

UNITED NATIONS
TRUSTEESHIP
COUNCIL



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ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

PETITION FROM THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF BOE AND YARREN DISTRICTS
CONCERNING NAURU

Note by the Secretary-General: In accordance with rule 85 and supplementary rule F of the rules of procedure for the Trusteeship Council, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the Trusteeship Council and to the Government of Italy as the Administering Authority of the Trust Territory of Somaliland, a communication dated 10 March 1953 from representatives of the people of Boe and Yarren Districts concerning the Trust Territory of Nauru.

This communication was transmitted to the Secretary-General by the United Nations Visiting Mission to Trust Territories in the Pacific.

COPY

Nauru,
10th March, 1953.

The Chairman,
U.N. Visiting Mission
N A U R U

Sir,

We the undersigned beg leave to petition your Mission to intercede on our behalf and ask the Australian government to hand back our lands which are being forefully acquisitioned from us, for purposes of an airstrip, without our consent.

Through our former Chiefs, we have petitioned the U.N. Mission which visited this Territory in 1950^{1/} but to our great disappointment it appeared as if that Mission was more sympathetic with the Australian government in its desire to have an airstrip, however rarely used though it may be, than with us in our need to use and live daily on the lands.

To our suggestion for an alternate site, if it was imperative to have an airstrip, the 1950 U.N. Mission agreed with the Australian government that it was impracticable to build one there, that is, on the worked-out phosphate fields. Why impracticable, no one has been good enough to tell us.

If it was mainly because of anticipated huge costs, we think they should at least estimate the costs and tell us, in view of our offer to assist with finance and labour. We also think that an aeronautics expert or an authority on aerodrome construction should be consulted and not just any official. Our offer to assist with finance and labour still stands.

We beg the present Mission to help us overcome the powerful people opposing us and also to make us understand the position better. We would like to hear the exact reason or reasons why it has to be necessary to deprive us of so much land which we can use for immediate, important and permanent purposes, for the sake of an aerodrome which is of very insignificant use and benefit to us and the rest of the Nauruans on this island.

1/ Note by the Secretariat: See T/PET.9/7 - Resolution 325 (VIII).

One given reason had been that the aerodrome was a security measure. Exactly what is this? Security for who, when, how and from what danger? For many years before the war Nauru did not have an airfield and to our knowledge the general position then was not insecure for anybody. In the event of future hostilities the present aerodrome will be in the line of attack by any belligerent power fighting against Australia. If it is reasonable to learn from the Japanese experiences, we would be highly vulnerable to enemy air attacks. Moreover, it is just to suppose the havoc will be more terrible next time taking into account the fact that our homes are packed alongside this aerodrome.

We, at present, are not secure from the danger of having no lands when we need them. As it is, some families have had to live where they do not want, away from the lands which had been their homesteads until the Japanese therefrom up-rooted them by force, and also away from the district and people to which they belong. Some are being forced to live on the charity of their neighbours and relatives on lands the latter had to give them. It cannot be expected however that these same neighbours and relatives will continue their charity unto the children of these people, when in turn they have families of their own.

It is certain that the Administration is concerned mainly with getting the airstrip, whether or not it is detrimental to the people who own the lands. Before implementing the Ordinance for acquisition of the lands it has never, to our knowledge, made any effort to find out which people would be in difficulties and which would require to be provided for. Today some families are still finding difficulties because houses they want to build are within the specified boundaries of the aerodrome. Actually some are living within the same boundaries, and we fear, sooner or later they are going to be evicted. The majority of Nauruans still have considerable use for coconut and toddy for food and other purposes, but because of the aerodrome and its attendant troubles, it has not been possible for us to grow enough coconut trees for the above. People in our two districts have had to go elsewhere for same. It will be extremely unwise to belittle the importance of these necessities, as in these times of high living costs and ever-spiralling prices, the need for them is greater even than it was pre-war. Our two districts then had quite enough coconut trees, to mention only the most useful of our fruit trees.

Why then must we suffer all these hardships and inconveniences for a cause which is what it is?

A recent communication on this matter, from Canberra and received through the Administrator, asserted that the aerodrome is in the general interests of the Nauruan Community. We strongly disagree with this and we think it would be more correct on their part to say that the aerodrome is in the good interests of only one section of the Nauruan Community, and that is, the Europeans. This section is comprised mainly of B.P.C. and Administration employees and their families - all temporary residents.

We beg again the Visiting Mission not to sacrifice our immediate, permanent and indigenous interests for the sake of a luxurious convenience for an alien minority. We bear no racial enmity against Europeans but think their welcomed and necessary presence on this island should not be a burden on us in so under a manner.

The matter of compensation, as arised in the same communication is not clearly understood and we would like the assistance of the Mission in dealing with it. Although it is not the main issue in our minds we think the rates laid down are unfair and not commensurate with our loss. They are dictated by Canberra, ignoring even the rate proposed of the old Council of Chiefs which was £12 per acre per annum. The rates laid sown by Canberra may be found in the Ordinance, a copy of which is attached.^{1/} A copy of the communication menticed above is also attached hereto for information.

We are convinced by past usage of the aeordrome that it chiefly serves B.P.O. Europeans and vested interests. It has never served us directly and in our hour of dire need. During August 1950, a young Nauruan lad contracted tetanus and was hospitalized at the Nauru Administration Hospital. At the time there was no tetanus anti-toxin on the whole island and although the responsible people knew the lad's life was hanging in the balance and the aerodrome was quite serviceable as it is even now, the responsible people made no attempt then to charter a plane up here with the required drug. The lad died after a week of agony in hospital. It will not be true to say that the authorities did nothing. As far as we know, the Administration wired Ocean Island for the drug and it

^{1/} Note by the Secretariat: The text of the above-mentioned ordinance has been placed in the files of the Secretariat and is available to members of the Trusteeship Council on request.

was leisurely despatched from there by a steamer which was on a normal phosphate run. The drug arrived about a week after the death of the Nauruan.

In sharp contrast to this the only plane that has ever used the aerodrome during the last two years has been for the specific purpose of flying in a doctor from Australia to attend the wife of a B.P.C. executive who had an attack of asthma. She was flown to Australia.

The few Australian planes which had been using the aerodrome during recent years were mostly under charter to the B.P.C., carrying visiting and vacationing employees and their families, for and from Nauru and Ocean Island.

We are also sure that even if we want to use the air service, costs thereof will be too prohibitive and we are a people who receive generally very low income.

To ignore all these facts because six Chiefs of other districts, who have no lands to speak of in the aerodrome area happened to favour the idea, would appear to us anomalous. It would be acting on the views and advices of incompetent men who did not have in the first place, mandate to fritter away our limited lands. These Chiefs really believed that the United Nations wanted the aerodrome for an international airport. They could not be really blamed for that and we also believed in same. However when the 1950 U.N. Mission exploded that myth we thought they would have changed their minds about the aerodrome.

Taking the advice of one of their executive members the Chiefs probably believed also that plane service would be useful in bringing the anti-tuberculosis serum BCG which, according to their advisor, could not be brought here otherwise. This serum has been brought here a long time ago since then, and it was not by plane. Another belief therefore in a myth.

A very peculiar belief and apparently one which those old Chiefs held seriously was that the Australian Government had more right to the lands in question that we had, because it captured the lands from the Japanese, their war-time enemy. This is too ridiculous and we shall not waste the Mission's time trying to discount it.

Another alluring thing about the aerodrome idea with the same Chiefs was that progressive places elsewhere have aerodromes. What they have yet to show us is whether aerodromes in those places were acquired under similar malevolent circumstances as this one.

When the matter was reviewed recently by the Nauru Local Government Council, four Councillors, counting the vote of the Head Chief who was chairman, were in favour of the airstrip, and three were not. We wish to point out that this is a very slim majority of which to take notice, and besides, two Councillors were not present at the review. We would be grateful if views of the latter could be obtained by the U.N. Mission, since nobody else has seen fit to do so. Better still, it would be much more proper to get a consensus of opinion of all Nauruans on the matter.

In conclusion we would like to thank the U.N. Mission in anticipation of whatever effort it may expend on our behalf, in connection with this matter which is of vital importance to us.

Although we have been told that you cannot instruct the Administering Authority to do things, we still firmly believe that your Organisation is a very big force for the good in this troubled world, and incidentally, our only hope.

We wish your Mission and the United Nations Organisation every success.

Very respectfully submitted,

we are

(Signed) APPI. D.

Appi. D.
Councillor for Boe District

(Signed) JULIUS AKUBOR

Julius. A.
Councillor for Yarren District

(A list of 100 signatures followed)

Received through the United Nations Visiting Mission to the Pacific, 1953, on 17 March 1953.

(C O P Y)

TRUST TERRITORY OF NAURU

ADMINISTRATION HEADQUARTERS

NAURU,

CENTRAL PACIFIC.

13th February, 1953

In reply Quote No.8/15

MEMORANDUM FOR:

Councillor Appi D.,
NAURU.

I refer to representations you made to Mr. C.R. Lambert, Secretary of the Department of Territories, during his recent visit to Nauru on the Aerodrome (Acquisition of Land) Ordinance, 1952.

On his return to Canberra Mr. Lambert took up your representations with the Minister for Territories, who has directed that you be informed that he is not prepared to agree to any variation in the provisions of the existing Ordinance.

In this regard the Minister desires that you be informed that the acquisition of the land is necessary for the requirements of the aerodrome, is in the general interests of the Nauruan Community and no other site is practicable. Further more the Minister considers that the amount of compensation provided in the Ordinance is regarded as fair and reasonable, having regard to the use value of the land and the use to which the holders have put it.

(J.K. Lawrence,)
Administrator.