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COLONY OF FIJI,
Rambi Island.
2nd December, 1946.

Sir,

I have the honour to refer to my telegram dated the 20th of last month, which reads :-

" Banabans have informed me of unanimous
" decision by them to make Rambi their
" permanent headquarters and home.
" Conditions submitted are those
" inevitable and no more. Matter of
" future management of communal funds
" and that of next agreement with the
" British Phosphate Commissioners are
" independent of decision. As some
" details still under consideration,
" I shall not be able to forward full
" statement by coming opportunity.
"
" The condition receiving most
" emphasis is that contained in my
" telegram dated 25th September. The
" Banabans express the hope that early
" departure of party for Ocean Island
" can be arranged. "

2. The Island Council were the spokesmen for the statement that follows, made on behalf of the Banaban Community :-

(a) The Banabans have no wish to wait until the two-year period allowed them has expired, before stating their decision, and so make it known now;

(b) They remember the Government's promise that if they remained on Rambi, then nothing of what they enjoyed in the past of lands and money would be taken away from them ;

(c) This promise in their opinion should be extended to include that all lands at Ocean Island not yet returned, or being returned, to them shall be handed back, as soon as mining for phosphate ceases.

3. Of the above, I gathered that (a) was given, without prejudice. Other matters were then submitted :-

(d) That at an early date, as already requested, a small number of Banabans may travel to Ocean Island and stay there to look after individual and communal interests. The members of the party may be changed, as needs dictate, though not with increase of number. The party would not possess any power of attorney;

(e) That the Banabans who desire to live until death on Ocean Island shall be allowed to return and dwell there, when such return can be arranged;

(f) That parties of Banabans may return on visits to Ocean Island, according as transport becomes available, in order that their ancestral home may be

The Secretary to the
Western Pacific High Commission,
S U V A, F I J I.

looked

looked upon again. The duration of stay of each such party would not exceed three months. One visit only per person to be formal, i.e., subject to this request;

4. (g) The decision, if the requests contained in the foregoing are granted, is that the Banabans will make Rambi their permanent headquarters and home. The decision is unanimous and final.

5. The paragraph that follows deals with four matters also of outstanding importance to the Banabans. These have been linked prominently, with the Rambi Settlement Scheme, in discussions and in correspondence, but the Banabans have chosen against involving them wholly or partly as conditions precedent to the decision.

6. The Future Management of Communal Funds

Soon after my arrival on Rambi Island, I assured the Banabans that I myself would not incur new expenditure, nor recommend expenditure, without first consulting them. Since then there has been peace over this - to them - once burning question, they being content to await the measures of control and adjustment thus expected as being set up by Government. I have not informed them, of course, of the proposals contained at paragraph 58 of Mr Maude's memorandum, but of these, (c) and (d), if approved, will be highly regarded by the Banabans and all their liability to grievance in this connection will be removed. Another grievance, one only recently voiced to me, will disappear when the recommendation made at paragraph 61 of this memorandum is approved. This recommendation is that annuities paid in Fiji shall not carry exchange deduction.

The Banaban Landholders Fund

The request has been renewed that the capital, as well as the interest of this Fund, shall be handed over to each landholder, though not, as requested formerly, to be held at discretion, but now to be held strictly in accordance with Banaban land tenure. The capital thus transferred to individual landholders would no doubt be deposited in a Bank, the interest alone being withdrawable, except in special cases, as for instance, land improvements, which by their nature represented capital, prior official sanction being required in each case. The request as now amended has my full support.

Agreement with the British Phosphate Commissioners

The Banabans are reported in writing as having asserted that no decision at all would be given by them regarding the settlement on Rambi, until a final agreement (more correctly, the pending agreement) with the British Phosphate Commissioners was satisfactorily concluded. It does not lessen the importance of the question of this agreement to state that their present mood is not so arbitrary. In fact, they have readily agreed that the coming agreement has no real connection with the permanency or otherwise of the Rambi Settlement Scheme. But they have urged that the departure of the boundary-marking party for Ocean Island may be expedited, because of the incidence of death among the elderly people, who alone possess knowledge of land marks. Further, they desire that the agreement mentioned shall be signed at Rambi, their headquarters.

Payment of Passages, Ocean Island

See (d), (e) and (f) above. This matter, like the previous three, is separate from the decision under report, but is much in the Banaban mind at the moment. The Banabans feel, and make request accordingly, that Government should bear the cost of passages of all those returning to Ocean Island, whether permanently or not. They base this opinion on a promise given at Tarawa that if, at the end of two years any or all of them should wish to return to Ocean Island, suitable transport would be arranged and that the expense of their return would also be borne by the Government. They submit that they should not be penalized for their speedy decision, with all its convenience, and given without prejudice, when they might have waited the two years allowed, thus making sure of the grant of passages. It would be idle to argue that the grant of passages related to the return to Ocean Island, after the non-adoption of Rambi as a permanent home. Though this may have been the intention, such was not made clear nor even mentioned at the time. I find myself much in favour of the request, not only for the reason furnished, but also for broader if less pertinent reasons, namely, the suffering and misfortune endured by the Banabans as the result of war; their loyalty in practice as expressed by the £10,000 sterling contribution to British war funds in 1939, and their recent donation of £1,000 to the Fiji Gifts to Britain Fund; and the surpassing proportion of revenue, direct and indirect, that has come to Government from the mining of their lands.

7. I would like in conclusion to refer generally to the memorandum prepared by Mr. H.E. Maude, M.B.E., on the "Future of the Banaban Population of Ocean Island: with Special Relation to their Lands and Funds." This document, necessarily used without mention of its recommendations, has given me indispensable help in my dealings with the Banabans. Such help I gratefully acknowledge.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,

(Signed) F.G.L. Holland,

Administrative Officer,
Rambi.

Distribution :

The Honourable, The Colonial Secretary,
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