

Warm welcome home for PNG contingent



A contingency is defined as an event that may occur in the future, especially a problem, emergency, or expense that might arise unexpectedly, that needs to be dealt with, and therefore must be prepared for.

Assisting Australian Police (AAP) members first arrived in Bougainville in late August 2004, and in September 2004 commenced duty in Port Moresby. These members were deployed across a wide range of areas including general duties, CID, forensics, prosecutions, national fraud and anti corruption, communications, transnational crime and administrative support areas.

Policing was the largest component of the Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) Program and in many ways the most challenging in what can be considered one of the most demanding policing environments in the world. The AAP component was labelled Project 'Wok Wantaim' which means "working together".



In December, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Supreme Court heard a constitutional challenge to the legality of the ECP brought by the Governor of the Morobe Province, Luther Wenge. As a result, both in PNG and Australia, consideration was given to likely results and contingency plans were organised for each possible scenario.

On Friday 13 May 2005, the PNG Supreme Court delivered its opinion on Governor Luther Wenge's constitutional challenge. The Court found that elements of the Treaty and enabling legislation were not consistent with the PNG Constitution, particularly sections relating to immunities and police powers which significantly impact on the operation of AFP personnel in PNG and Bougainville.

The court decision started wheels turning in the IDG in Canberra.

Contingency plans were reviewed and planning commenced relating to the withdrawal and redeployment in the advent of an adverse Supreme Court decision, however nothing could be arranged or progressed until a decision was made at the highest levels of Government.

On Sunday 15 May, notification was received by the IDG that the Australian Government had approved the AAP withdrawal. That call initiated a whole of IDG response with PNG desk members working together with AAP in PNG, HR, logistics, finance, pay team, executive and other AFP elements.

A major event plan was prepared and implemented to ensure a seamless and coordinated exit and redeployment strategies for AAP personnel from PNG.

On Tuesday 17 May 2005, 52 hours after the notification, more than 150 AFP members and 50 tonnes of equipment arrived in Canberra. The IDG team had planned and organised the notification of family in Australia, arranged hotel accommodation, aircraft and on-ground transport, finance, obtained appropriate licences and warm jumpers for the returning members.

Nothing was overlooked or left to chance. Even though there had been no rain in Canberra for months, an aircraft hangar was sourced from Qantas – and as if on cue, it rained.

HR efforts in obtaining redeployment preferences and allocating member's positions, resulted in 80% of AAP members obtaining their first preference options for redeployment.

This repatriation and redeployment was the largest AFP controlled movement of people and cargo ever undertaken in our history, and would not have been possible without the support, assistance and involvement from the wider AFP. Special mention goes to the Recognition and Ceremonial team, finance, marketing and communications, Police Volunteers, Protective Service, and AFP Executive members. Special thanks should also be given to the RMC Duntroon Band and Qantas for their support. The efforts of everybody involved was recognised and appreciated by the returning members from both AFP and state police services, many who have commented positively on the professionalism of the operation.

In a pre-briefing to all personnel involved in this operation NMIDG Paul Jevtovic outlined the operations main objective; "that we treat the personnel of the AAP as people with respect". From all respects this attitude underpinned the AFP's response to this temporary withdrawal from PNG.

Wok Wantaim became true for the AFP. Working together and showing close attention and accuracy to detail resulted in a successful operation and highlighted the benefits of planning.

