

# Pacific Freedom Forum

[mediafreedom@googlegroups.com](mailto:mediafreedom@googlegroups.com)

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Attack on Vanuatu publisher an outrage: Pacific Freedom Forum**

*For immediate release: 20 January, 2009*

Perpetrators of the weekend attack in Port Vila on 51-year old Vanuatu publisher and editor Marc-Neil Jones should get a clear and strong message from Police investigators that intimidation and bashings of citizens is a clear abuse of their positions and a criminal offence, says the Pacific Freedom Forum.

PFF chair Mr Susuve Laumaea said the Port Vila attack, by a number of men believed to be Vanuatu Correctional Services Department employees, had left Mr Neil-Jones with a number of injuries including a severely cut and bruised face.

The PFF, a regional network of working journalists, media freedom advocates, media trainers and journalism students, urged the leaders of the VPF investigation to adhere to the rule of law and not let personal agendas dictate their investigation. 'We ask this because it is likely that the investigating VPF officers will know the assailants personally,' said Mr Laumaea.

"Justice in this case must be swift and public, as we understand that those behind this cowardly act are supposed to be the keepers of the rule of law and public safety," Mr Laumaea said. He and PFF co-chair Monica Miller strongly condemned the attack on Neil-Jones, an insulin-dependent diabetic whose health has suffered as a result of previous assaults and intimidation by VPF officers over his anti-corruption reporting and media freedom advocacy.

"Media freedom in Vanuatu has suffered a mighty blow," said Ms. Miller. "Marc Neil-Jones and his newspaper, the Vanuatu Daily Post, were serving the public interest with the series of investigative prison stories they published. The cowards who attacked one of Pacific's most courageous and vocal advocates of media freedom and the public's right to know should clearly understand that physical assaults on Neil-Jones won't silence him, or his newspaper."

Ms. Miller continued, "We are hopeful that the Honourable Prime Minister of Vanuatu's swift action to remove the official responsible for the prison abuses reported by the Vanuatu Daily Post will be swiftly followed by police action to identify and charge Neil-Jones' assailants."

Neil-Jones was attacked in the afternoon of last Saturday (17 January) in the Vanuatu Daily Post office compound. His attackers were angry at recent reports in the Post that led up to the Prime Minister's Office announcement of the dismissal of Correctional Services Department Acting Director Joshua Bong.

Blaming the Daily Post for what they claimed was one-sided reporting, the men confronted Neil-Jones as he sat alone in his office, menacing him with a knife before threatening to shoot him. He was repeatedly punched in the face before falling to the ground, where he was kicked a number of times.

The attacks followed a recent editorial by Neil-Jones calling for the suspension of Mr Bong, pending the completion of a Commission of Inquiry into an ongoing crisis of management at the Port Vila jail. This crisis had resulted in numerous prison escapes, allegations of human rights abuses, and the burning down of the jail. Before his replacement, Bong had demanded a meeting with Neil-Jones over a photo published by the Daily Post showing the prison gates wide open and unattended the week after 5 prisoners had escaped, walking out unhindered by prison authorities or police.

Neil - Jones, who is an insulin dependent diabetic, has suffered from high blood pressure since being illegally thrown in prison by police after he had demanded the suspension of a police officer for assaulting his sports journalist in a rugby game between police and USP a few years ago. ENDS

CONTACT:

**PFF interim Chair**

**Susuve Laumaea | Sunday Chronicle Newspaper | Papua New Guinea**

Mobile: 675-684 5168 | Office: 675-321-7040 | Email: [susuve.laumaea@interoil.com](mailto:susuve.laumaea@interoil.com)

**PFF interim co-Chair**

**Monica Miller | KHJ Radio | American Samoa**

Mob 684 258-4197 | Office 684 633-7793 | Email: [monica@khjradio.com](mailto:monica@khjradio.com)

*The Pacific Freedom Forum are a regional and global online network of Pacific media colleagues, with the specific intent of raising awareness and advocacy of the right of Pacific people to enjoy freedom of expression and be served by a free and independent media.*

*We believe in the critical and basic link between these freedoms, and the vision of democratic and participatory governance pledged by our leaders in their endorsement of the Pacific Plan and other commitments to good governance.*

*In support of the above, our key focus is monitoring threats to media freedom and bringing issues of concern to the attention of the wider regional and international community.*