

AUSTRALIA 2020 SUMMIT

Topic 10 - D: How Australia can make the greatest contribution both within and outside the framework of the United Nations in addressing the challenge of extreme poverty

RECOGNITION OF BANABAN CONTRIBUTION TO AUSTRALIA'S PROSPERITY AS A FARMING NATION

While Australia currently prepares CERD reports regarding Australia's compliance with Articles 2-7 on the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Racial Discrimination, issues relating to Australia's past dealings with a small Pacific Island people called the Banabans(1) must be addressed if we are to genuinely move forward as a truly egalitarian democratic nation.

This submission calls on the Australian government to formally recognise the Banaban people and their major contribution to Australia's prosperity over the past century.

With the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 the nations' founders were keen to build something new and wanted to avoid the pitfalls of the old world. While they wanted Australia to be harmonious and united, and to encourage progressive ideas about human rights and democratic procedures, the first act of the new Commonwealth Parliament was to pass the White Australia Policy which restricted migration to people of primarily European origin and remained intact right up to the end of the 1973.

Australia made great progress towards Nation Building through the development of the country's agricultural and manufacturing capacities. Wool and wheat became the cornerstone of Australian agriculture and as the country's production rapidly increased it led to Australia becoming one of the world's leading food and wool exporters. The major components of this success depended on the subsidised use of super-phosphate fertilisers derived from the rich phosphatic rock deposits from the Banabans' small Pacific equatorial island. This discovery would revolutionise the Australian fertiliser industry.

Between 1900 -1980 more than 20 million tons of the Banaban's land would be removed with over 13 million tons scattered over Australian farmlands. This left the Island devastated and only capable of supporting a small population of between 300-500 people. Today the majority of the Banaban population of approximately 6,000, which was moved to Rabi Island in Fiji, has been left as an impoverished minority people still suffering from the actions of past Colonial rulers. To further repress the Banabans they have been split under the governance of two Pacific nations of Fiji and Kiribati with over 90% of the Banaban population identified as living below Fiji's poverty line(2) .

No other country (3) has paid such a devastating price to help build our nation. Today the Banabans are calling on the Australian government to formally recognise their major contribution and historic relationship to this country. The Banabans ask for Australia's assistance in the areas of education and development that will allow them to also move towards a much brighter future, and provide hope for their future generations.

(1) The Banabans are from a small equatorial island in the Pacific called Banaba and know during Colonial times as Ocean Island.

(2) Journal of Contemporary Fiji Vol. 4 May 2006.

(3) Except for Nauru. Australia paid Nauru \$A107M compensation for damage caused by phosphate mining.

