

STATEMENT PREPARED BY ELOI MACHORO OF NEW CALEDONIA
FOR PRESENTATION AT THE THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
WCIP

1. GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

NEW CALEDONIA IS PART OF THE MELANESIAN ARCHIPELAGO, WHICH CONTAINS THE INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES PAPUA NEW GUINEA, THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, VANUATU, FIJI AND TONGA. NEW CALEDONIA IS THE SOLE TERRITORY IN THIS GROUP OF COUNTRIES THAT REMAINS THE COLONY OF A EUROPEAN POWER. IT IS LOCATED 1,500 KM TO THE WEST OF AUSTRALIA, AT ABOUT THE SAME LATITUDE AS TOWNSVILLE. THE MAIN ISLAND, SOME 200 KM LONG AND 30 KM WIDE, CONTAINS THE CAPITAL, NOUMEA; IN ADDITION THERE ARE THE THREE SMALLER LOYALTY ISLANDS.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY

FRANCE CLAIMED POSSESSION OF NEW CALEDONIA IN 1853. SINCE THEN, FRANCE HAS SENT SETTLERS THERE: IT HAS ALSO USED PARTS OF NEW CALEDONIA AS PENAL SETTLEMENTS. THE BEST LAND WAS THUS TAKEN FROM THE INDIGENOUS KANAKS AND GIVEN TO SETTLERS OR USED FOR PRISON AREAS.

THIS WAS NOT PASSIVELY ACCEPTED BY THE KANAKS, WHO REVOLTED IN 1878 AND AGAIN IN 1917. BUT THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT USED THESE REVOLTS AS A PRETEXT TO CRUSH THE KANAKS AND TAKE MORE LAND FOR FRENCH SETTLEMENTS. MANY KANAKS WERE DEPORTED FROM NEW CALEDONIA TO QUEENSLAND AND TAHITI. OTHERS WERE SENT TO OTHER PARTS OF NEW CALEDONIA POPULATED BY DIFFERENT INDIGENOUS GROUPS. THIS CREATED TENSIONS AMONG DIFFERENT KANAK GROUPS - BETWEEN THE CLANS PROPRIETAIRES WHO OWNED THE LAND, AND THE

CLANS ETANGERS WHO HAD BEEN TRANSPORTED FROM OTHER PARTS OF NEW CALEDONIA.

AT THE SAME TIME THE FRENCH EMBARKED ON A POLICY OF CULTURAL GENOCIDE, REPLACING THE NATIVE CULTURE WITH FRENCH WAYS. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH COLLABORATED WITH THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT IN TRYING TO ELIMINATE THE KANAK CULTURE. UP UNTIL NOW ALL EDUCATION HAS BEEN IN FRENCH, IGNORING THE 36 KANAK LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN NEW CALEDONIA. YOUNG KANAKS ARE EVEN TAUGHT THAT THEIR ANCESTORS WERE THE GAULS! ONLY THE PROTESTANT EDUCATION IS BILINGUAL.

THE ONLY CULTURE RECOGNIZED AND MAINTAINED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS FRENCH CULTURE; INDEED, THE FRENCH NEVER RECOGNIZED A KANAK CULTURE.

3. COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION

THERE ARE ABOUT 160,000 PEOPLE LIVING IN NEW CALEDONIA TODAY. THIS INCLUDES:

- A. 60,000 KANAKS
- B. 25,000 "CALEDOCHES" - DESCENDANTS OF THE SETTLERS WHO HAVE BEEN IN NEW CALEDONIA FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS.
- C. OTHERS:
 - i) NATIVE PEOPLE FROM OTHER FRENCH COLONIES - MARTINIQUE, REUNION, GUADELOUPE, WALLIS AND FUTUNA ISLANDS, TAHITI.
 - ii) FRENCH CITIZENS FROM VIETNAM, ALGERIA, VANUATU, WHO WERE EXPELLED FROM THESE COUNTRIES AFTER INDEPENDENCE.

- iii) DESCENDANTS OF THE LABOURERS FROM NEW HEBRIDES, JAPAN, JAVA, AND INDONESIA, WHO WERE IMPORTED TO PROVIDE THE FRENCH SETTLERS WITH CHEAP LABOUR.

4. POLITICAL STATUS OF THE TERRITORY

(a) OWNERSHIP OF LANDS AND MINERALS

IN 1853 FRANCE TOOK POSSESSION OF ALL THE LAND. SOME WAS GIVEN TO SETTLERS AS PRIVATE PROPERTY, SOME WAS ALLOCATED TO THE KANAKS AS "RESERVES". BUT THESE RESERVES REMAIN FRENCH PROPERTY. THE REST OF THE LAND WAS KEPT FOR THE STATE AND THE TERRITORY ADMINISTRATION.

ALL MINERAL DEPOSITS BELONG TO THE STATE. NEW CALEDONIA IS THE THIRD MOST IMPORTANT EXPORTER OF NICKEL. THERE ARE ALSO SIGNIFICANT DEPOSITS OF CHROME AND OTHER MINERALS.

FRANCE ALSO LAYS CLAIM TO ALL SEAS WITHIN 200 MILES OF NEW CALEDONIA. THIS AREA CONTAINS VAST QUANTITIES OF MINERAL-BEARING "NODULES" AN IMPORTANT ENERGY RESOURCE FOR THE FUTURE. IT POSSIBLY ALSO CONTAINS LARGE PETROLEUM DEPOSITS. FRANCE HAS ALSO MADE ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE AMERICANS AND JAPANESE FOR COMMERCIAL FISHING.

IT IS ALWAYS FRANCE THAT MAKES THESE DECISION; THE EXPLOITATION OF NEW CALEDONIA'S MINERAL RESOURCES PROVIDES MONEY FOR THE FRENCH, BUT ONLY POLLUTION FOR THE KANAKS.

(b) STATUS OF LANDS

THE KANAKS LIVE ON LANDS WHICH THEY WORK IN ORDER TO LIVE, BUT WHICH BELONG TO THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT. THIS SYSTEM OF "USUFRUIT" IS REMINISCENT OF THE MEDIEVAL SERF SYSTEM. ALL PEOPLE WHO

ARRIVED AFTER COLONIZATION CAN OWN PROPERTY BUT THE KANAKS, AS A COMMUNITY, HAVE NO SUCH RIGHT. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT DOES ALLOW INDIVIDUAL KANAKS TO OWN LAND. THIS HELPS DESTROY THE UNITY OF THE KANAK COMMUNITY BY ENCOURAGING SOME INDIVIDUAL KANAKS TO INTEGRATE INTO EUROPEAN-STYLE SOCIETY.

(c) STATUS OF THE PEOPLE

TWO TYPES OF LEGAL STATUS ARE RECOGNIZED:

- i) COMMON LAW STATUS FOR FRENCH "NATIONALS"
- ii) SPECIAL STATUS FOR THE KANAKS

THESE ARE NOT EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW. FOR EXAMPLE, IN "MIXED MARRIAGES" THE INDIVIDUAL WITH "SPECIAL STATUS" LOSES IT AND GAINS "COMMON LAW STATUS". THIS IS YET ANOTHER MEANS OF SUPPRESSING THE IDENTITY OF THE KANAK PEOPLE. ALL CHILDREN OF SUCH MARRIAGES HAVE "COMMON LAW" STATUS, AND LOSE ANY CLAIM TO SPECIAL LAND RIGHTS. EVEN THE CHILDREN OF MIXED DE FACTO RELATIONSHIPS HAVE COMMON LAW STATUS.

(d) POLITICAL POWER - STILL HELD BY FRANCE

SINCE NEW CALEDONIA IS A FRENCH TERRITORY, IT IS GOVERNED BY A REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE - THE HIGH COMMISSIONER.

A LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IS ELECTED DIRECTLY BY THE NEW CALEDONIA POPULATION AND ELECTS IN ITS TURN AN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WHICH IS PRESIDED OVER BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER. THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POPULATION MAY THUS MAKE LAWS, BUT ONLY THOSE LAWS WHICH AGREE WITH THE FRENCH CONSTITUTION.

THE HIGH COMMISSIONER IS AT THE SAME TIME PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND EXECUTIVE OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT 20,000 KILOMETRES AWAY. SO IN NEW CALEDONIA WE SAY THAT THE HIGH COMMISSIONER "HAS TWO HATS". BUT HE IS PRIMARILY A FRENCH EXECUTIVE, EXERCISING POWER IN SUCH VITAL AREAS AS IMMIGRATION, SECONDARY EDUCATION, DEFENCE, POLICE, COMMERCE, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA, HEALTH, AND THE BUDGET. IN OTHER WORDS, ALL IMPORTANT ISSUES ARE DECIDED BY FRANCE.

5. THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

THERE ARE THREE MAIN GROUPS IN THE TERRITORIAL ASSEMBLY:

- (a) THE RIGHT WING, HOLDING 15 SEATS, OPPOSE INDEPENDENCE WHICH WOULD THREATEN THEIR WEALTH. IT IS A COALITION WHOSE POLICIES COINCIDE WITH GISCARD D'ESTAING AND JACQUES CHIRAC IN FRANCE AND IS SUPPORTED BY TWO MAIN GROUPS - THE WEALTHY LANDOWNERS, AND THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION, BECAUSE THEY CLAIM TO GUARANTEE THE AVAILABILITY OF WORK FOR IMMIGRANTS. MOST OF THE FRENCH OFFICIALS ALSO SUPPORT THIS PARTY.
- (b) THE CENTRE, WITH 7 SEATS, SUPPORTED BY THE "CALEDOKES". THE CENTRE SUPPORTS GISCARD IN THE FRENCH PARLIAMENT; IT FEARS INDEPENDENCE BECAUSE THE CALEDOKES WOULD LOSE THEIR LAND. THEY CLAIM TO BE AS "CALEDONIAN" AS THE KANAKS; BUT THEY ALSO LIKE TO SEE THEMSELVES AS FRENCH.
- (c) THE INDEPENDENCE FRONT, WITH 14 SEATS. IN THE 1978 ELECTIONS, THEY GAINED 82% OF THE KANAK VOTE. IT COMPRISES FIVE PARTIES, WHO ALL WANT INDEPENDENCE FOR NEW CALEDONIA, THE KANAKS' HOMELAND. FOREMOST AMONG THEM IS THE UNION CALEDONIENNE, WHICH WAS THE FIRST

PARTY CREATED FOR THE KANAKS IN THE 1950'S. THIS FRONT AIMS TO GAIN COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE - INDEPENDENCE IN THE CHOICE OF TRADING PARTNERS, CURRENTLY IMPOSED FROM ABOVE BY FRANCE, INDEPENDENCE IN THEIR POLITICAL ALLIANCES. ABOVE ALL, THE KANAKS WANT TO ~~SEE~~ THEMSELVES, WITH THEIR OWN CULTURE, AND OWNING THEIR OWN LAND.

FRANCE CLAIMS THAT THE MAJORITY OF NEW CALEDONIANS DO NOT WANT TO BE INDEPENDENT. THIS IS ONLY TRUE BECAUSE FRANCE STACKS THE VOTE. SINCE THE 1950'S, IT HAS ORGANIZED IMMIGRATION FROM THE FRENCH TERRITORIES AND ENROLMENTS OF TEMPORARY ARMY PERSONNEL, IN ORDER ~~TO~~ SWAMP THE NATIVE VOTE. IN THIS WAY IT MANIPULATES THE ELECTORATE, CONTRAVENTING THE UNITED NATIONS PROCLAMATION WHICH RECOGNIZES THE RIGHT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION.

6. CONCLUSION

I HOPE THAT THIS BRIEF STATEMENT WILL SHOW YOU THAT THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF NEW CALEDONIA HAVE MANY OF THE SAME PROBLEMS AS THE OTHER INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE WORLD. WE ARE READY TO SUPPORT THEM IN THEIR STRUGGLE AGAINST THE IMPERIALISM OF THE GREAT NATIONS, FOR THE SURVIVAL OF THEIR OWN RACE AND CULTURE AND FOR THE POSSESSION OF THEIR LANDS. WE SUPPORT THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES IN PARTICULAR AND WE CLOSELY FOLLOW PROGRESS OF THEIR STRUGGLE. WE FIND IT EASY TO IDENTIFY OURSELVES WITH THEIR POSITION. LIKE THEM WE ARE THE BLACKS OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC. LIKE THEM WE ARE FIGHTING FOR THE POSSESSION OF OUR LANDS AND FOR THE RECOGNITION AND SURVIVAL OF OUR CULTURE, FOR JUSTICE AND FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN.

WE HAVE FOUND THAT WORDS SUCH AS THE RIGHTS OF MAN ARE COMPLETELY MEANINGLESS WHEN THE IMPERIALIST POWERS MEET TO DISCUSS ISSUES LIKE NICKEL IN NEW CALEDONIA AND URANIUM IN AUSTRALIA.

WE EXPRESS OUR REGRET AT NOT BEING ABLE TO TAKE PART IN THIS CONFERENCE AS DELEGATES BUT HOPE THAT THIS WILL CHANGE AT THE NEXT MEETING.

IN CONCLUSION, I CAN SAY THAT, IF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER IN MANY RESPECTS, THEY ARE UNITED AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN A COMMON BATTLE.

