



WRITTEN SUBMISSION BY
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY
THE HONOURABLE TIMOTHY MASIU, MP
TO THE SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON GENDER BASED
VIOLENCE PUBLIC INQUIRY

25TH MAY 2021

APEC HAUS, N.C.D.

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The Chairman
Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender Based Violence
Public Inquiry
P O Parliament House
Independence Drive
Waigani
National Capital District

**SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE**

MINISTRY—ABOUT

The Minister for Communication and Information Technology ('Portfolio Minister') was appointed by determination of titles and responsibilities of Ministers published in the National Gazette.¹ The incumbent is the Honourable Timothy Masiu, MP and Member for South Bougainville.

The Portfolio Minister is responsible for all the matters related to functions of:

- (a) National Broadcasting Corporation;
- (b) National Information and Communication Technology Authority; and
- (c) Department of Information and Communication Technology.

The Portfolio Minister administers:

- (a) Broadcasting Corporation Act (Chapter 149);
- (b) National Information and Communication Technology Act 2009;
- (c) Printers and Newspapers Act (Chapter 151);
- (d) Telecommunications Industry Act 2002; and
- (e) Television (Prohibition and Control) Act 1980.

¹ National Gazette No. G920 (Thursday 24th December 2020); p15.

SUBMISSION

The Portfolio Minister was invited by the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender Based Violence Public Inquiry to make submissions addressing *cyber-bullying in connection with Gender Based Violence (GBV)*.

PNG NATIONAL STRATEGY ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE 2016-2025

The *PNG National Strategy on Gender Based Violence 2016-2025* (Strategy) is the Government's framework to prevent and to respond to GBV.

According to the Strategy, thousands of survivors of GBV need more socio-psychological services, accessible legal and justice services, and protective shelters.

The Strategy defines GBV as:

"Physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse directed against a person because of his or her gender in a society or culture including, but not limited to, acts committed with force, manipulation or coercion and without the informed consent of the survivor, to gain control and power over them."

The Strategy highlights that addressing GBV requires both prevention and response.

MOBILE TELEPHONY, INTERNET AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

To provide a better context to this, please allow me to highlight the ICT Sector in Papua New Guinea.

Within the last 15 years, Papua New Guinea has experienced an exponential increase in the use of digital technologies and services, and particularly with respect to access to internet and Social Media.

We now have 3G and 4G mobile networks with affordable smart devices that enable us access to the internet and internet-enabled services such as social media anywhere, anytime, as long as there is connectivity.

The usage of mobile phones has shot up from a mere 30,000 in 2005 to 2.5 million subscribers; with the majority, if not all, having access to 3G and 4G mobile network bandwidth.

By March of 2021, the number of Papua New Guineans on Facebook surpassed 1 million, and the majority were men aged between 18 and 24.

These technologies and social media platforms have brought many beneficial opportunities for our people. However, opportunities come with risks and threats.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO PERPETRATE CYBER GBV (C-GBV)

Beyond the traditional context of GBV, we are now seeing perpetrators moving from physical to virtual space and taking advantage of technologies and social media platforms to attack, humiliate, shame, silence and publicly expose our women and girls. My Ministry is now calling this cyber gender-based violence.

Forms of cyber gender-based violence are now manifesting through cyberbullying and cyber harassment.

Cyber-bullying as in the case of a child; and cyber-harassment as in the case of adults, is where a person initiates and engages in an online communication or posts with the intention to bully or harass, intimidate, threaten, demean, ridicule or stalk and or cause emotional stress.

While men can be harassed online, observations of the past show that when women are harassed, online harassment quickly stoops into sexualized hate or threats.

The only conclusion I can draw is that cyber gender-based violence reflects the deeply rooted gender inequalities in our society.

We must accept that our people are no longer just PNG citizens localized to their respective physical communities and villages. They have assumed an additional identity as 'netizens' in virtual communities existing in WhatsApp and Facebook communities and villages.

This also means that gender-based violence will continue to manifest itself online through cyber bullying and cyber harassment, and in the absence of effective monitoring and prosecution by relevant government authorities; the same and more perpetrators will continue to 'commit violence' online without facing legal and just consequences.

According to data from UNESCO on the prevalence of cyberbullying and cyber harassment, the proportion of children and adolescents who are affected by cyberbullying ranges from 5 per cent to 21 per cent; with girls appearing to be more likely to experience cyberbullying than boys.

I'm sure that we all will have noticed by now that women can be deemed as main targets of cyber violence and especially cyber-harassment.

ICT RELATED REASONS WHY GBV REMAINS SO PREVALENT IN PNG

The ***PNG National Strategy on Gender Based Violence*** gives about eleven reasons why GBV remains so prevalent in PNG.

Two of these reasons are data-centred and they are:

- Inaccurate, scattered, and inaccessible data, and;
- Data/knowledge coordination and sharing.

In terms of Inaccurate, scattered, and inaccessible data, the following is established:

- There is a lack of up-to-date data
- No national system for compiling and disseminating data
- No institutionalized method for the collection of administrative data on GBV, which has meant data collected by police and health centres is inaccurate and unreliable

In terms of data/knowledge coordination and sharing, the following issues are identified:

- The Government is yet to establish a comprehensive standardized system for reporting, data collection and analysis
- If data was standardized and systematically collected by agencies and compiled into a reliable national collection; then the spread, types, incidence and severity of GBV could be better understood

From our discussions over the past two days, it is evident from findings that records of all types of GBV cases are not shared between safe houses, as victims usually move between safe houses.

A central case management system that links safe houses and allows sharing of records is a vital component of our solution in this instance.

Additionally, a mobile app that builds on such a case management system and allows stakeholders and especially GBV and Cyber GBV victims to communicate in real time and get a response in record time would be a way forward.

MARAPE-BASIL GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS WITHIN THE ICT SECTOR

In 2019, when the Marape Government came into power, one of the most critical observations I made as Minister responsible for ICT was the fact that ICT was not properly coordinated. Within the public service, I could not see ICT being used in a coordinated manner to improve public service delivery.

Upon identifying this issue, I set about to develop a broad policy framework that would guide a whole-of-government approach to coordinate the usage of ICT within public service.

In 2020, the Marape-Basil Government approved the PNG Digital Transformation Policy through NEC Decision No. 252/2020.

As part of the policy scope, the PNG Digital Transformation Policy introduces Cyber Safety & Privacy as a priority.

Under my oversight, the Department of ICT has recently been reorganized and restructured to implement Government Policy on 'digital transformation'. Further to this, the Department is in the process of establishing a **Social Media Monitoring Desk** under its Information Dissemination and Cybersafety Division. The Division is tasked to develop awareness strategies on safe use of internet and social media. In fact, I am taking a Policy Submission to NEC to seek approval and funding support for this set-up commencing 2022.

The **Social Media Monitoring Desk** within the Department will have the capacity to develop an online application for monitoring of GBV as well as providing an avenue for reporting of gender-based violence and act as a shared platform for all agencies to use. As Minister responsible for ICT, I would support a shared services approach.

Under the Digital Transformation Policy, we recognize that we cannot ban emerging digital technologies, particularly the services on social media platforms. However, relevant agencies including Police, Department of Community Development, Department of ICT, Department of Justice and Attorney General,

and other instrumentalities of State to work together to monitor and curb all types gender-based violence including those initiated online. The **Cybercrime Code Act 2016** is already in existence and those responsible must be prosecuted.

One of the main issues highlighted is data and information of cases and victims being scattered across agencies. I have taken a policy direction (**NEC Decision 40/2020**) to establish a National Secure Data Exchange Platform.

This Cabinet decision seeks to enable the integration and sharing of data securely to effectively serve our citizens. In this instance, this initiative will improve enabling safe house systems, respective state entities and business houses to effectively share confidential and necessary data of victims so that our combined efforts on GBV can be realized and addressed.

Finally, for children and the future. It is important that we protect our underaged children from having open access to internet. I want to remind all our parents and guardians to take more responsibility in monitoring your children's use of internet.

I am also of the view that Christian Religion instructions and safe, respectful use of technology must be taught as compulsory lessons in primary and secondary schools so that we impart Christian moral and ethical values in the minds of our children at an early age.

Much of these interventions highlighted are in fact provisioned through a Digital Government approach as articulated in the proposed *Digital Government Bill 2021*.

The proposed Digital Government Bill 2021 will:

- Censor and filter websites that are deemed to host content that breach existing laws. On this note we recognize that inappropriate websites such as sites hosting pornographic content are not helpful to the GBV agenda.

- Promote and improve access to information through the proposed central e-Government Platform. Our goal is for GBV victims to be able to have easy access to report to appropriate authorities anonymously and safely.

The Digital Government Bill is an effort my Ministry and Department has been working on since last year and hope to have enacted this year.

In addition to this intervention, I have instructed the agencies under my Ministry to commence work on relevant policies and legal framework necessary to safeguard our citizens online. I am pleased to mention that work has now commenced on developing the **Data Protection** and **Privacy laws**, to protect the identities and information of our women and girls online.

To conclude, I want to emphasize that ICT is a tool that we can utilize to assist us in our effort to curb gender-based violence. I call on relevant stakeholders to work closely with my Department of ICT and develop systems and applications that can be used to assist us curb gender-based violence.

I thank you Chair and your Committee Members for giving me this time to talk on online gender-based violence, and I am sure you have taken note of my comments and recommendations.

God Bless Papua New Guinea