

# We need arrests: testimony to the PNG Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence

by Denga Ilave

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Denga Ilave speaking at the Gender-Based Violence Public Hearing

Photo Credit: [PNG Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence/Facebook](#)

*This is the edited testimony of Ms Denga Ilave, Lae Operations Director for Femili PNG, delivered on Monday 24 May to PNG's [Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence](#).*

Firstly, I'd like to thank the committee members. It's been so long that we've worked in this space. And it's a challenge that you take up as parliamentarians. We are not exempt from family and sexual violence issues in our country and we need political leadership. On behalf of [Femili PNG](#), I would like to thank you all for taking the challenge and taking political leadership on this.

Femili PNG has run a Case Management Centre (CMC) in Lae for seven years now. And since 2018, in Port Moresby under the Bel isi PNG Initiative, we operate a CMC and Safe House. In Lae, in the last seven years, we have assisted more than 3,000 men, women and children through the CMC. In the Bel isi CMC, we've assisted more than 900 survivors of family and sexual violence. We work directly with the government service providers, including the welfare, police courts, Family Support Centres, and other NGOs and community-based organisations that work in this space, and we assist survivors.

When survivors are registered in our CMC, we work with them. For those who are illiterate, we assist them with their statement and writing affidavits to the court. We assist them to report the cases to the police. For women who need medical assistance, we assist them to a Family Support Centre. If they require other services that are not provided by the Family Support Centre or by the public hospitals, we assist them to access the services from private hospitals.

We also coordinate with the safe houses in Lae. There are several safe houses that are provided by other organisations like City Mission and the Salvation Army. We

coordinate with them for women and children who require refuge accommodation. We also assist them while they are there. We provide survivors with transport assistance, food and other basic needs while they are at the safe house.

We also assist survivors to access justice from the courts, including interim and permanent protection orders. We follow through the process in seeking justice for survivors.

There are also cases where women have come up and said, 'I've lived in this violence for too long, for 10, 20 years now. I want to relocate.' While repatriation and relocation is not the solution to the problem of family violence, we do assist them when the request comes from the survivors. So at times those repatriations cost more than 10,000 kina, including if they are going to an island in the province and need transfers.

That is the work that we do.

With high-profile cases, it is challenging to work when perpetrators have money and they can influence some of the services that are supposed to be accessed by the survivors.

Service providers like police – sometimes I see that they fear to do their work because of the money and power involved. When high-profile perpetrators are involved in cases, because they have the resources and power, they influence the police. Probably they know the police officers who are working on that case, and the police are reluctant. They delay the cases in terms of arresting those perpetrators, or whatever is involved.

Sometimes I get called by my caseworkers. 'Oh we have the perpetrator driving around in the car, and they've come into our office.' If they're on the run, we try to call the police, and we ask the police to come quickly to arrest them. If they are able to come in time they do. But then we hear that they go to the police station, and they are not arrested. It's easy to arrest some people down there on the street, but sometimes it's much more difficult to arrest some high-profile people.

From the experience of Femili PNG, I'd like to take this opportunity to say that we need the government to help strengthen access to the services that are essential for the survivors.

I'd like to recommend that the government look into including Family Court magistrates at all District Courts throughout the country, because a lot of cases end up in the District Court. If we can have Family Court magistrates included in all District Courts throughout the country to progress cases, and the Office of the Child

and Family Services to ensure there are administrative mechanisms in place. A lot of cases are pending in the District Court.

I am concerned – I am a mother, I have a daughter. And there are many children out there in Papua New Guinea. We have an increase in the number of children's cases. We need to ensure that we have mechanisms that are working. Our child protection officers throughout the country need to be gazetted, as do the child protection community volunteers. Also those that are working in civil society groups need to be gazetted because the issue is big. They need to have the power also to help the government and the police.

Within the police, we need the Family and Sexual Violence Units and the juvenile sections to be integrated into the police department. Currently, they're outside of the structure. At times, it's challenging to get them working. If there are other activities happening in the province, they have to attend to those and they leave their units behind. If we have urgent cases, like sorcery or the rape of a child, it can be hard to get the police to immediately attend.

Femili PNG has assisted more than 20 sorcery-related cases. Only one case in Lae have the perpetrators been arrested. And it didn't make it through the court process; it dropped out from the District Court. Even if the perpetrators are identified, the police lock the survivors in the cell for their safety, and then eventually refer them to the safe houses and NGOs to take care of them. Then they are staying at the safe house for eight months, nine months, with no arrests made. I've had so many conferences with police. **We need arrests and we need justice for this vulnerable population.** If the police could effect arrests on this, it would give a strong message out to the community that this is totally wrong.

Femili PNG allocates a small amount of money from donors to assist our partners, around 50,000-60,000 kina. I receive a lot of requests from service providers, government essential service providers, including requests for stationery, requests for police vehicle fuel, requests for printers and photocopy machines. We need the government to resource our essential service providers in the gender-based violence space. Please allocate resources to them, so that they can deliver.

*Written submissions are invited by the Committee and can be sent by Friday 30 June to [parliamentgbvcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:parliamentgbvcommittee@gmail.com).*

*You can listen to Ms Denga Ilave's full speech [here](#).*

## Disclosures:

*The Development Policy Centre provides pro-bono institutional support for Femili PNG.*

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Denga Ilave is the Lae Operations Director for Femili PNG.

### Link:

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