

L-R: East Sepik Province Governor Allan Bird, Oro Governor Gary Juffa, Angoram MP Salio Waipo wearing black to raise awareness on ending violence against women (Photo credit: Namorong Report)



Building a violence-free society in PNG

By Allan Bird
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Why is violence acceptable in PNG?

I grew up in an Abelam society where we could scream at the top of our voices without violence. Violence was always a last resort. Today it seems, violence is always the first response.

I see violence everywhere. Too much violence, young men drinking steam, getting violent using grass knives, bush knives and darts fired from sling shots. As a former hospital Chair, I was shocked that more than half of the cases at the Boram Hospital in East Sepik were the result of violence. That is still the case today.

And yes a large part of the statistics were women bashed up by their loving partners. I am concerned that more and more young people are solving problems using violence.

I never saw my grandfather beat up my grandmother. He always said to me: "We are warriors, we must always protect and defend our women." This is what I teach my sons. I have never seen my mature cousins beat their wives. So beating women is not part of my traditional culture. It seems to be a part of modern PNG culture.

I have consistently spoken in Parliament and outside about my concern for women and girls being beaten up and in some instances killed. I find it shocking that society is approving of this by its indifference.

I don't want my daughters to live in a society where beating of women is acceptable and normal.

My grandfather always said, "*sapos meri bighead lo yu, lusim em na kisim narapla*". In my society that is normal. Children from the marriage were then raised by relatives. We still communally raise children today.

The East Sepik provincial government has been discussing the issue of violence in our community and we want to do something about it. COVID-19 has stymied our plans but we are keen to tackle the issue of violence against women and violence generally in our society. But we will be mounting an anti-violence campaign in Sepik this year.

In a nation where violence is fast approaching pandemic proportions, it is important that we make a stand somewhere and try to build a decent society where we can all live free of violence. I hope we can do that at home and I call on all Sepiks to help us build a violence-free society.

So let's keep wearing black on Thursday to make a stand against violence, especially violence against women and girls.

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