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Papua New Guinea Coalition to Stop Gun Violence
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman. My name is Vavine Gabi and I come from Papua New Guinea, an island nation which borders Indonesia and is situated north of Australia.

I have flown thousands of miles from my country to tell you my story at the UN First Committee as a survivor of gun violence. I also represent the coalition to stop gun violence in Papua New Guinea.

Armed crime is a daily reality in my hometown. In 2004 Port Moresby was ranked as the worst place to live in the world. Much of the armed violence is committed by gangs. We have a lot of carjackings, many of which end in violent deaths. This happened to the father of a good friend of mine only 2 months ago. His body was left in a drain.

But on to my story. I saw my mother shot in the head the day after I turned sixteen.

It was a beautiful June day that followed my birthday in 1999. I was travelling home along the highway with my parents in a single cab Nissan. We were returning to our home village, an hour's journey from Port Moresby.

I remember enjoying the warm weather and spectacular views. Papua New Guinea is a land of hills, mountains, swamps and rivers.

Suddenly a car zoomed past us at high speed in the opposite direction. A blue car seemed to be chasing it. My dad slowed down but to our alarm, the blue car crossed lanes towards us. My dad and mum yelled at me to put my head down.

Dad quickly tried to reverse, but the tires jammed in a drain. The car stalled. There was nowhere else for my father to drive, as there were hills on one side and a swamp on the other.

At that point 6 men ambushed us and forced us to hand over all our possessions. One man approached me – I was still sitting in the back of the vehicle – and grabbed me by the t-shirt. Many women had been raped and killed on this highway, and I was not going to go through that. I fought him off and jumped off the vehicle to be with my mother.

The gunman approached my mum and I and demanded we hand over more. "We've given you everything, what more do you want?" said my mum calmly. I remember those words distinctly. At that point, the gunman placed the gun at her head and pulled the trigger.

The next thing I remember is the men driving off. In shock and in an attempt to stop the bleeding, I tied my sarong around my mum's head and helped her sit up to stop the bleeding. Eventually another car passed and we rushed my mum to the Port Moresby General Hospital. She was operated but died at 1pm on June 7.

It was only when I saw her body being wheeled into the viewing room that I began to accept that she was gone forever. The grief was overwhelming. The funeral was very difficult, but it was a great comfort to see so many people – some of whom I'd never met – crammed into our local church.

The following months were hard. My grades dropped at school and my father worried us all, as he, dad still blamed himself for failing to defend us. My teenage brother and sister were depressed and very emotional whenever we had family gatherings. It was heart breaking to see our aunties with their children. Often we preferred to be with friends, to keep our minds occupied.

I want to tell you now about the kind of woman my mother was. I remember my mum as a woman of courage, a woman who came naturally to other people's aid. She had a forgiving and understanding nature. She charmed everybody with her beautiful smile.

It would be easier to let go if my mum had died of an illness. But because she was taken away from us so violently and tragically, I fear that my family and I will never recover.

Armed crime is a terrible burden on PNG, but although it is particularly acute here, it is not unique to us. A thousand people a day die from armed violence around the world and many more people are severely injured. Yet there are 875 million firearms on the planet today.

The lack of control on gun transfers means it is easy for arms dealers to sell weapons to those who commit human rights abuses. Governments try to control arms but the lack of an effective global treaty limits their ability to do so. Many governments fail to invest in strict border controls. They have poorly secured stockpiles, enabling easy smuggling and looting.

An effective, legally binding Treaty could have a drastic effect on armed violence and conflict around the world. This is because the treaty would make all governments take responsibility for all arms sales. This means it will be harder for armed groups and criminals to wreak misery on civilians. It will require co-operation and a new transparency in arms transfers. But I believe it is possible. And I know in my heart that my mother would too.

On a more positive note, I am very happy that the Papua New Guinean government is serious about the issue of gun violence and has taken a step forward by making its submission on the ATT, which I believe is in the process of being presented to the UN Secretary General.

In conclusion it is my wish, in memory of my late mum and other victims of gun violence throughout Papua New Guinea, the South Pacific and the world, for an Arms Trade Treaty to be in place so that it can minimise and prevent horrific crimes like what I experienced from happening again. In the meantime, I will continue to work with the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence and Control Arms to push for global controls on the arms trade.

Thank you