

Statement at ANU PNG prayer vigil, Thursday June 9

By Stephen Howes
9 June 2016

I thank the organizers of this event, and commend all of you who have come to be here tonight. Our thoughts are with the victims of yesterday's violence, and with their families. Our thoughts are with all the students and faculty of our sister university, the University of Papua New Guinea. Our thoughts are with the people of PNG, both at home and abroad, including here in Canberra and at the ANU.

The ANU and UPNG go back a long way together, and last year, with the encouragement of our Dean, we celebrated our shared history through a photographic exhibition. In recent years we have revived that relationship with a new MOU signed in March of last year by the two Vice Chancellors. This year, with support from the Australian aid program, there have been five ANU academics teaching at UPNG, four from the Crawford School and one from SSGM. Of course, the student strike brought that teaching to a halt over a month ago now. We are confident, however, in the strength of our collaboration, and certainly expect the partnership between ANU and UPNG to remain strong.

As someone who has personally been involved with PNG and UPNG for some time, I was shocked and saddened by what happened yesterday. I have always experienced the UPNG campus as a very peaceful and relaxed place, and have enjoyed many walks and indeed runs around its fields.

We must condemn violence on all sides, and I do. But I was particularly appalled by the brutality of the police attack on the students. The excessive force exercised by the police yesterday should be condemned by both the PNG and the Australian governments, as it has been by Amnesty International. Not only academic freedom but the broader rights to life and liberty are important to all of us, and we need to stand up for them.

As I said, these are sad times. I am not here to speculate on how events will or should unfold. Rather I want to close by expressing sympathy and solidarity, and by reaffirming the close relationship between our two universities.

Statement at the June 9 ANU [prayer vigil](#) organized by PNG students and community.

About the author/s

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