

Call for Papers

Sorcery and Witchcraft-Related Killings in Melanesia: Culture, Law and Human Rights Perspectives Conference

5 – 7 June 2013, The Australian National University, Canberra

It has been widely believed that sorcery and witchcraft declines with modernity, but evidence from Melanesia, where a sharp increase in accusations of sorcery and witchcraft have resulted in horrendous attacks on alleged practitioners, shows that this is not true. In Papua New Guinea, for example, a pervasive culture of insecurity and fear is developing. The negative effects of such beliefs impinge upon issues as diverse as economic development, elections, civil unrest and criminal activity. Very little of the voluminous, largely anthropological, literature on sorcery and witchcraft in Melanesia considers how this issue can be addressed in policy and practical terms. This interdisciplinary conference and workshop will bring together academics (with backgrounds of law, anthropology, gender and human rights), policy-makers, human rights activists and other practitioners from the region for a constructive dialogue to develop practical and workable solutions to the issue of sorcery and witchcraft, and particularly the problem of sorcery and witchcraft-related killings.

The Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu will be the focus of the conference, which will examine similarities and differences across the region through comparative case studies. Although belief in sorcery and witchcraft is widespread in these countries, how their people and governments respond to them varies widely. The two-day conference will be followed by a half-day workshop to devise a research agenda and plan research collaborations in consultation with researchers, policy makers and practitioners from the region.

The conference and workshop is being organised by the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia and the Regulatory Institutions Network, with funding support from the Research School of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University and the ANU Gender Institute.

The organisers invite papers on the following topics:

- case studies from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu
- sorcery and witchcraft-related killings as a catalyst for civil unrest
- the gender dimensions of sorcery and witchcraft-related killings
- sorcery and witchcraft as a negative force on economic and social development
- the regulation of sorcery and witchcraft (by churches, state and customary authorities)
- case studies of interventions to address sorcery and witchcraft-related killings

The focus of the conference is on Melanesia, but presentations concerning other regions are also welcome as long as they are focussed on discussing how sorcery has been responded to or regulated and draw out lessons from those experiences.

Scholarships

Several scholarships are available to sponsor speakers from Melanesia. This will cover full economy class travel costs to and from Canberra, plus accommodation. Limited funding is also available to sponsor speakers from within Australia and New Zealand.

Please send an abstract (less than 250 words) on your intended presentation and include a brief biographical description of yourself and any institutional affiliations you may have. Successful applicants will be notified by mid-March 2013. The scholarships will be awarded when the abstracts have been received and evaluated. The papers presented will be considered for publication as a journal special edition or as an edited collection. Registration will open closer to the conference.

Organised by
State, Society & Governance in Melanesia Program
Regulatory Institutions Network

ANU College of
Asia & the Pacific

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Application deadline
Friday 15 February 2013, 5.00pm
Submit to: ssgm.admin@anu.edu.au