Joint Communiqué* being delivered to the PNG Prime Minister, signed by BTG/Resistance and BIG/BRA, in the presence of the representatives of the UN, the Commonwealth and Australia, on 18th December 1995. This communiqué signalled the intentions of the parties to enter into a process of dialogue to achieve a political settlement and confirmed the wish for the incorporation of international bodies such as the UN and the Commonwealth into the process in a capacity to be agreed with the PNG national government.

This achievement was damaged when the BIG/BRA delegation was ambushed by the PNGDF as they returned from the Cairns talks. The peace process publicly collapsed, though unofficial talks continued with the national government. Losing confidence in the dialogue option, Prime Minister Chan banned all overseas peace talks. Within months, Chan's government held meetings with Sandline, the private military company and later the PNGDF launched their unsuccessful 'Operation High Speed II'. Civil society, notably women's organisations, continued to convene dialogue meetings.

On 12 October 1996, Theodore Miriung, Premier of the Bougainville Transitional Government and senior negotiator, was assassinated in southern Bougainville while eating the evening meal with his family. A coroner's report later implicated PNGDF and Resistance forces.

Before tasting peace, Miriung died in the hands of the very people who were to have guaranteed his security. The late leader had begun the peace process in Cairns, Australia in line with his BTG mandate and with the Nasioi Principles of '*Osingeta, Osikaiang, Me'ekamu*', 'return to dust, return to basics, start all over again. Land is owned by man. Let us protect the land, for land is Holy'.

Conclusion

Though the collapse of every agreement in this early period was followed by an escalation of violence, each new round of dialogue returned to build on the achievements of the last. The work of Theodore Miriung was not to be in vain, for soon after his untimely death, another Nasioi-speaking leader and former NSPG Premier, Joseph Kabui, was to pick up the challenge, asserting that in order to build a lasting settlement with the government in Port Moresby, the people of Bougainville would first have to make their own peace.