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## PAPUA NEW GUINEA – INFORMATION SHEET

### BACKGROUND

Archaeological evidence indicates that human beings arrived on Papua New Guinea (PNG) at least 60,000 years ago, probably by sea from Southeast Asia during an Ice Age period when the sea was lower and distances between islands shorter. The first Europeans to sight New Guinea were probably the Portuguese and Spanish navigators sailing in the South Pacific in the early part of the 16th century. In 1526-27, Don Jorge de Meneses accidentally came upon the principal island and is credited with naming it "Papua," a Malay word for the frizzled quality of Melanesian hair. The term "New Guinea" was applied to the island in 1545 by a Spaniard, Íñigo Ortiz de Retes who thought inhabitants resembled the people of Africa's Guinea. It is estimated that more than 1000 different cultural groups exist and most groups have their own language. Papua New Guinea occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, just north of Australia, and many outlying islands. The Sepik and the Fly are its two major rivers and parts of the mountainous interior are only just being explored. The country's political system is considered unstable and the crime rate has soared. Corruption is rampant and essential services, including health care and education continue to decline. According to the World Bank, 70% of the country lives in poverty. Industries include copra crushing, palm oil processing, production of plywood, wood-chip and crude oil, mining of gold, silver, and copper, petroleum refining, construction and tourism. In 1989, guerrillas of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) shut down the island's Australian-owned copper mine, a major source of revenue for the country. The rebels believed that Bougainville deserved a greater share of the earnings for its copper. In 1990, the BRA declared Bougainville's independence, whereupon the government blockaded the island until January 1991, when a peace treaty was signed to unify the nation.

### LANGUAGE

The language Tok Pisin, once called Neo-Melanesian (or Pidgin English) has evolved as the lingua franca, the medium through which diverse language groups are able to communicate with one another in Parliament, in the news media, and elsewhere. Hirri Motu is spoken in the Papua region. Only 1%-2% of the population speak English and there are 715 indigenous languages.

### RELIGION

Roman Catholic 22%, Lutheran 16%, Presbyterian/Methodist/London Missionary Society 8%, Anglican 5%, Evangelical Alliance 4%, Seventh-Day Adventist 1%, other Protestant 10%, Indigenous beliefs 34%

### RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

NEW YEAR'S DAY - 1 Jan  
EASTER  
QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY  
REMEMBRANCE DAY- 19 July  
INDEPENDENCE DAY - 13 September  
CONSTITUTION DAY  
CHRISTMAS

### ETHNIC MAKEUP

Melanesian, Papuan, Negrito, Micronesian, Polynesian

### SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Up until 1933 sea shells were the form of currency. People typically live in villages or dispersed hamlets which rely on the subsistence farming of sweet potatoes and taro. The principal livestock in traditional PNG is the oceanic pig. To balance the diet, people of PNG hunt and collect wild plants or fish depending on the local environment and mode of subsistence. Those who become skilled at farming, hunting or fishing earn

a great deal of respect in Papua New Guinea. Agriculture includes coffee, cocoa, copra, palm kernels, tea, sugar, rubber, sweet potatoes, fruit, vegetables, vanilla, shell fish, poultry and pork.

People of the Sepik are world renowned wood and skull carvers.

MARRIAGE: Wedding dowries were often paid in golden edged clam shells and pigs.

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE: The Australian “thumbs up” sign is considered extremely impolite.

CHILD REARING PRACTICES: The planning and organisational foundations of early childhood education focus strongly on the local community, which is actively involved in the selection process of teachers and in the development of the curriculum. Elementary schools are built by villagers using local materials.

Communities informally monitor the activities of the school, the children and the teachers on a daily basis, while parents assist with field trips and voluntarily help out in the classroom. Instruction is given in the mother tongue of the child and is aimed at developing appropriate literacy and numeracy skills. Policy now emphasises this through the teacher education system. In the past, the provision of early childhood education has been left to the private sector. Although relatively small in number, programs have been run by the international school system since the 1970s and by non-governmental organizations since the 1980s. *Tok ples* schools originally offered mainly initial literacy in the vernacular language, but the curriculum of most of them was broadened to include numeracy and health skills. *Tok ples* attracted large numbers of children. It was partly their success that led the Department of Education to introduce the three-year elementary school program.

## CUISINE

Papua New Guinea's cuisine is very varied. The staple foods are rice, sago and kau kau generally prepared with seafood, chicken, game, pork and a large variety of greens. A traditional dish is mumu named after the oven where they cook their dishes. Mumu is made with pork meat, sweet potatoes, rice and greens. Traditional dishes are generally served on feast days. In Papua New Guinea, braising is one way of cooking meat, vegetables or seafood usually served with delicious sauces. An exotic meal might be fresh Barramundi wrapped in banana leaves, roasted chestnuts and incredibly delicious fruits, Talautu (Pineapple in coconut cream) with Muli Wara (Lemonade)

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