



## **PNG 'Repentance Day' a bolt from the blue**

By Online Editor

3:26 pm GMT+12, 26/08/2011, Papua New Guinea



Pray for forgiveness, a church in PNG

Many Papua New Guinea (PNG) residents are scratching their heads today as they mark the country's newest public holiday - Repentance Day - just 11 days after it was first announced.

Ceremonies will be held across the largely Christian country so people can ask forgiveness for their sins.

But, like a religious vision, the announcement came out of the blue.

Less than two weeks ago a government press release declared 26 August to be the National Day of Repentance, to be marked with a public holiday.

The statement was two sentences long with no explanation of the purpose or significance of this new public holiday.

Pastor Jack Edward from the Shema Evangelism Ministry is the Repentance Day co-ordinator, and he says what used to be an annual, informal day of prayer is now a public holiday.

“Basically a time when we ask the people of our nation to come together and pray and ask the Lord to forgive us for the wrongs that are happening in our nation,” he said.

“So everybody can find time to go to a church and pray, or if they [are not] able to, then stay back in their house and also pray for the country.”

Edward said then-acting Prime Minister Sam Abal responded to a request from a group of churches for the state-sanctioned day off.

PNG is a predominantly Christian country, but other religions do exist, and Mr Edward admitted some non-Christians would be confused.

“I think they [non-Christians], some of them will have questions about it. Most of them will think [what] is the reason behind that, but we feel this is a national issue,” he said.

There are thought to be more than 4,000 practising Muslims in PNG, and their spiritual leader is Imaam Mikail Abd Al-Azeez.

He is not against the idea of Repentance Day, but says it could send the wrong message that reflecting on one's wrongdoings can be done just once a year.

“Not only one day. We need to repent every time we do wrong, we must repent and will not commit it again,” he said.

Businesses in particular have been left confused by the sudden creation.

Port Moresby Chamber of Commerce CEO David Conn says the lack of details surrounding the announcement forced him to get a copy of the government gazette to confirm the holiday.

“We've suddenly been told a couple of weeks out that Friday is not a working day, and you just close down or, if you keep operating, it means you have got to pay double pay,” he said.

“I think we've finally managed to convince our members that it is actually a public holiday. A lot of people thought it wasn't, a lot of people have been arguing the toss with us that it's not.”

Prayer ceremonies are due to be held across the country, but it remains to be seen whether Papua New Guineans turn out en masse to atone for the sins or just relax and enjoy a long weekend.

SOURCE: ABC/PACNEWS