



Telegrams: CHIEFMIN BAIRIKI

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MINISTER,  
P.O. Box 68  
Bairiki, Tarawa,  
Gilbert and Ellice Islands.

(In reply please quote) F.....

16th April, 1975

H.E. Maude, Esq., O.B.E., M.A.,  
Department of Pacific History,  
Australian National University,  
Canberra,  
AUSTRALIA

*Dear Professor Maude,*

You are undoubtedly aware of the dispute between the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and the Rabi Council of Leaders regarding the latter's claim to independence for Ocean Island. As you may have also guessed, while the Banabans have engaged a number of experts and advisers to assist them in the presentation of their case, the government here is dependent for advice on its not very expert officials. We do our best but are hampered by lack of knowledge of the background to certain aspects of the Banabans' claim. With some hesitancy therefore I am writing to you to see whether you would be prepared to advise and assist us on two particular points which are worrying us.

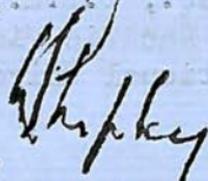
The first point is the Banabans' claim to have your support in their contention that they have no connection with the Gilbertese. We acknowledge your expertise in this respect and it is therefore of some concern that our belief, based on the limited information we have available, and the absolute conviction of the Gilbertese that they are connected, to find that we may be wrong. We would of course still argue that irrespective of the past the Banabans and Gilbertese are now so intermixed as to be virtually indistinguishable but I should be grateful to learn from you yourself that the Banabans' contention is correct and that there were no ethnic or cultural ties with the Gilbertese before the British presence.

The second point on which we would welcome information is the background to the signing of the 1947 memorandum of understanding which among other things gave the Banabans the right to return to Ocean Island. The more we study this document and the related papers the more we feel that the principal purpose of the memorandum was to

protect the Banabans' interests in Rabi with the right to return to Ocean Island being simply an acknowledgment of their position as Ocean Island landowners. I hasten to add that the government has no wish to prevent any Banaban who genuinely wishes to resettle on Ocean Island from doing so and has even agreed to enshrine their right to return in the constitution, but we do suspect that undue weight is being attached to this right in support of the Banabans' claim to independence.

I shall of course fully understand should you not wish to be involved in any way. However to put it bluntly our backs are to the wall and we need all the information we can get if we are to genuinely help the people of these scattered islands.

*Yours sincerely*



Keith Shipley  
(Secretary to the Chief Minister)