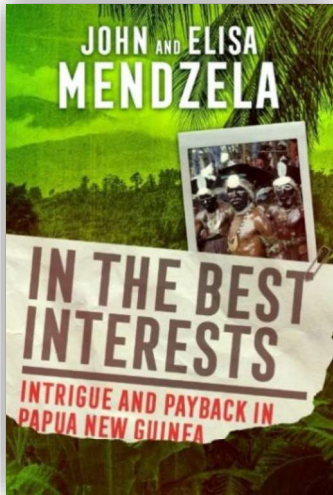


In the Best Interests

by John and Elisa Mendzela



A story for anyone who's ever asked: what would I risk to do what's right?

Papua New Guinea, 1980s: a fascinating and dangerous country. Idealistic, newly arrived teachers from New Zealand, John and Elisa Mendzela, step into a world of rich culture, eager learners—and buried secrets. When evidence of widespread sexual exploitation of students by Australian expatriate educators comes to light, they join a small group of Kiwi colleagues trying to stop the abuse quietly, through official channels.

But the corrupt are protected by cover-ups and the whistleblowers are punished. Events spiral into firings, threats of deportation, media exposés, student uprisings and armed police on campus. John and Elisa are forced into a high-stakes battle for justice that shakes a young nation still reckoning with its colonial past.

In the Best Interests is a gripping true story of courage, corruption, colonial legacy, and the cost of standing up when it's easier to stay silent. Illustrated with striking photos and authentic documents, the book combines the twists and turns of a crime thriller with deep insights into indigenous people grappling with the challenges of true independence.

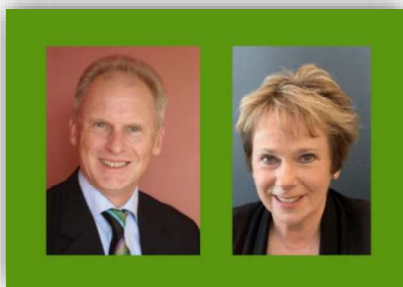
***In the Best Interests* will be published on 16 September – the 50th anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence from Australia.**

'Our book relates past events. But abusive behaviour by public institutions, and harassment suffered by whistleblowers who try to stop that behaviour, continue to this day.'

'We hope reading our story will encourage anyone in a similar situation to act 'in the best interests' of those they are responsible for and challenge those who would abuse their official positions to exploit others or suppress the truth.' – John Mendzela

'Throughout our story, many different individuals had opportunities to do the right thing, the wrong thing, or nothing at all. Our book pays tribute to those who chose to do the right thing, often at personal cost and risk.'

'Equally prominent was the key role played by reliable and respected public media to bring our case to public attention and ensure that the truth could no longer be repressed.' – Elisa Mendzela



John Mendzela grew up in the United States and attended university in England, where he met and married his lifetime partner **Elisa Mendzela**. The young couple trained as teachers and began work in England. Keen on travel and adventure, they migrated to New Zealand and then took up posts in newly independent Papua New Guinea. *In the Best Interests* tells the story of what they found there and what they felt compelled to do about it – leading to the dramatic events that became widely known as The Keravat Affair.

After The Keravat Affair, John and Elisa migrated out of teaching and developed new careers as independent governance and management consultants. They have led challenging institutional change projects across a diverse range of cultures in over 30 countries worldwide, including Papua New Guinea and the Pacific.

John and Elisa live in New Zealand in a home and office overlooking the beautiful Wellington harbour from a native forest backdrop. They are keen conservationists and sponsor a range of cultural and charitable groups.

www.mendhurst.com

In the Best Interests by John and Elisa Mendzela | Published 16 September 2025 | \$45 | available from bookstores or [here](#)

For a review copy, an interview with John and Elisa, or for further information please contact: Penny Hartill - director hPR, 021 721 424, penny@hartillpr.co.nz