

## 4. Peacemaking on, off and finally back on track

### Arawa Peace Conference, 1994

Sir Julius Chan became PNG Prime Minister in September 1994. Worried that the defence forces might sabotage his peace initiatives, Chan immediately took ministerial control of both the military and the police. Within days of taking over, Chan was in Honiara, Solomon Islands, for talks with BRA military commander Sam Kauona chaired by Solomons Prime Minister Billy Hilly. They signed the Honiara Commitments on a cease-fire and peace conference in Arawa with security provided for people from all over Bougainville to attend by a South Pacific Peacekeeping Force. Australia funded this mostly non-Australian force named Operation Lagoon with leadership provided by Australian Brigadier Peter Abigail and colonels from Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu.

But after Kauona reported back to Francis Ona, the BRA began to backtrack. Ona objected to the force being led by an Australian. Brigadier Abigail and the three Pacific colonels visited Ona in the mountains to give him their personal assurance that they could guarantee his security. But Ona had never attended any of the peace conferences and was not going to start at Arawa. His most senior deputies, Kauona and Kabui, also did not attend. Senior commander Ishmael Toroama did attend, but was attacked by the PNGDF in the process; one of his aides was wounded (Breen 2001a:73–5). It is doubtful whether Ona or the rest of the leadership group ever intended to show. Without Ona, and with Kauona now deeply distrusted by Chan and most of the national and international players because he walked away from his signature on the Honiara Commitments, nothing concrete was achieved at Arawa in 1994. Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating, and other regional leaders cancelled their plans to attend the finale. From a military point view, Operation Lagoon in 1994 was not a model peace operation (Breen 2001a). Beyond Sir Julius Chan's rushed political timetable for it, the fundamental problem was military: elements of the PNGDF were not under the authority of their prime minister and cabinet; they were a 'bit of the state' executing plans to attack and kill BRA attending the conference. Even an Australian helicopter was fired on and hit—almost certainly by PNGDF troops.

Yet the Arawa Peace Conference succeeded in accelerating momentum towards peace by allowing 1200 members of civil society from across Bougainville to assemble and commit to peace (Breen 2001a). Talk to officers of the South Pacific Peacekeeping Force and they say they went home feeling they failed utterly; talk to civil society leaders, particularly women's leaders, and many see the Arawa Peace Conference as a turning point to peace. It allowed the women to coordinate the talking in of local fighters across all Bougainville and the winding of women's peace marches across the island. It was the moment when the Bougainvillean Women's Choir sang *Island of Sorrow*, written by one of their members, Elizabeth Burein. The sound of this lament brought tears many times to those who cared about peace in Bougainville. It came to symbolise a turning point to hope:

*Bougainville is an island, an island of sorrow.  
Bougainville is an island, an island of pain.  
There are people dying, there are people crying.  
Who is responsible?  
There's no education, there's no hospital.  
Who is responsible?  
There are people dying, there are people crying.  
Not knowing why. Bougainville island is an island I love.*

It was sung opposite the burnt-out buildings of Bougainville's largest hospital under a tree in the grounds of the gutted Arawa High School, which had not seen students in years. The women were more determined, patient, persistent and resilient than Sir Julius Chan. Chan had wanted Arawa to be his triumph and he wanted a result in Bougainville before he faced the people in an election to consolidate his ascendancy after the vote of no confidence in Wingti.

## **The North Nasioi peace zone**

A second bottom-up success of Arawa was that it created a new 'island of civility' (Kaldor 1999) within the surrounding heartland region of the war. North Nasioi traditional leaders and BRA commanders attended Arawa and then established a North Nasioi peace zone from which they hoped peace would spread. These leaders followed up on Arawa locally by signing a peace agreement with the national government. Our interviews suggested that their hopes were realised that they would demonstrate to neighbouring districts that their peace could deliver safe streets, get more food in people's mouths, get trade moving, get children back in school and health care delivered. Theodore Miriung was a former acting National Court judge and local intellectual who articulated this vision of peace rippling out from their local peace zone. He did

so with an intolerance of those with less vision; this was softened, however, by the leadership he shared with outstanding women such as Josephine Harepa.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, multiple islands of civility did spread and merge until the islands of incivility became exceptions that the Truce and Peace Monitoring Groups could later join to the peace in the following way:

If there was a particularly violent or troublesome village that we weren't able to go to, we would go to all the villages around it and then basically send out the message that we were not going to go to your village if you were going to be like that. We'd use the women's network to send out that message and the women would then shame the men into behaving and then we would visit. (Interview with Australian peacekeeper, 2008)

The North Nasioi island of civility was, therefore, just one of many islands of civility. Yet it had the special significance of throwing up, in the words of Anthony Regan, 'a leadership option that bridged the BRA–BRF gap'. The North Nasioi Peace Committee worked at reconciliation and communication among the divided leadership of Central Bougainville. In the days after the Arawa conference, Miriung twice made the risky journey to Ona in the mountains to plead unsuccessfully with him to come back with him to Arawa to join the peace process. In Port Moresby, Health Minister, Sir Peter Barter, was the leader with the vision to see the crucible of hope in the work of the North Nasioi Peace Committee. He became a family friend of the Miriungs and collaborator with Miriung's peace vision. Anthony Regan, an academic from The Australian National University whose sister had married a Bougainvillean, also became a collaborator with the Miriung–Barter peace path until Miriung's death and beyond it in the form of the Barter Peace Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> During our fieldwork, Josephine Harepa was manager of the Arawa Women's Training Centre. The centre runs the best visitor's accommodation in Arawa and many peace meetings and visiting peacebuilders stayed there. Before establishing the centre with UNDP funding, the more conservative North Nasioi women who were early movers to peace with Miriung at the end of the 1990s had joined hands with the more radical, pro-BRA Women for Peace and Freedom, who in the mid 1990s also became active in persuading BRA fighters to join the peace. So the joining together of the North Nasioi peacemakers with the peacemakers of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom subsequently expanded the zone of peace out from this node where peacemakers could gather.



**Figure 4.1 Women organised peace marches all over Bougainville. This is in fact a photo of women organising children playing bamboo flutes in a march to welcome peacekeepers to a reconciliation ceremony in the grounds of King Tore's 666 Movement in Nagovis in 2000**

Photo: Ben Bohane

## **Miriung's Bougainville Transitional Government**

November 1994 saw Miriung and Chan sign the Mirigini Charter, which pledged leaders of the national government and the people of Bougainville to continue the peace process started at Arawa. The idea was to establish a Bougainville Transitional Government based on an assembly of leaders 'nominated by councils of chiefs'. In April 1995, a Bougainville Transitional Government was established as a successor to the North Solomons Provincial Government, which had been suspended in 1990. Seats covered all of Bougainville, with three intentionally left vacant for areas fully under BRA control. The idea was that they would eventually be occupied by Ona, Kabui and Kauona (Dorney 1998:55). The assembly voted Theodore Miriung Premier. Miriung believed that with patience he could eventually entice the BRA leadership to join the transitional government in negotiating a political settlement. Miriung's problem was that Chan (and the PNGDF) and Ona (and his hardline supporters) both saw him as untrustworthy and coopted by the other side.

Miriung secured Chan's agreement to grant amnesty for actors on both sides who committed crimes during the conflict, to negotiate for autonomy for Bougainville and to convene meetings to build consensus for peace on the BRA side of the conflict. September 1995 saw the Transitional Government meet with BRA/BIG representatives in Cairns, together with representatives of the Solomon Islands and Australia. Ona did not attend. At another December meeting in Cairns, Kauona and Kabui (again without Ona) met with Miriung and the Bougainville Transitional Government, representatives of the United Nations and the Commonwealth Secretariat to discuss steps to peace and humanitarian assistance. On returning to Bougainville in January 1996, the BRA/BIG representatives came under fire from PNG security forces. Spoilers (Stedman 1997) were on the loose. The BRA's Ishmael Toroama led savage retaliatory attacks to end the cease-fire. This was some of the most deadly fighting of the war. The BRA gained the upper hand. Disastrous setback though this was, the Cairns meetings helped build relationships among the key players from Bougainville that laid a foundation for the truce that would ultimately come at Burnham two years later. They also built experience in coming to grips with the positions of others and reality testing of some of their own unrealistic positions. Brisbane lawyers Mark Plunkett and Leo White helped to build on the legacy in 1997 with conflict-resolution training for BRA and BIG members. This reinforced Miriung's work in bridging the gaps between the key Bougainville players that were often based on misconceptions of one another's positions.

In 1996, Miriung developed a modified version of the councils of chiefs, called councils of elders, which would foster 'a symbiotic relationship between customary authority and state authority' (Regan 2002a). They would ground the state in the legitimacy of customary authority and underwrite customary authority with the legitimacy of the state. Citizens of a council of elders' area would opt every five years to select their elders by election or by custom (which could include heredity). This would allow areas to undergo smooth transitions to more democratic from more traditional hierarchical forms of authority. The term 'elders' rather than 'chiefs' was opted for so that church leaders, women's leaders, youth leaders and others could also join chiefs in leadership roles. All 40 councils had at least one female member in 2007. The growth of women's voices was seen as an objective of the reform. Bougainville has a recent history of competition between traditional chiefs and more modern forms of leadership based on education and entrepreneurship (Regan 2000:300). Miriung's reforms were based on power sharing that would strengthen traditional and more education-oriented and market-oriented forms of leadership. Paul Johnson's account of English legal reforms in the early Middle Ages is brought to mind: 'The present is reformed by rewriting the past in such a way that it becomes the future' (quoted by John Connell in Regan 2000:302).

The councils would facilitate bottom-up planning, do much local administration and empower most of the dispute resolution and legal decision making at the local level. Chiefs would be especially responsible for reconciliation and reintegration of combatants. Miriung enlisted the Peace Foundation Melanesia to do leadership training with chiefs in exerting 'power with' as opposed to what he saw as older patterns of 'power over' (Howley 2002:86–7). The law for the councils of elders that passed the provincial legislature in 1996 also provided for village assemblies of all customary landowning groups in the village area (Regan 2000). In many, but not all, areas these are functioning well today and are potentially the most vibrant level of governance (Boege 2008:28). Councils of elders still cover most parts of Bougainville today, though their success has been uneven and nowhere have they been adequately resourced. During the conflict there were no resources. Post-conflict, leaders of the Autonomous Bougainville Government naturally favoured channelling scarce resources to building their new state administrative structures—and this fitted the state-building ethos of donors.

Theodore Miriung is still seen by many in Bougainville as a visionary whose inspiration survives and struggles into the future. He was assassinated in front of his family in October 1996. Largely suppressed investigations into the premier's assassination make it fairly clear that elements of the PNGDF working with the Siwai Resistance planned the murder. While Miriung's assassination extinguished a flame of hope, it did push other moderates to step up and it created a vacancy for a new visionary leader of Bougainville who could only be a high-level member of Francis Ona's circle. That man eventually was Joseph Kabui. The transformative civil-society push for peace triggered by the 1994 Arawa Peace Conference—in the face of another top-down failure by Ona to participate in an important peace process—began to sow seeds of doubt in the mind of the other inner-circle leaders: Kauona, Kabui, Toroama and Ona's young secretary, James Tanis (who in December 2008 would succeed Kabui as President of the Autonomous Bougainville Government). Perhaps, they began to think, Ona would never deliver Bougainville the peace the people were demanding.

## Sandline

Military spoilers were at work in the unsuccessful attempt to murder the BRA leaders returning from the Cairns peace talks and the successful attempt to murder Miriung. They were also embarked on a paradoxical process of winning the Prime Minister over to their military solution, but not in a way that proved to their liking. Between these two murderous episodes, in March 1996, the PNG Government made its first contact with Sandline International, a British military contracting organisation that in turn employed the South African

private military organisation Executive Outcomes.<sup>2</sup> This led to a contract for the pacification of Bougainville (Dinnen et al. 1997; Dorney 1998; O’Callaghan 1999).

Military leaders on the ground in Bougainville were unaware of this and in July 1996 pushed ahead with another attempted surge: Operation High-Speed II. It ended in stalemate in August with many casualties on both sides. September 1996 saw the biggest loss of life of the PNGDF in a single operation of the war, with 12 members of the security forces killed in the Kangu Beach massacre (Box 4.1). As the details of this story gradually reached the press—especially that payback for rape of Bougainvillean women by soldiers added with home-brew was involved—it further sapped morale in Port Moresby and confidence in the discipline and competence of their military. The electorate was deeply concerned that the war was lurching from one disaster to another and would go on forever. The Prime Minister and his inner circle had totally lost confidence in the PNGDF.

#### **Box 4.1 The Kangu Beach massacre**

Kangu Beach in the far south was one of the worst care centres. Bougainvilleans suffered much abuse there, including sexual assault of women. Chosen women were asked to carry food and water up to soldiers in a bunker above the care centre in the evening. After occupying them there for a while, soldiers would tell the women they would be in breach of curfew if they returned down the mountain. Soldiers then raped the women during the night.

We were able to interview some key PNG security force players and all of the local BRA hierarchy (except the murdered Paul Bobby), who were looking on at this situation with concern. They developed several plans to entice the Resistance to defect back to the BRA. The most successful element of these plans was placing an undercover BRA operative who had relatives at Kangu Beach into the Resistance there in 1994. This man was an effective leader and was promoted by the PNGDF to command of the Resistance at Kangu Beach. He remained surrounded by men loyal to the PNGDF. Various strategies to steer their loyalties back to the BRA failed. The women were the primary victims of abuse and were initially much more receptive to BRA appeals to defect back. Some widows and wives of Resistance men put their bodies on the line for the sake of other women by agreeing to have sex with soldiers. They then told their male relatives they had been raped. Combined with the earlier sexual violence, this finally turned the male Resistance leadership against the PNGDF.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Sandline, Executive Outcomes and the multinational mining interests that were backing them remains murky. It appears that in some ways Sandline could have been a successor proxy to Executive Outcomes when the mining interests that backed Executive Outcomes perceived its reputation in Africa to be tarnished.

Then women of Kangu Beach, including some very young women, laid their bodies on the line in a second way on 8 September 1996. They got soldiers drunk. They then enticed the soldiers to put their weapons down to move down the beach to play volleyball with them. The defecting Resistance men were waiting to grab their weapons. On a signal, the women hit the sand and the PNG soldiers were mown down. Other women distracted soldiers elsewhere, keeping them away from their weapons. The commander was shot in his bed, others in the bunker. Twelve soldiers and PNG police were killed; five others surrendered—spared as hostages. A number of the bodies were found mutilated, ‘several having their penises severed and shoved in their mouths’ (Dorney 1998:140).

While the story of Bougainville women as leaders in the peace process is much told, the story of their physical bravery in putting their bodies on the line, as at Kangu Beach, is less told (Charlesworth 2008:352–4). The peacemaking story is partly about women going out into the bush to persuade male fighters to join the peace in circumstances where men were afraid that if they did they would be shot as spies by one side or the other. Some women peacemakers were killed—such as Angelina Nuguitu, of the Peace Foundation Melanesia, who was killed near Kangu Beach while trying to broker peace a month before the massacre. The five hostages became a major negotiating chip for the BRA. Even more importantly, the armoury they captured at Kangu Beach contained more than 60 automatic weapons, a great deal of ammunition, grenades, an 80 mm mortar, and more. While these weapons were boxed during the peace process, the BRA commander who captured them, Thomas Tari, has not destroyed the weapons and on occasion has broken the boxes open. His control of these weapons has made Tari a dominant warlord of sorts in the south. Tari’s right-hand man executed his BRA superior in the south, Paul Bobby, and Bobby’s brother in 1998.

Kangu Beach was a turning point of the war in various respects. It triggered an Australian Defence Department review of whether Australia had erred in allowing the PNGDF since 1991 to struggle through the war without determined Australian defence assistance. The review concluded Australia should continue to sit on the sidelines. The loss of life, the new bargaining chip of the five hostages and the captured weapons all shifted the momentum of the war in favour of the BRA. Morale in Port Moresby collapsed. The Prime Minister lost confidence in his army, and in Australia, and turned to Sandline. The PNGDF blamed Theodore Miriung, totally erroneously, for orchestrating the Kangu Beach massacre, because, coincidentally, he had visited the care centre that week. Many believe this is the reason they assassinated him.

Sandline International spent much of 1996 in communication with the PNG Defence Minister, Mathias Ijape, about mercenary assistance for the PNGDF to dislodge the BRA. Options were considered to mount the invasion jointly with the PNGDF supporting Sandline and with Rio-Tinto dollars and/or an income stream from a future joint venture to reopen the mine between the government, Sandline and Rio-Tinto's operating company (BCL) or some new operator. Lieutenant-Colonel (retired) Tim Spicer of Sandline prepared a consultancy report on options during 10 days in Papua New Guinea in which he pitched a grandiose vision of cargo arriving to fill the coffers of a strongman state:

PNG is potentially one of the world's richest countries per capita...If its mineral wealth...is fully realised it could give the country the economic power to threaten Australia and dwarf all other economies in the region. If this wealth was combined with a well-trained, effective and combat-experienced military, then the country could become a very significant regional power. (*Spicer Report*, quoted in Dorney 1998:164)

Spicer argued that there had been a conspiracy by the other regional powers to keep Papua New Guinea weak: 'It is possible that there is a deliberate policy on the part of Australia and New Zealand to prolong the Bougainville problem, either by omission or commission.' The lack of direct military assistance from them was taken as evidence, along with Australian and New Zealand support only for resolution through 'negotiations/peaceful means'. Perhaps Australia played into this stereotype because, as one senior Australian intelligence official put it, when it became aware of Sandline, 'Australia had to do some heavying'. This included intervening to prevent weapons arriving for the mercenaries—to intercept them if necessary—because it 'could have been explosive to have these weapons arrayed against the PNGDF'.

Prime Minister Chan eventually was won over to a joint Sandline/PNGDF operation to capture Panguna and kill or capture the BRA leadership. A contract with Sandline was signed 31 January 1997. In February 1997, BCL shares dramatically jumped on the Australian stock exchange, which probably meant insider trading from the very small number of people who knew about the plan at that stage (Claxton 1998:69–70). There were also allegations of corrupt payments by both pro-Sandline and anti-Sandline interests that were in no case proved (Claxton 1998:70). Three weeks later, the story was broken by Mary-Louise O'Callaghan in *The Australian*, and PNG opposition followed in the wake of international opposition to such a costly and bloody military resolution. On 2 March, Chan announced his intention to purchase control of BCL as part of the Sandline-funding strategy.

PNGDF commander Jerry Singirok initially supported the plan, but then switched to the view that spending such vast resources on foreign mercenaries

would be less effective in the long run than investing those resources in the PNGDF. Singirok simply wrote to the Prime Minister advising him that he had cancelled the joint operation with Sandline, surprised the Sandline personnel, put them under arrest and called a press conference before the prime minister had received the letter to announce his defiance of a prime minister who was planning to 'mortgage the island of Bougainville and other resource-rich areas to foreigners'. There was no call for Chan to resign nor for a commission of inquiry into the Sandline fiasco at first, though these demands came later amid large street demonstrations. This was a case of the crowd making history (Rudé 1964). It was a particular kind of crowd massing outside the Parliament in 1997 that was made up substantially of members of the military. There were also many non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists, students and ordinary people who were concerned about a mercenary onslaught on the people of Bougainville. In most cases where people power changes history, the crowd can effect regime change only when it coopts a military that declines to crush it. The Sandline street demonstrations reversed this people-power dynamic, with the military in effect coopting the demonstrations. A commission of inquiry was established and Chan did step aside for a period and then contested an election on the issue. Chan took to the airwaves to accuse Singirok of 'gross insubordination, bordering on treason' and of the possibility that he was 'attempting a coup' (Dorney 1998:292). A stand-off between the prime minister and defence commander threw the nation into a major crisis.

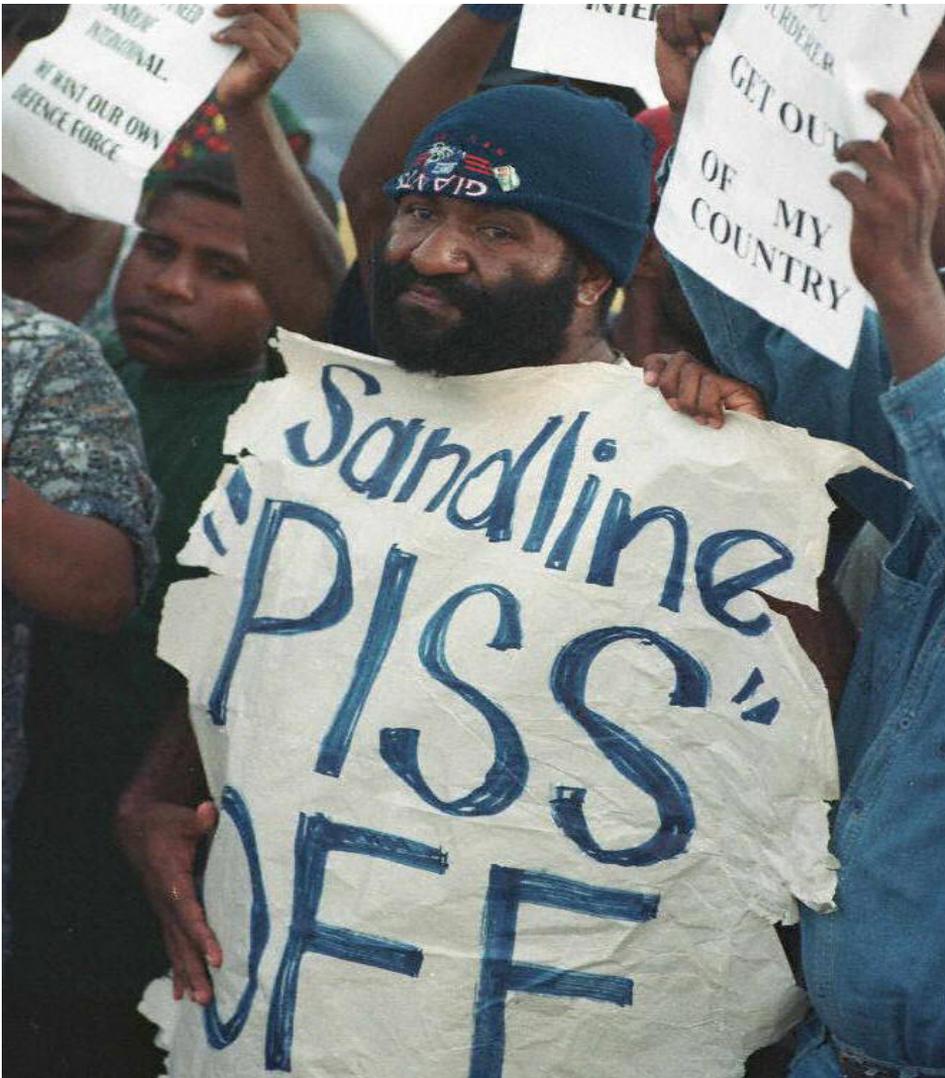
Australia backed the authority of the elected Prime Minister to sack his defence commander, but implicitly threatened withdrawal of aid if Papua New Guinea did not terminate the Sandline contract and deport its fighters. Eventually they were deported. Australian aircraft had intercepted the heavy equipment flown in for Sandline, forcing the Russian-built freighter down in Darwin. Prime Minister, John Howard, and his military advisors did not think Sandline would succeed militarily and feared the destabilising impact of mercenary intervention in the region.

In the 1997 PNG election, six of the nine cabinet ministers who attended the National Security Council Meeting that approved the hiring of Sandline lost their seats, including Chan.

Hardliners for a renewed PNGDF push for victory were still at work in July 1997 when New Zealand intelligence helped prevent a PNG ambush of BRA/BIG leaders returning from the peace talks in New Zealand, though the PNGDF was suspected of responsibility for the murder of one moderate delegate with BRA links soon after his return from New Zealand (Regan 2005a). Most PNGDF, however, were war weary by then; many PNGDF officers were part of the

moderate majority pressing for peace after the push of Operation High Speed II had failed and the Sandline intervention had collapsed. Sandline paved the path to a peace process that delivered.

In October 1998, international arbitrators found the Sandline contract valid and awarded Sandline US\$25 million in payments, though Mary-Louise O'Callaghan (1999:366) estimates a total payment was made to Sandline of US\$43 million without them ever having to fire a shot to earn it.



**Figure 4.2 Port Moresby protestors against Sandline, 1997—a global turning point back to the anti-mercenary norm**

Photo: AAP/AFP

## New Zealand peace diplomacy

The interregnum between the stepping aside of Chan and the election of a new prime minister was one of productive peace diplomacy. On 28 May 1997, the National Executive Council approved Sir Peter Barter's Bougainville Peace Strategy. Barter had been unsuccessfully attempting to broker peace<sup>3</sup> since Miriung's assassination and the PNGDF attacks on Kauona and Kabui returning from Cairns.

Almost all parties to the conflict beyond the desperate politicians who signed the Sandline contract were united in their opposition to solving the conflict with mercenaries. This created a moment of unanimity among the PNGDF, BRA, Resistance and Bougainville political leaders of all stripes (Reddy 2006:228). Most critically, it changed BRA perceptions of who their enemies were and allowed moderates in the BRA and moderates in the PNG Parliament to find common cause (Regan 2010). The Sandline mutiny created a political space for an aggressive diplomatic initiative led by New Zealand Foreign Minister, Don McKinnon. He sent former New Zealand High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea John Hayes to lobby during the PNG election campaign for what became the breakthrough Burnham talks of July 1997. Burnham was a military base on the South Island of New Zealand. Burnham I was among just the Bougainville factions. It is important to see it not as something New Zealand initiated but as something the Bougainville leaders were planning (to resume the process they started in Townsville) and that New Zealand facilitated. Almost 100 Bougainville leaders, including women's leaders, attended. Kauona and Kabui were once more willing to participate, as was the new Premier of the Bougainville Transitional Government, Gerard Sinato, and the MPs from Bougainville just elected to the new PNG Parliament. These included senior minister John Momis, who had been captured by Ona loyalists during the 1997 election campaign. It was a near-run thing that he was not killed, with James Tanis eventually persuading Ona to release Momis. Ona, however, was still not willing to attend peace talks and Hayes' helicopter was fired on when it flew past Ona's Guava village on its way to pick up other BRA leaders for discussions.

Finally the time had come for a majority of the leaders of the BRA to separate from Ona. Ona's aloofness from the practical politics of the people and the rebellion resulted in a gradual process of Kauona becoming a more dominant leader during much of the war and in turn a gradual process of Kabui becoming the major figure in the diplomacy for peace. Ishmael Toroama, the BRA commander most respected by the troops on the ground, was also a quietly effective figure in supporting the peace against Ona's resistance. This now-moderate core of

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<sup>3</sup> Though Chan had been pretending to support Barter's peace diplomacy as a cover as he prepared the way for Sandline.

the BRA—like the moderate core of the Resistance—was worried about the corrosive effect of the conflict on the unity of Bougainville and the shared identity as Bougainvilleans that had blossomed before the Resistance coalesced (Regan 2010). An important lesson for BRA moderates resulted from an order from the BRA leadership not to accept Red Cross ‘village packs’ and ‘family packs’ of seeds, agricultural tools, blankets, cooking pots, and so on. In late 1996 and early 1997, villages in BRA-controlled areas defied the leadership to accept these packs (Regan 2010). BRA moderates feared that the next step for such communities could be for them to defect to the Resistance or become covert supporters of reintegration with Papua New Guinea.

Burnham differed from previous talks in including quite a wide circle of leaders, who came to understand and commit to the peace process. The Burnham I talks accomplished the first step towards the release of the five PNG security personnel still held hostage after the Kangu Beach massacre. Against considerable opposition, Kabui, with support from Toroama, coaxed agreement from the Bougainville factions to hand them over. Then there was a second difficult negotiation on the ground with Thomas Tari—who had custody of the five and was not at Burnham—led by Kabui and Hayes. For the new Prime Minister, Bill Skate, being able to welcome the five back to Port Moresby was a great confidence-building measure for the peace. Sam Akoitai had emerged from the war as the political leader of the Resistance and had been elected in the 1997 poll for the National Parliament. He was effective in putting pressure on Skate for support for the Burnham peace process in return for Akoitai’s support in assuming the prime ministership. Akoitai became Skate’s Minister for Bougainville Affairs and a major force in the peace process and in reconciliation between the BRA and the Resistance.

The Burnham I talks involved key national players such as Akoitai and Momis, but not the PNGDF. The talks were fundamentally about achieving the beginnings of a solid reconciliation for peace within Bougainville. They lasted 10 days and involved a traditional *tarout* or vomiting session in which ‘unrestrained emotional outpourings are allowed to happen...[and] anything that any relevant party feels needs to be said, shouted or cried out is expressed’ (Reddy 2006:227)—a kind of venting of psychological poisons. One of Peter Reddy’s 2004 interviews captured the spirit of the early part of Burnham I:

There were no specific procedures—we went into the room with NZDF in between our factions—we were ready to throw punches. The vomiting session united us and from then on we stood back as one. The BRA and the BIG were housed together, but separate from the Resistance. There was real enmity. It was really very difficult. Someone would shout to another person, ‘You shot my brother, you murdered my brother’. And they would jump across to do violence but the NZ military were in

between. This went on until nothing was left inside. The women played a very important role, they would say 'Look, I am here, there is my son over there, and over there is my other son. And all of you, you are all our sons.' During this time there was no agenda and it was so important to vomit it all out. (Reddy 2006:228)

During that first five days of *tarout*, the women from the two sides were the ones who were crossing the divide between the BRA and Resistance living areas and forming joint agendas for peace that transcended the BRA–Resistance divide. A second round of peace talks at the Burnham military barracks in October 1997, with PNG leaders this time, eventually produced a truce. Since the movement to peace was flowing around the intransigence of the BRA leader, Francis Ona, both Burnham talks wisely involved the participation of dozens of young BRA and Resistance commanders from all corners of Bougainville. The Bougainville delegation at Burnham II numbered 80. New Zealand and Australian diplomats worried that this would be unwieldy and costly—a worry that proved misplaced. It was important that the younger commanders who attended the talks did not become spoilers of the peace. The movement from Burnham I to Burnham II was from trust building among the Bougainville factions to a truce between PNG and more unified Bougainville parties.

The next major meeting was even more widely participatory than the Burnham meetings. It was held at Lincoln University, New Zealand, in January 1998. During Burnham I and II and the Lincoln talks, a strong consensus emerged on the importance of an international peace force to nurture the peace process.

## **Conclusion: the diplomacy of flipping disasters into opportunities**

A former Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea described the sequence of New Zealand meetings as 'a brilliant piece of diplomacy by New Zealand'. He was aggravated by the way it played to the stereotype of 'Australia as clumsy, cultural insensitives of the Pacific', but conceded in the circumstances this stereotyping and the launching of the initiative as totally New Zealand's 'was actually helpful' in getting a result. 'In general,' he said, 'effective diplomacy involves avoiding coming in on a white charger. It's more like being a shepherd. Trying to herd all the key players to move in a positive direction, to keep them in the same paddock. It's frustrating, facilitating work' and New Zealand did it well. The former Australian High Commissioner also said when Miriung was assassinated, 'good diplomacy was about calming', keeping the Barter agenda alive in the capital and 'trying to move Momis and Akoitai to take constructive initiatives, which they did'. But in particular, good

diplomacy is ‘about taking advantage of disasters. That was why New Zealand diplomacy after Sandline was so brilliant.’ One commentator said of this part of our text that ‘New Zealand was building on what Miriung initiated and what Barter, Kabui, Akoitai and others were able to carry through’. Indeed, the lens of the diplomat in Port Moresby is just one lens and the one that focuses on the conversations that occurred among these players on Bougainville could be the more important one.

Sandline was an important historical event not only because the reaction against it brought the Burnham peace together. Until the mid 1990s, there had been an anti-mercenary norm in international affairs that had been particularly strong since the American Revolution—in fact, so strong that even in circumstances in which generals were desperate, they mostly refrained from hiring mercenaries when it would have been rational for them to do so (Percy 2007). The end of the Cold War and the neo-liberal spirit of the 1990s created a new environment of opportunity for mercenaries. Sandline and Executive Outcomes were the most important companies in the military business. They led what were seen as successful private military operations funded by seizing natural-resource assets in Angola and Sierra Leone in the mid 1990s (Percy 2007:209–11). Bougainville turned this tide decisively, as it was such an unmitigated failure for Sandline, the PNG Government and their corporate mining associates in the background with an interest in taking over the Bougainville mine. Bougainville helped to sharply reinstate the international anti-mercenary norm as the handiwork of Executive Outcomes and Sandline in Africa began to be reinterpreted negatively through the prism of the ‘blood diamonds’ corporate social responsibility debate. As their (allegedly shared [Percy 2007:213–14]) corporate backers from the mining sector distanced themselves, Executive Outcomes closed its doors in 1999, Sandline in 2004. But the principals of these companies such as Tim Spicer were back with a new business model in Iraq and Afghanistan. The private military corporation was dead, especially after the imprisonment of mercenary Simon Mann and the attempted extradition of Mark Thatcher in Africa. But the private security corporation that supported the militaries of major powers (instead of dominating the militaries and states of minor nations) boomed. While Bougainville was decisively important in resuscitating an international anti-mercenary norm that was eroding until 1997, the other reason why the anti-mercenary norm was reinstated was that a more profitable opportunity arrived with the war on terror for the entrepreneurs who had been dismantling the anti-mercenary norm.