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30th April, 1975.

Mr Keith Shipley,  
Secretary to the Chief Minister,  
Office of the Chief Minister,  
P.O. Box 68, Bairiki,  
TARAWA ISLAND, Gilbert Islands.

Dear Mr Shipley,

Thank you for your letter of the 16th April on the subject of certain evidence adduced by the Banabans in support of their contention that Ocean Island should be separated from the jurisdiction of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Government. I understand that, as you state, the Banaban leaders have from time to time sought the advice of political, economic and other experts to assist them in the presentation of their petition, and of the two legal actions now pending in the Chancery Division of the United Kingdom High Court of Justice relating to the British Phosphate Commission.

As I have myself received a subpoena issued at the instance of the solicitors for the Banaban plaintiffs to give evidence before the High Court I should like to make my position clear, as stated in my letter to them dated the 3rd February. In this I reiterated my willingness at all times to give unofficial advice on documentation and such like matters whether to the British, Australian, or Gilbert Islands Governments, the Banabans or the British Phosphate Commissioners, but that: 'as a member of Her Majesty's Government I am not prepared to give evidence in a case in which that Government is involved except at its express request in writing'.

My attention has also been drawn to statements allegedly made by Sir Arthur Grimble, Sir Albert Ellis and myself on the relationship between the Gilbertese and Banabans, as reproduced on pp. 9 and 10 of The Pacific Islands Monthly for April. Those made by me are apparently taken from a draft sketch of pre-annexation Banaban ethnohistory made by me for the late Professor J.W. Davidson, of the Australian National University, in response to a request received from him in 1969.

This draft was not prepared in support of any claim for the political separation of Ocean Island from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, which so far as I am aware was not an issue at the time, but in consequence of Professor Davidson and Dr Deryck Scarr having visited Rambi Island during 1969 and promised to prepare a History of Ocean Island for presentation to the Banaban community.

On Professor Davidson's return I was requested by him to write an ethnohistorical prologue to this work, with emphasis on the relationship between the Banabans and Gilbertese, and on the 27th October I submitted a preliminary draft sketch for his consideration: it was essentially a tentative draft, containing many pencilled amendments on doubtful points, and forwarded for his comments (I was not sure what he wanted), after receipt of which I intended to revise and complete it.

In the event Professor Davidson was busy on other work and therefore asked me to send a photocopy of my preliminary draft prologue to the Rev. Tebuke Rotan pending his preparation of the promised monograph (which, incidentally, he never commenced). As the prologue had only reached the stage of a draft for consideration by Professor Davidson no copy was kept by me at the time and I am now informed by the Secretary to the Department of Pacific History at the University that Dr Davidson's original has been mislaid. This is of less importance, however, as additional material has since come to light on the subject of Banaban traditional and pre-annexation documentary history in connexion with the preparation for publication of various papers on Gilbertese ethnohistory on which I am engaged during my retirement.

I note that in the radio interview reproduced in the Pacific Islands Monthly and referred to above statements made by Sir Arthur Grimble, Sir Albert Ellis and myself are quoted in contrast. As a protégé of the former and a friend of the latter until his death I am not aware of any substantial differences in our viewpoints on the racial composition of the Banaban population. It would appear, however, that we are all talking about the Banabans at different points in time.

Banaban oral tradition, much of it collected by Sir Arthur Grimble himself, indicates that the autochthonous inhabitants, possessing Melanesian physical characteristics, came from the west (the people of Mangati, whose descendants later formed the Te Karieta division of Tabwewa), as apparently did a second immigration at a later date (whose descendants later formed the Te Karia division of Tabwewa). The racial origin of these people is conjectural, nor is it of concern in the present issue, though I have suggested that the first were related to the earlier inhabitants of Ponape (and no doubt other islands in the Caroline Group).

These early Banabans and their descendants lived on Ocean Island for so long that they came to regard it as 'the first of all lands, the navel of the universe, the home of the first ancestors', a period, as on Nauru, sufficiently long to have developed a distinctively Banaban culture, with ancillary linguistic and possibly somatological deviations.

You will appreciate that this period was before that of the efflorescence of deep-sea voyaging, which did not commence until the Uruakin Kain Tiku-aba, when a Polynesian people (the Tonga-fiti host) were defeated in, and dispersed from, Samoa and a portion reached the Gilberts about the year A.D. 1400. Gilbertese history, as contrasted with more or less conjectural reconstruction, dates from this time.

The next known event of ethnic significance on Banaba was the arrival of baurua from Beru, bringing Nei Angi-ni-maeao, her relations and followers, who were, on geneological and other evidence, flying from the upheavals associated with the conquests of Kaitu and Uakesi in about A.D. 1650.

The Gilbertese immigrants, who evidently outnumbered the Banabans, took the four districts of Te Aonoanne, Uma, Toakira and Tabiang, leaving the fifth district of Tabwewa to the original inhabitants, together with a number of privileges which resulted, at a later date, in the Chief of Tabwewa being erroneously called by Europeans the King (or Queen) of Banaba.

As the Gilbertese majority are said to have ~~inter~~married freely with the Banabans it will be apparent that within a few generations there would have been a preponderance of Gilbertese blood in the population. This was increased over the years through drift voyages from the Gilberts. I have written elsewhere that Nauru 'was not entirely a world on its own, isolated from all contact with humanity, but rather a dead-end, a terminal point which permitted immigration from outside but from which no one who landed ashore ever returned'. Much the same could be said of Ocean Island after c.1400 A.D. and, apart from the tradition of a Banaban who married Nei Angi-ni-maao of Beru, the Banabans appear to have been the recipients of Gilbertese immigrants, and not the reverse. The reason for this was, of course, the south-east trades, the westerly season being scarcely conducive to inter-island canoe travelling.

When John Webster, the first European to leave an account of the Banabans, landed on Ocean Island in 1851 he stated (and almost certainly over-stated) the population as being between 2,000 and 3,000, but the disastrous drought of the early 1870s reduced it to about 100. Fortunately, from the 1820s whaling ships had begun to call at Ocean Island, with the discovery of the 'on-the-line grounds', followed later by a few trading, mission and other vessels; and at the height of the famine the Banabans left by every means possible for Hawaii, Tahiti, the Carolines (and no doubt other islands). Some were able to return and by 1888 the population had recovered to 300, and by 1900 to 450.

There is no traditional account known to me of a Banaban visiting any other island by canoe since about 1700 (indeed they had no sailing canoes when first described by Europeans), nor of any Gilbertese visiting Ocean, other than as the result of an accidental drift voyage (returning, if at all, by European ship). One of the twelve 'tribes' on Nauru was known as the 'iruwa', the descendants of drift voyagers, who brought the worship of Tabuariki. Ocean Island, being so much nearer to the Gilberts (although smaller and thus easier to miss), would presumably have received more, and I well remember examining the decaying hull of the last Gilbertese baurua to reach Ocean, where it lay on a foreshore terrace below Tabwewa in 1929. I have recorded elsewhere that from an estimate made in the 19th century hundreds drifted to sea each year from the Gilbert chain of islands, and to those one must add fugitives from inter-island and civil wars and the surplus population compelled by community pressure to migrate or be killed. The Banabans, unlike the Nauruans, seem to have been hospitable to all comers.

Other Gilbertese, as well as Europeans, are known to have arrived at Ocean on ships, such as the Henderson and Macfarlane trading vessel Archer which regularly called there from the Gilberts. In 1845, for instance, there were no less than 17 Europeans living ashore and in the 60s a party of Gilbertese, who moved on to Nauru during the drought period, taught the Banabans how to make sour toddy, while an Abemaman living there in the early 80s similarly taught them the rudiments of Christianity. The first professional teacher to live on the island (in 1885) was a Tabiteuean, and in 1896 his son was ordained and became head of the Ocean Island mission. Cases of intermarriage between Banabans and Gilbertese were noted in genealogies and in the course of land hearings during the land settlement of the island made by me in 1931 and 1932.

There do not appear, however, to have been very many Gilbertese living among the Banabans during the latter part of the 19th century and in 1933, when Mr P.D. Macdonald and I made a detailed cephalometric survey of Banaban adults believed to have been without any trace of Gilbertese blood up to at least the tibu mamano generation (the limits of te utu ae kan) we recorded 73 (there may, of course, have been others who did not turn up or were uncertain of their genealogies). I still possess tabular statements giving their names and measurements.

As regards cultural traits I would refer you to my article on 'The Social Organization of Banaba or Ocean Island', in The Journal of the Polynesian Society, vol.41, no.1 (December 1932), pp.262-301, from which it will be, I think, clear that the Banaban social organization had, in pre-annexation times, both Gilbertese and non-Gilbertese features, this being, in fact, what one would expect from the ethnohistorical reconstruction epitomized above. The picture is complicated by boti and other innovations introduced by Kaitu and Uakeia, which are naturally not to any extent reproduced in the social structures of Makin, Butaritari, Banaba or Nui. Linguistically the Banabans were speaking a dialect of Gilbertese at least in the 1850s, though even in 1931 there were words and idioms used which were not known in Gilbertese.

I am sorry to have been so verbose but I feel rather strongly that misunderstanding can arise from unduly condensed and simplistic statements on what are rather complicated issues involving the interpretation of many different traditions and other accounts. As it is I fear lest I have abbreviated too much and if you would like a more detailed exposition, with full citation of references, I could prepare it (though not at the moment owing to pressure of other work, since I hold a Commonwealth Literary Fund grant for this year, am under contract to the Australian Broadcasting Commission and have commitments to three publishers: in other words, under present conditions of inflation, I have of necessity to earn my living by writing work).

To summarize, the answer to the query in your para. 2 is that the Banabans had both ethnic and cultural ties with the Gilbertese before the British presence. In fact I would agree with your Governor that the ethnic relationship between the Banabans and Gilbertese is probably similar to that between the Cornish and English during recent years; culturally, however, I do not consider that it would have been as close as it was ethnically in say 1850. The degree of affinity today is probably better known to you than to me.

Where I feel that the Chief Minister may have been perhaps misreported is in the statement at the bottom of column 2 of page 9 of the April Pacific Islands Monthly which appears to me to imply that Ocean Island was regarded either by the Gilbertese or by Europeans as one of the Gilbert group of islands. With all respect, I would submit that this was not the case. It was not one of the 16 Gilbert Islands given by informants from Kuria and Butaritari to the ethnographer Horatio Hale in 1841 as constituting the Group, nor was it included in the list given by Captain Richard Randell, the most knowledgeable European connected with the Gilberts prior to

annexation, to the Rev. L.H. Gulick in 1861. Nor was Ocean Island included among 'the Gilbert Islands' which Captain E.M. Davis was directed to declare a British Protectorate over, and it is not mentioned in the copies of related correspondence on the Gilbert Islands in my possession.

*in the 19th century,*

In this connexion it is perhaps pertinent to mention that while it appears from Gilbertese traditions that inter-island travel from Makin to Arorae was relatively common in the ~~islands~~ following the Polynesian migration of evidently skilled tani borau from Samoa in c.1400 A.D. the increase of population, and consequently of inter-island and inter-district warfare, made such voyages increasingly precarious and thus less frequent. Possibly the last of the 'grand tours' (rather like the finishing tours of the young English gentleman on the Continent during the 19th century) was made by a Chief of Kuria about 1740. But Ocean Island was not, included in the Gilbertese inter-island itineraries because, I suggest, it did not come within the navigational purview of the latter-day tia borau, who alone could have imparted the essential navigational route briefing.

As regards the import of the document known as the 'Statement of Intentions, 1947' I am of the opinion that Section (A) was inserted to reassure the Banabans that residence on Rambi would not affect their customary land rights on Ocean Island, and Section (E) to reassure them that they would not be precluded from visiting or residing on Ocean, subject to the provisos stated therein. The other clauses appear to have no relevance to Ocean Island. I do not consider that the Statement was intended to have any bearing whatsoever on the political status of Ocean Island as part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. The question of the possible independence of Rambi Island or Ocean Island (or both) or of the possible severance of the latter from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony was not, to the best of my recollection, raised by anyone at the discussions which preceded the drawing up of the Statement. I am confident that you will be able to obtain confirmation of this point by consulting my old friend Mr Bauro Ratieta, who took part in these discussions and, as an Assistant Administrative Officer, was one of the signatories to the agreement.

In conclusion, I am sure that you will appreciate the difficulty of giving any accurate degree of chronological exactitude to prehistoric events or of quantification to ~~ethnic~~ and, in particular, to cultural variables involved in ethnohistorical reconstruction. Furthermore, while ethnohistory is now recognized to be of great importance in helping to develop and preserve a pride in their racial heritage on the part of the island peoples I am somewhat at a loss, as a student of international law, to understand its bearing on claims to political independence.

Yours sincerely,



H.E. Maude.