

In Search of Peace for Bougainville

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[In the printed version, there were two footnotes numbered “1”. This has now been corrected. —Revising ed.]

This is an attempt to analyse the peace process that has been employed in the war-torn island since the beginning of the conflict on November 26, 1988. Since the conflict erupted seven years ago, a lot of time, effort, and money has been used in trying various means and strategies to achieve lasting peace and normalcy. However, up until now, none of the peace deals has really been successful. Time and time again, one or both parties have breached the agreements that were signed. Therefore, the road to peace has been a slippery and illusive one, with many oceans to cross and mountains to climb.

The Problem of the Paper

Previous materials that have been written on the current subject have been the works of people from outside the province and country. Mostly, they were written by people, who did not have any first-hand experience of the crisis at all, but were from people, especially journalists, who made it their business to report, and write up, anything that came up on the news. Another group was the so-called scholars, who were attached to universities, and other research institutions.

¹ This article is extracted from a sub-thesis presented at Rarongo Theological College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Divinity degree. The entire work may be consulted in the College library.

It is, therefore, out of that context that this paper is being attempted. Thus, the author will grapple with the task of presenting issues, from the point of view of someone, who has actually experienced the crisis. And, furthermore, it is written by someone, who has felt the hardships of the people, has seen the type of atrocities that have befallen them, and has shed tears, and mourned, with the people.

Sir Michael Somare and Bernard Narokobi, after the signing of the *Endeavour Accord*, made the following confession: “We addressed it (the Bougainville crisis) as a mere law-and-order problem, and made the wrong diagnosis.” They admitted that the use of security forces, the appointment of various committees, the imposition of a curfew, and the declaration of a state of emergency, had not been based on proper analysis. They said that the issue became a protracted, bloody crisis, because of the initial, misguided attempts to resolve the problem.

The Western method, and type of peace, is quite different from the Melanesian way. The West tries to assure lasting peace, through various means, such as, diplomacy, international organisations, discernment, collective security, and improvement of international communication and trade. It is a method, which always requires, and demands, peace in black and white. The main types of instruments and documents used are: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Joint Statements, or Communiqués, and Peace Agreements, or Treaties. These have been employed by PNG, in the peace agreements it has entered into with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), and the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG). It has been a case of “my signature against yours”, whereas, in Melanesia, it needs to be “my word against yours, secured by the exchange of gifts”.

Another key aspect of the Western method is the use of high-powered, and high-levelled, consultant committees. Such committees are the advisers, offering professional and technical advice to the people seeking peace.

Examples of the use of these, so far, have been the engagement of Nicholas Etheridge, of the Canadian High Commission in Canberra, and Tony Brown, the Director of the New Zealand's Security Secretariat. Both of these gentlemen officiated as observers at the signing of the *Endeavour Accord* in 1990.

The Western method may seem awkward and unintelligible in a society, where payback killing is part and parcel of the peace process. However, it has gained acceptance, and popularity, in the wider world. Evidence of its use and effectiveness has been witnessed in various world trouble spots, such as Palestine and Bosnia.

The biblical method of peace is based on the teachings of the Bible. It contains the covenant of God, relayed through the prophets in the Old Testament, and the teaching of Jesus, and the Apostles, in the New Testament. The Old Testament word for peace (שָׁלוֹם = *shalom*) means “completeness”, “soundness”, “well-being”. Its parallel in the New Testament is the Greek εἰρήνη = *eirene*, which describes harmonious relationships between men (Matt 10:34; Rom 14:19), and between nations (Luke 14:32; Acts 12:20). It also means “friendliness” (Acts 15:33), and “freedom from molestation” (Luke 11:21). Furthermore, it also refers to the harmonised relationship between God and man, accomplished through the gospel (Acts 10:36; Eph 2:17).

Peace, in biblical discussion, usually refers to a relationship between man and man, or between God and man, depending on the context. It is based on the love of God for man (John 3:16), and, also, on the biblical commands for man to love his neighbour, as he loves himself (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39). Therefore, biblical peace begins from love. It highlights, or affirms, the fact that peace and love go together (Gal 5:22).

Another angle, or aspect, of biblical peace, is forgiveness. This is very important, because any peace without forgiveness will not really be a lasting one. Forgiveness means forgetting, or burying, the past, and

making a new beginning. In a deeper sense, it means admitting our failures, humbling ourselves, and seeking forgiveness from others. Ultimately, reconciliation and restoration come about, so that renewal of fellowship and relationship is the outcome.

Biblical peace does not mean highlighting others' faults, nor pointing fingers at others, nor justifying ourselves. But, it means only one thing: biblical peace means love, because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8).

The Conception of Peace

Peace is previewed, seen, and interpreted in various different ways, by those, who have been involved, and affected, by the crisis, in one way or another. The author will discuss how each of the groups sees peace, and what peace means in the minds of these people.

(a) The Papua New Guinea National Government

The position of the PNG national government on peace in Bougainville has always been clear. It has been maintained, right through the years of the crisis, and perhaps will remain unchanged. The national government has always maintained that the foundation for a solution depended on a number of fundamental principles. These included:

(i) The National Constitution

Any peace discussion must be held within the framework of the National Constitution of Papua New Guinea. Successive governments have maintained this stand. For example, the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sir Michael Somare, on the *Implementation of the Honiara Declaration on Bougainville*, in 1991. He said, "Future political relationships will be, and must be, determined within the constitutional framework of the state."

The current Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chao, when he announced the lifting of the cease-fire in March this year, said, “above all else, the National Constitution of PNG must be upheld and respected”.

The National Constitution is the most sacred document in the country, and, as such, it is guarded vigorously at all times. Any abuse of the Constitution would be a recipe for disaster to the whole country.

Under the National Constitution, Bougainville is an integral part of PNG. It is not a colony of Papua New Guinea. At the all-Bougainville leader talks, held in Cairns in December, 1995, this fact was emphatically laid down by those who chaired the meeting. The Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat (political), Mr K. Srinivasan, said it would not pronounce itself on independence for Bougainville.

On the same note, Mr Frances Vendrell, Director for Political Affairs of the United Nations, said that self-determination was a principle, not a right. In so far as it was a right, it applied only to colonial countries, and people. “Resolution 1514 of the United Nations, on political affairs, contained a provision against disrupting the territorial integrity of a member state.”

(ii) Dialogue

The national government has always taken a position that secession is “not negotiable”, and that any dialogue has to be undertaken within an atmosphere of a compromise on this issue. At the same time, the BRA has taken up the converse position. When both sides are unwilling to give way, there will always be bloodshed. This has been the case for the last seven years, where security forces members, BRA members, and also civilians, have died unnecessarily.

The national government is consistently pursuing this avenue, as evidenced from the past agreements that have been signed. Despite those signings, normalcy, and permanent peace, have not been fully

realised, the reason being that both sides are accusing, and counter-accusing, each other for non-compliance with the terms of the agreements. This problem will be further discussed later in the paper.

Although the national government has, in the past, rejected the idea of meeting face to face with the BRA, it has slowly softened that stance, as evidenced by the past meetings that have taken place. While both sides differ on the agenda of future meetings, in the long run, this is more likely to be the most humanly-sensible way to go.

(iii) Internal Matter

As far as the national government is concerned, the Bougainville crisis is an internal matter. This has meant that any answer to the situation has to be found within the country, and not brought in from the outside. Any assistance and help is welcomed, provided it is coming through the proper channel. For example, in 1991, the then Prime Minister, Rabbie Namaliu, commented on this, at the height of the crisis:

From the very outset, we have made it totally clear that outside interference in any aspect of the problems on Bougainville will not be tolerated. This is an internal matter, between the government of Papua New Guinea, and rebel elements on Bougainville. If any organisation wants to offer medical or other supplies, it is welcome to do so through the government of Papua New Guinea.

In 1992, the Pacific Conference of Churches challenged the principle of non-interference in the internal matters of sovereign states, adding that this principle can be an alibi for doing nothing, or for committing unjust deeds.

(iv) Military Option

The national government has always been reluctant to use this method in searching for peace. Although quite a number of members of

Parliament have been pushing for this, it has not been implemented, until this year. The reason the government has not been keen on this, is because it means more people would die, without peace actually being realised.

(b) The Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the Bougainville Interim Government

This group consisted of the hardcore, and diehard, BRA members, supporters, and sympathisers. Their approach is that “we have come this far, there is no turning back. This is a golden opportunity to press ahead, and determine our own future.”

(i) Secession

The BRA says that there will be peace, when independence is achieved. They have no middle position, but have persistently advocated the extreme. Both the national government and BRA have employed the argument that secession was “not negotiable”. The national government says that secession will not be entertained in any peace talks. The BRA maintains the position that there will not be any peace talks unless secession is on the agenda. With these two extremes being emphasised, there has been an impasse in any peace negotiation.

To go back to their roots, independence is something, which the BRA sees as a means to an end. Furthermore, they argue that they were never consulted on their wish, whether they should stay within PNG or not. In 1975, this matter surfaced, but a compromise was reached, giving birth to the Organic Law on Provincial Government.

In the all-Bougainville talks, Joseph Kabui, leader of the Bougainville Interim Government, said: “while it (the BRA/BIG) did not want to achieve independence through force of arms, it would maintain the right, by force, if necessary”.

(ii) PNG Defence Force Withdrawal

Another common cliché, which has been employed by the BRA/BIG hierarchy, is the demand for the withdrawal of the security forces. They believe that the fighting continues because of their presence. However, at the all-Bougainville talks, Theodore Miriung, Premier and leader of the BTG (Bougainville Traditional Government) delegation, said that “the demand was unrealistic, without suggesting anything to fill the void”.

(iii) Referendum

Although the PNG national constitution does not have any provision for a referendum, the BRA/BIG have continued to push for the idea regardless. Their belief is that there is a silent majority in favour of this, living in fear to express their wish. Therefore, a referendum would prove, once and for all, who was telling the truth.

While the national government has maintained its position, at the height of the crisis, in 1990, it indicated that it was the wish of the people for Bougainville to break away. Commenting on the subject, in September, 1990, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Ted Diro, said: “The question of a referendum will be considered by cabinet, if the situation gets that far. Whether we accept the verdict is another thing. That is a separate decision. I am praying that the BRA will not pursue the question of secession too hard.”

In the past, other commentators, too, have referred to the subject. For example, Don Woolford said, “Bougainville has the genesis of a government, and there is much better evidence that most of its people support separation”. Also, another person to have made some comments was John Griffith. He said; “Only Bougainville had the potential, and the possible impetus, to attempt a full-scale breakaway.” Earlier, Leo Hannett had warned; “The peoples’ aspirations might have to be realised through bloodshed.”

Just recently, Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chao, in an interview with the Seven Network of Australia, said, “the government might consider autonomy or self-government for Bougainville. We will look at that (autonomy), look at it constructively, and positively. It depends on parliament. I mean I’m prepared to try it.”

(iv) Dialogue

In the past, the BRA has not been very keen on dialogue, although it has entered into various agreements. Yet, the author has not seen a time, where they have come out, and called for such a meeting. All past meetings and negotiations have been the attempt of other parties. For example, the *Endeavour Accord* was arranged and organised by the national government, with the assistance of the New Zealand government. Again, the *Honiara Declaration* was the initiative of the Solomon Islands national government and the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA).

The BRA has always been more interested in political autonomy than peace and normalcy. Their argument is that there cannot be any peace and normalcy until the question of a political self-determination is answered.

The national government, on the other hand, has embarked on a programme, as per the *Endeavour Accord* and the *Honiara Declaration*, which stipulates that services should be restored in Bougainville.

(c) The Bougainville Transitional Government (BTG)

The Bougainville Transitional Government is the legally-instituted body that was created in place of the previous provincial government, which was suspended during the crisis. There are two main objectives, which they want to execute, in order to find a lasting solution.

(i) The Return of Peace and Normalcy

This is the first goal, towards which the BTG is working. Peace must be restored to society, and people enabled to live normal lives: lives that are free from fear, anger, hatred, sorrow, and mourning. They want to achieve this, through the work of the security forces, in areas which are already secured, peace committees have been established, and their work will lead to peace and normalcy, as is already happening in some parts of the island. For example, in Buka, and some parts of North Bougainville, people are now again living normal lives. This has not been an easy task, and it will take time to be realised.

(ii) Political Autonomy

The BTG wants to negotiate with the national government for a new political settlement, based on *A New Deal for Bougainville*. After peace and normalcy have been secured, it wants to embark on this strategy, because it believes that the solution to the Bougainville crisis lies here. It has already had a series of meetings with the national government regarding this matter. However, before any permanent and concrete plan takes place, the Bougainvillean leaders and people must all be united. This is the reason why the all-Bougainville talks have been taking place, to try and find a common understanding. This process will take time, because of all the problems involved, like communication, transportation, and freedom of movement between the leaders (BRA/BIG and BTG).

The BTG believes that succession and independence will not be possible, therefore, it wants to take a middle road. It wants Bougainville to be given the highest political autonomy, under the political framework of a united Papua New Guinea. James Togel, the provincial peace coordinator, during an interview, said: “whatever that highest political autonomy is, is not clear, but it won’t certainly be the same old provincial government system”. The BTG is looking at something higher than the current political system of provincial governments. It does not want to fall in line with the new reforms on

provincial governments, and third-level local government, that have been passed by the national parliament.

(d) Churches

The church in Bougainville has been very quiet, to the point where people have often questioned, and wondered, whether it was alive or dead. This was to be expected, because there is a war going on, and the leaders live in fear. Although the church neither supported the security forces, nor the BRA, it had a duty to perform, which it failed to do. The church is very passive and naive, even though people looked for a voice, and guidance. In an interview, which the author had with the United church bishop of the Bougainville Region, Bishop Revd Samson Mangung, he said: “the United church does not really have any concrete plan, but we are working closely with the security forces. When an area is secured, we move in with spiritual rehabilitation programmes.”

The Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC) has also, in the past, tried to help find ways and means to end the conflict in Bougainville. In March, 1993, the PNGCC called on the government of Papua New Guinea to allow the international community to help find a solution to the long-standing conflict on Bougainville. The PNG government’s response to these types of requests usually takes months, and, even if eventually given, would not be recognised by the PNGDF.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary, Revd Konrad Raiser, during his visit here in February/March, 1996, conceded that the churches have failed to find a solution to the eight-year-old conflict. There is a need for a new approach by the churches, especially to search for a new sense of purpose, to ensure that peace and stability return to Bougainville. Whatever that new approach is, remains to be seen.

The church certainly has the mandate to engage in dialogue with the security forces (national government) and the BRA, but it never rose

up to the challenge. It always took the backstage, and never really made any attempt to go out into the pasture, which it owned.

What is happening in the Bougainville church could be compared to what happened in Rwanda. The Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, leader of 70 million Anglicans worldwide, said, on his return from a pastoral visit to this central-African country: "The church in Rwanda lost an opportunity to be prophetic. It should have been calling out for justice. It should have been pointing out some of the atrocities that were being done, but, by and large, its voice was silent." This is also true of the church in Bougainville.

Why Have Previous Peace Attempts Failed?

In this section, the author will discuss why previous attempts, through the peace agreements, signed in the past, have failed. Due to the limitation of space, not all of them will be discussed.

(a) The *Endeavour Accord*

The *Endeavour Accord* was signed on August 5, 1990, between the PNG delegation, led by Sir Michael Somare, and the Bougainville delegation, led by Joseph Kabui. It was signed aboard the New Zealand ship, *HMNZS Endeavour*. Being the first agreement to be signed between the national government and the BRA, it was designed to establish dialogue, and the return of services to Bougainville.

It was disappointing, both, in what it said, and in what it did not say. The text did not specify when the promised goods and services would begin to arrive, and, for the Bougainvillians, the ever-lengthening delay in arrival increased their mistrust and anger towards the PNG government.

What proved more divisive was the clause stating that the Papua New Guinea government would take all practical steps to bring about the return of goods and services, consistent with the Constitution of Papua New Guinea. This was given dramatically different meanings by

both sides. The BRA charged the national government with violating the *Endeavour Accord* by sending patrol boats with supply vessels. The PNG government countered by saying that security forces did not use force to clear their way before landing. Also the “defence force” involvement was made, in accordance with the national constitution. This disagreement exemplified the understandable differences in interpretation of the blurry wording of the *Endeavour Accord*.

Generally speaking, the biggest hurdle to the successful implementation of the *Endeavour Accord* was the different interpretations that were applied to the agreement. All the hard work that was done, in good faith, was undone, with both sides justifying their courses of actions. It brought into question the spirit in which the accord was signed, and also, whether future signings could be honoured.

(b) The *Honiara Declaration*

The *Honiara Declaration* on Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation on Bougainville was signed on January 23, 1991. It incorporated a lot of aspects from the *Endeavour Accord* and the *Kavieng Agreement*. This latter was signed in Kavieng on October 5, 1990, between the community leaders of Buka and the national government, and referred mostly to the people of Buka. The *Honiara Declaration*, however, was to formulate a common strategy and programme for the restoration of services, to enhance peace, reconciliation, and rehabilitation on Bougainville.

One of the main components of the *Honiara Declaration* was the establishment of a “Task Force”. Mr John Momis was appointed to the role of implementing the *Declaration*, but was thwarted in implementing it by other government agencies, including the defence force on the ground. On the formation of the “Task Force”, it was to be

a joint effort, with members coming from both the national government and the BRA. Its members comprised the following:²

- (i) Kepas Wetenge (Chairman/PNG government)
- (ii) Patrick Itta (Co-chairman/BRA)
- (iii) Bernard Simiha – PNG
- (iv) Steven Burain – PNG
- (v) Theresa Jaintong – BRA

Their terms of reference included the following:

- Planning, coordination, and implementation of the programme for the restoration of services;
- Monitoring and supervision of the programme;
- Investigating, and determining the scope, and components of, the projects under the programme;
- Investigating, mobilising, and securing all financial avenues at its disposal, to finance the programme;
- Developing a detailed timetable, to implement the programme, which must be submitted to the Minister for Provincial Affairs for final approval, as soon as practicable, following their appointments.

Although the “Task Force” was assigned the task of implementing the restoration programme, they faced problems with differences in interpretation of the *Declaration*. They also lacked financial support to get the programme actually going. And to make matters worse, they were not free to carry out their task to the full capacity, because most of the time they were under suspicion.

² The author could not establish the full list, due to the unavailability of material.

(c) Pan-Bougainville Peace Conference

The Pan-Bougainville Peace Conference was held in Arawa for three days, beginning on October 10, 1994. It was supervised by the *Pacific Peace-Keeping Force*, which comprised Pacific Island nations, including Australia.

This was one of the most-crucial meetings that has been held, because it was here that the people clearly indicated their desire for peace. This meeting paved the way for further dialogue held between the national government and the Bougainville leaders. This culminated in the *Mirigina Charter*, which gave the mandate for the creation of the BTG.

The failure of this conference was that the BRA delegates did not attend (for unknown reasons, but, perhaps, out of fear for their safety). Because of the BRA non-attendance, there was fear of trouble, so that the meeting ended before scheduled.

Conclusion

To conclude here, the road to peace is not an easy one, but we can thank those who have tried in the past, because we can learn from their mistakes and experience. This will provide a background for future peace endeavours.

There are no easy answers, solutions, and fast conclusions, to the Bougainville conflict, but it has continued to be the biggest problem, with which the national government has had to grapple. In social and economic terms, it has been very expensive: thousands of lives have been lost, and millions of Kina have been expended, since the conflict began seven years ago. Quantitatively, the number of lives lost is estimated to be between 10,000 to 15,000, and, in monetary terms, it is estimated to have cost over K800 million.

The Prime Minister, at the beginning of 1996, during the lifting of the cease-fire, said: "For the last 18 months, the government has left no

stone unturned, travelled down every path . . . tried every legal means at its disposal, to resolve this conflict to find peace.” The author believes that the statement made by the Prime Minister is inconclusive, because it can be solved, if addressed properly, and in the following manner:

1. Peace Makers

There is a great need to have real “peace makers” solving conflicts like this. For too long now, both the national government and the BRA/BIG have handled this conflict haphazardly. Neutral bodies should be invited to play this role, such as the United Nations, or the Commonwealth Secretariat. This strategy has not been seriously pursued in the past, because of the “internal matter” policy, which the PNG government has adopted.

National sovereignty, and national pride, can sometimes become a stumbling block to clear thinking, and doing what is right. This conflict now demands this strategy be taken seriously, and given priority. I remember what joy there was when New Zealand participated in the *Endeavour Accord*. People in the province were overjoyed for the help a neutral country offered. The BRA/BIG have been in support of the idea, while the PNG government has been against it, because it did not want to internationalise the conflict. Despite the many calls that have been made along this line, nothing had been done.

2. A Political Solution

An answer to this conflict lies with this strategy: the government would be kidding itself if it does not address the question of a new political autonomy. As a Bougainvillean, this is the general feeling that the majority of the people have within themselves. Although they want peace, normalcy, and the return of services, the political structure must be addressed, so that the struggle, and those who have died in the conflict, were not in vain.

This struggle for a new political autonomy is now something, which is already in the blood of the people, especially the youth, who

have gone through this nightmare. Moreover, the BTG has been working overtime, trying to complete all the necessary paperwork, in preparation for this change. In fact, under the *Mirigina Charter*, the BTG has until the coming election next year to come up with a future political and administrative arrangement for Bougainville. It will have to a type, which meets the needs of the people, and also, it will have to take into account the changes in the circumstances, which have resulted in the crisis. Furthermore, it must be capable of managing the major changes that must be expected in Bougainville in the next 20 years.

Although the BRA/BIG might not be in favour of a political compromise, I think they will, grudgingly, accept it, in the long run.

3. The Church

The church in Bougainville is now coming out with a strategy of reaching the people with the gospel. Where the government has failed, the church can step in, and really make its mark on the crisis. What has been done, and what it should be doing now, is to go out, where the people are, and reach them. Spiritual and psychological healing is mostly needed. The church should be on the offensive, carrying out evangelism crusades, rallies, Bible studies, and fellowships, in the care centres, and other places, which are accessible. This strategy will help reform, and transform, the minds, attitudes, characters, and behaviour of those, who have been involved in the crisis.

New generations, which are coming up, have undergone tremendous stress, hardship, and problems, in trying to cope with the crisis, and to now adapt properly back into normal lives.

The churches' message should be "peace", not victory. The full-time vocation, and comprehensive calling of Christians, is to be "peacemakers". US President, Woodrow Wilson, during the First World War, said, "peace without victory, so that all parties will feel they are victorious. There must be no victor, nor victim, triumphant, or defeated. This is victory for peace."

These are words of wisdom, indeed, and the church in Bougainville will make an impact in adopting the same melody.

4. The Future

For the political analyst, and strategist, of PNG, the future of peace lies in how much the national government is willing to give in, and make concessions to the Bougainville people. For the sake of peace, the national government must make a forecast of what will happen in the next 20 years, taking into account the temperature, and the pulse, of secession, which is in the blood of the people. Experience shows that secessionist movements do not die, but only lie dormant.