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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA
FOR THE 53RD SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

www.ECLJ.org
4, quai Koch
67000 Strasbourg, France
Phone: +33 (0)3.88.24.94.40

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Independent State of Papua New Guinea (Papua New Guinea) for the 53rd session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Papua New Guinea is a country located in the Pacific Ocean and has a population of approximately 14.2 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 94.8% of the population identifying as Christian and 3.3% belonging to ethnic religions.²

3. Papua New Guinea's last review was held on November 4, 2021.³ As a result of the review, Papua New Guinea received 161 recommendations, 101 of which it accepted.⁴ It was recommended by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but only noted by Papua New Guinea, that the government “[r]atify and implement the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.”⁵ In our last UPR, we called on Papua New Guinea to allocate resources to fighting human trafficking and increase its ability to identify victims.

Legal Framework

4. Under Article 43 of the Constitution of Papua New Guinea, “[n]o person shall be required to perform forced labour.”⁶ Additionally, human trafficking is punishable under Article 208C of the Criminal Code of Papua New Guinea. Under Article 208C:

¹ William Standish et al., *Papua New Guinea*, BRITANNICA (Apr. 2, 2026), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Papua-New-Guinea>.

² *Papua New Guinea: Major World Religions (1900-2050)* (World Religion Database, 2025), THE ASS'N OF RELIGION DATA ARCHIVES, <https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles?u=175c> (last visited Apr. 6, 2026).

³ *Universal Periodic Review - Papua New Guinea*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/pg-index>.

⁴ *Papua New Guinea*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Infographic_Papua_new_Guinea.pdf (last visited Apr. 6, 2026).

⁵ OHCHR, *UPR of Papua New Guinea (3rd Cycle - 39th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations*, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/UPR39_Papua_New_Guinea_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx (last visited Apr. 6, 2026).

⁶ CONST. OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA 1975 (REV. 2016) art. 43, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Papua_New_Guinea_2016.

(l), Any person who recruits, transports, transfers, conceals, harbours or receives any person by-

- (a) threat; or
- (b) use of force or other forms of coercion; or
- (c) abduction; or
- (d) fraud; or
- (e) deception; or
- (j) use of drugs or intoxicating liquors; or
- (g) the abuse of office; or
- (h) the abuse of a relationship of trust, authority or dependency; or
- (i) the abuse of a position of vulnerability; or
- (j) the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, with the intention that the other person will be subject to exploitation, is guilty of a crime,

Penalty: Imprisonment for a term not exceeding 20 years[.]⁷

5. Papua New Guinea is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁸ Under Article 8 of the ICCPR, “[n]o one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”⁹

6. Papua New Guinea is not a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹⁰ However, Papua New Guinea has an obligation under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to uphold the rights enshrined within. Under Article 4 of the UDHR, “[n]o one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.”¹¹

Human Trafficking

7. Human traffickers exploit both local and foreign individuals, and Papua New Guinea serves as both a transit and destination country for human trafficking.¹² Many of the victims are subjected to forced labor, sexual exploitation, forced marriages, child labor, and domestic servitude.¹³ Both

⁷ Criminal Code Act 1974 (As Amended by the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 2013) art. 208C, <https://antislaverylaw.ac.uk/country/papua-new-guinea/?dataset=adld>.

⁸ *Ratification Status for Papua New Guinea*, OHCHR, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/> (last visited Apr. 6, 2026).

⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 8, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

¹⁰ *Chapter XVIII Penal Matters 12. A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime* (Nov. 15, 2000), U.N. TREATY COLLECTION, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18.

¹¹ G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 4 (Dec. 10, 1948).

¹² *Papua New Guinea*, GLOB. ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX (2025), <https://ocindex.net/country/papua-new-guinea>.

¹³ *Id.*

men and women are targeted.¹⁴ Children are also heavily targeted by human traffickers, with approximately 30% of sex trafficking victims in Papua New Guinea being minors, with some being as young as ten years old.¹⁵ Unfortunately, there has only been one human trafficking conviction in Papua New Guinea.¹⁶ This is extremely troubling given that estimates suggest that there are approximately 93,000 people living in conditions of modern slavery within the country.¹⁷ These estimates highlight a significant discrepancy between identified cases and the broader scale of human trafficking.

8. For example, in 2025, a woman was arrested in Australia for trafficking fifteen citizens from Papua New Guinea to Australia between March 2021 and July 2023.¹⁸ The perpetrator deceived the victims with fictitious scholarship offers and subsequently forced them to work involuntarily on farms in Australia.¹⁹

9. Moreover, in 2023, police raided a nightclub in Gordons, National Capital District, where foreign nationals were being exploited for prostitution.²⁰

10. While the victims were rescued in these two examples, many instances of human trafficking within Papua New Guinea often go unreported and uninvestigated.²¹ For example, in 2023, authorities investigated only two cases of sex trafficking, neither of which resulted in a conviction.²²

11. There are many factors contributing to Papua New Guinea's human trafficking problem. Papua New Guinea's geographic location, combined with police lacking the capacity to secure the

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *DFAT Country Information Report Papua New Guinea*, AUSTL. GOVERNMENT DEP'T OF FOREIGN AFFS. AND TRADE 26 (July 25, 2025), <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-papua-new-guinea.pdf>.

¹⁶ Julian Melpa, *Transnational Crime on the Rise in Papua New Guinea: Challenges and Some Ways it Can be Addressed*, NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE PAPUA NEW GUINEA (Feb. 2024), https://pngnri.org/images/Publications/Issue_Paper_46_-_Transnational_crimes_on_the_rise_in_Papua_New_Guinea-Challenges_and_some_ways_it_can_be_addressed_by_Julian_Melpa.pdf.

¹⁷ *Modern Slavery in Papua New Guinea*, WALK FREE (2023), <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/09/27165026/GSI-Snapshot-Papua-New-Guinea.pdf>.

¹⁸ *Dual Australian and Nigerian Citizen Charged with Human Trafficking After Allegedly Tricking PNG Nationals with Fake Scholarships*, AFP (June 12, 2025, 1:03 PM), <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/dual-australian-and-nigerian-citizen-charged-human-trafficking-after#:~:text=2025,%201:03pm-,Dual%20Australian%20and%20Nigerian%20citizen%20charged%20with%20human%20trafficking%20after,15%20PNG%20nationals%20to%20Australia.>

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Julian Melpa, *Transnational Crime on the Rise in Papua New Guinea: Challenges and Some Ways it Can be Addressed*, NAT'L RSCH. INST. PAPUA N.G. 3 (Feb. 2024), https://pngnri.org/images/Publications/Issue_Paper_46_-_Transnational_crimes_on_the_rise_in_Papua_New_Guinea-Challenges_and_some_ways_it_can_be_addressed_by_Julian_Melpa.pdf.

²¹ *Papua New Guinea Reignites National Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts with the First Meeting of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee in Three Years*, IOM UN MIGRATION (May 6, 2025), <https://png.iom.int/news/papua-new-guinea-reignites-national-anti-human-trafficking-efforts-first-meeting-national-anti-human-trafficking-committee-three-years>.

²² *DFAT Country Information Report Papua New Guinea*, *supra* note 15, at 26.

border, has led to a rise in crimes like human trafficking.²³ In our last report on Papua New Guinea, we reported that the government lacks the resources needed to combat human trafficking. Unfortunately, not much has changed which has contributed to that fact that the authorities have not convicted a single human trafficking case since Papua New Guinea’s last review. Law enforcement still lacks the training and resources needed to identify victims of human trafficking, and in some cases, victims of human trafficking go unidentified and are deported.²⁴ Further, there are twenty-two provinces in Papua New Guinea,²⁵ and in each province there are only two labor inspectors.²⁶ The lack of personnel makes it hard to investigate, inspect, and prevent cases of labor and sexual exploitation.²⁷

12. To address its shortcomings, in April 2025, the Department of Justice convened its first National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee (NAHTC) meeting since 2022.²⁸ The purpose of this meeting was to facilitate interagency coordination on combating human trafficking and to start the process of developing a National Action Plan.²⁹ The Commissioner of Police emphasized the necessity of addressing human trafficking:

We have only had one successful trafficking conviction in PNG. There are many more cases — some undetected or unreported. A better-informed society can recognize these crimes and report them. Let’s not wait until it becomes a bigger issue. Let’s act now before we are overwhelmed.³⁰

13. Additionally, it is concerning that Papua New Guinea did not support a recommendation that called for the government to “[r]atify and implement the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.”³¹ This international agreement requires States Parties to “prevent and combat trafficking in persons” as well as to “protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.”³² As stated above, there has only been one human trafficking conviction in Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea is failing to protect its citizens from the horrors of human trafficking, as tens of thousands of people are currently being exploited in the country and the government has failed to take meaningful action.

²³ *Id.* at 12.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *About PNG*, HIGH COMM’N OF THE INDEP. STATE OF PAPUA N.G. (2020), <https://pngcanberra.org/about-png/#:~:text=Papua%20New%20Guinea%20has%202022,and%20Autonomous%20Region%20of%20Bougainville>.

²⁶ Madison Tomaso, *The Fight Against Human Trafficking in Papua New Guinea*, THE BORGEN PROJECT (May 10, 2023), <https://borgenproject.org/human-trafficking-in-papua-new-guinea/>.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Papua New Guinea Reignites National Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts with the First Meeting of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee in Three Years*, *supra* note 21.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *UPR of Papua New Guinea (3rd Cycle - 39th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations*, *supra* note 5.

³² Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9 § 1, Nov. 15, 2000, G.A. Res. 55/25, U.N. Doc. A/RES/55/25, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>.

Recommendations

14. We urge Papua New Guinea to take human trafficking seriously. To do this, Papua New Guinea must allocate resources and personnel who are dedicated to investigating and prosecuting human trafficking cases. Further, we ask that the government implement procedures to identify victims of human trafficking and provide them with aid. Lastly, we ask that the government ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.