


Annex 5: Letter from Committee Chair to Police Commissioner re SARV

Letter emailed on 21 June 2021

**SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**



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9 June 2021

Dear Commissioner Manning,

Re: Request for information on (i) action taken on sorcery accusation related killing in Hela and (ii) systematic RPNGC response to sorcery accusation related violence

I am writing to you on behalf of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Thank you again for your participation at our public hearings in the week of 24 May 2021.

During those public hearings, we heard considerable testimony related to the continuing rise of sorcery accusation related violence (SARV) across the country. The brutal treatment of our fellow citizens on the basis of completely unfounded superstitions is of deep concern to the Committee. We heard from multiple civil society representatives who advised us that the police response to SARV is often insufficient, with police not attending cases in a timely manner and little or no action being taken to investigate or arrest alleged perpetrators.

This issue has come to the fore again, with the *The National* running the headline "Horror Torture in Hela" on 4 June 2021. That report told a horrifying story of an innocent woman, Mary Kopari, being mercilessly killed, after being tortured and having her limbs chopped off. In respect of Ms Kopari's case and the many SARV cases across the country that we are aware of, the Committee asks you to respond to the following questions:

i. Please advise what action is being taken to ensure that Ms Kopari's case is being properly investigated. We hear too many stories of women being publicly attacked and killed and yet perpetrators are never arrested and brought to trial. This is a clear case of unlawful killing. Perpetrators must be identified and prosecuted as murderers. We need an assurance that your office will provide proper resources and leadership to ensure that those responsible will be held accountable by our justice system. Specifically, please advise:

- Have there been any arrests in this case, noting that the violence was captured on videotape? If not, please explain the delay.
- Has the glassman been identified and arrested? If not, please explain the delay.

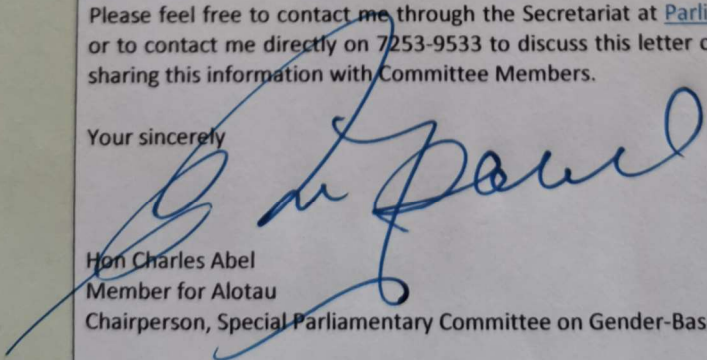
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- If there have not yet been arrests, please provide the Committee with an update in 2 weeks' time of progress with the investigation, including an update on any arrests.
- ii. More generally, please advise which Assistant Commissioner or other senior commander has responsibility for taking leadership on the RPNGC's response to GBV and SARV, noting that former Police Minister Bryan Kramer proposed dedicating a specific Assistant Commissioner on GBV in 2020. What is the specific mandate of the senior police commander currently responsible for GBV? How does he/she interact with provincial level police commanders to ensure that local officers are properly investigating GBV cases?
- iii. We expect senior RPNGC leaders to be actively driving better GBV responses. Are you, or another RPNGC senior commander, regularly provided with statistics regarding the number of GBV cases lodged across the country and the status of those investigations? If so, how often? If so, can these statistics be released publicly (with personal details redacted to provide privacy)?
- iv. Please explain to us how the RPNGC's internal investigations systems are set up to respond to news reports about GBV and SARV cases, including cases like Ms Kopari's. While we expect all GBV cases to be investigated, we would assume that high profile cases reported in the media automatically trigger some form of internal process, which would ensure that your Headquarters Command is provided with updates on progress that can be provided to the media and other concerned stakeholders. Is this the case? If not, why not? If not, how do you reassure yourself that proper investigations are being undertaken of such serious cases?
- v. Are there Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in place to guide RPNGC officers on how to respond to SARV cases, including how to offer protection to living victims, how to engage with family members and communities (who in many cases may be implicated in the crime), how to gather evidence and how to put together case files for prosecution? If not, we would strongly urge you to produce SARV SOPs as a matter of urgency, drawing on advice from NGO partners who currently provide support to SARV survivors and have a strong understanding of how police responses should be delivered.

We would please request that your office provide this information to the Committee Secretariat no later than one week from today, namely Monday 14 June 2021, in writing, at ParliamentGBVCommittee@gmail.com. Please note that it is my intention to share the information received with other Committee Members, with my fellow members of the Coalition of Parliamentarians to End GBV and with the public.

Please feel free to contact me through the Secretariat at ParliamentGBVCommittee@gmail.com or to contact me directly on 7253-9533 to discuss this letter or propose a different approach to sharing this information with Committee Members.

Your sincerely


Hon Charles Abel
Member for Alotau
Chairperson, Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence