



KARKAR PROTEST: TB patients and staff of the Gaubin Hospital in Madang bury the coffin of the Kinim district office to symbolise the demise of the TB DOTS program on the island. Picture supplied by DR SILKE BERTRAM.

TB patients hold protest

MORE than 50 tuberculosis (TB) patients led a protest march on Karkar Island on Monday to press concerns over the lack of support for the TB treatment program on the island.

The patients, who had been treated under the TB DOTS (directly observed and treated system) program, were joined in a march by staff of the Gaubin Hospital and other concerned people to the Kinim district office, where they dug a shallow grave on the front lawn and buried a coffin with the words "Karkar TB DOTS idai nau — 2003-2005 — Rest In Peace" and a red cross inscribed on a white coffin cover.

The burial was to symbolise the end of the TB DOTS program on the island, started only two years ago due to a lack of support from the various

levels of governments. The protesters had planned to be present at the district office on Monday, when the joint district planning and budget priorities committee for Karkar was to hold its meeting.

To their disappointment, the meeting was postponed at the last minute, and only the deputy district administrator was present.

"Our message was clear that the time for begging for support and help was over. We expected on-going support from the government for the TB DOTS program on the island," medical officer for Gaubin Hospital Dr Silke Bertram said.

Dr Bertram said the program on the island had been funded by donors since it was set up in 2003 following an outbreak of TB.