



PNG to co-host U.S, World Bank talks on maternal health

By Online Editor

2:45 pm GMT+12, 23/05/2011, Papua New Guinea



Papua New Guinea and the United States in partnership with the World Bank will co-host talks in Port Moresby at the end of the month with leaders from the Pacific on ways to improve maternal health, increase economic opportunities and empower women.

The US-funded women's empowerment initiative in the Pacific region, which also has the backing of Australia and New Zealand, is coordinating the May 30-June 1 talks to find ways to combat gender-based violence in the Pacific.

The US ambassador-at-large for global women's issues Melanne Verveer, who will attend the talks, said gender-based violence was a global epidemic and new solutions needed to be considered.

She said improving conditions in the Pacific could help end violence, Radio Australia reported yesterday.

“Many of these practices are rooted in lack of economic opportunity, lack of status, lack of empowerment.”

Verveer said the PNG talks would focus on “healthy women, healthy economies”.

The talks will draw 30 women leaders and activists from 12 countries in the Pacific as well as 30 donor community representatives.

“Where women are healthy and economies are healthier, we are certainly going to see less violence against women,” she said.

Verveer said the issues had to be addressed at the top level of government and at the grassroots level.

She said laws against violence needed to be enforced and perpetrators punished.

“We also need to change mindsets at the grassroots level and we certainly need to see men and boys playing a greater role in addressing these issues. We need more work at a community level in changing ways that people look at these issues,” Verveer said.

She announced the women’s empowerment initiative in the region last year at the end of US secretary of state Hillary Clinton’s Asia-Pacific tour.

The upcoming Port Moresby talks announcement comes days after human rights watchdog Amnesty International released its 2011 State of the World’s Human Rights report, noting that in PNG, violence against women and sorcery-related killings continued to be widespread but the government had done little to address them.

It said police often raped or sexually abused women detainees, adding that violence against women continued to be widespread, perpetuated by women’s low status in society and traditional practices such as polygamy and bride price.

“A culture of silence and impunity prevailed, and women remained fearful of reporting sexual and physical violence to the authorities.”

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL/PACNEWS