



TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL (PNG) INC
Lokua Avenue, Boroko, Section 54 Lot 31
PO Box 591 Port Moresby, NCD Phone 323 7517/4917 Fax 323 4317
E-mail: yvonne.ngutlick@transparencypng.org.pg
Website: www.transparencypng.org.pg

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Silencing Free Speech a Tool of the Corrupt

Friday 28th March 2025, Port Moresby – Transparency International Papua New Guinea (TIPNG) strongly condemns the recent events surrounding the disruption of Facebook and internet in Papua New Guinea and the subsequent justifications provided by government officials. These actions represent a dangerous erosion of fundamental citizen rights and raise serious concerns about the growing centralising of power.

On March 24th, many Papua New Guineans experienced disruptions across various social media platforms, including Facebook. In response, a press release from the Minister of Police acknowledged the successful testing of ICT control systems to regulate online content, particularly on Facebook. Comments attributed to the CEO of the National Information & Communications Technology Authority (NICTA) clarified that NICTA had not been consulted or involved in this testing, and he highlighted his concern for the lack of inter-agency coordination and transparency.

TIPNG reiterates that freedom of expression is a cornerstone of a democratic society. The Constitution of Papua New Guinea guarantees this right under Section 46. While the Constitution allows for reasonable restrictions, these must be justifiable and necessary in a democratic society. The actions taken by the Government and the incoherence of the contradictory justifications provided, fail to meet this threshold.

The Counter-Terrorism Act 2024, cited as the legal basis for these actions, grants broad powers for surveillance and information access. TIPNG is deeply concerned that the vague definition of "*terrorism*" within this Act leaves it open to abuse, and unfortunately those fears are now being realized. The recent actions of those in power demonstrate the potential for this law to be misused to suppress free speech and curtail legitimate discourse, for instance when discussing votes of no confidence or even the expression of public views on issues such as the forthcoming 2027 National Election.

“The shutting down of Facebook is only the latest in a pattern of behaviour by the Government to curtail free speech in Papua New Guinea,” stated Mr. Peter Aitsi, Chairman of TIPNG. “This includes the rushing of a controversial media policy last year, the threat of litigation by the Prime Minister & the Speaker over newspaper articles this year and the ongoing abuse of the Cybercrime Code Act to silence civil society holding power to account and protesting injustice.”

“TIPNG unequivocally condemns the government's attempts to control online communication and restrict freedom of expression. We call for the repeal of the Counter-Terrorism Act 2024. This draconian law has no place in a democratic society, when the existing Criminal Code could be amended if required,” said Mr Aitsi.

What is TIPNG?

TIPNG is a member of Transparency International a global anti-corruption movement committed to fighting corruption. TIPNG is an independent organization in PNG known as a Chapter of the international movement. The PNG chapter advocates against corruption and promotes transparency, good governance, honesty and accountability both in private and public sector dealings. TIPNG tries to assist strengthen the integrity systems of our country such as the police, the parliament, the public services and the judiciary.

Furthermore, TIPNG calls for:

- 1) The Ombudsman Commission and other constitutional offices with standing to seek a Supreme Court reference on the use of the Terrorism Act this week, so as to avoid the unilateral abuse of its powers. This can be done in conjunction with Parliament amending existing laws that have safeguards.
- 2) The Government to respect the independence of the media to self-regulate, and to increase the quality of journalism not through censorship but instead by adequate funding to schools of journalism in tertiary institutions in Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guineans do not want state-censorship of our media.
- 3) Our elected leaders and constitutional office holders to protect the freedom of expression as guaranteed in the Constitution by not silencing critical voices in our country. Complaints should be handled by the independent Media Council of PNG process.

TIPNG remains steadfast in our commitment to promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability. We will continue to advocate for the protection of fundamental rights and oppose any attempts to undermine democracy in Papua New Guinea.

Ends...///

Authorized by:

Arianne Kassman
Chief Executive Officer

Media contact:

Yvonne Ngutlick
Deputy Director Communications

What is TIPNG?

TIPNG is a member of Transparency International a global anti-corruption movement committed to fighting corruption. TIPNG is an independent organization in PNG known as a Chapter of the international movement. The PNG chapter advocates against corruption and promotes transparency, good governance, honesty and accountability both in private and public sector dealings. TIPNG tries to assist strengthen the integrity systems of our country such as the police, the parliament, the public services and the judiciary.