

UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/5404/Add.3
4 April 1963

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Eighteenth session

INFORMATION FROM NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES

POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION ON PACIFIC TERRITORIES
UNDER UNITED KINGDOM ADMINISTRATION

Note by the Secretary-General

GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS

In accordance with the statement of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 27 September 1961, the Government of the United Kingdom has transmitted to the Secretary-General the following political and constitutional information on the Territory of Gilbert and Ellice Islands.

This information, which was received on 21 March 1963, is herewith submitted to the General Assembly at its eighteenth session.^{1/}

^{1/} In accordance with General Assembly resolution 1700 (XVI) of 19 December 1961, this information is also submitted to the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories.

GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS

POPULATION

1. The estimated population at 31 December 1961, was 47,000. The division by races is as follows:

Micronesian	39,000
Polynesian	7,000
European and others	<u>1,000</u>
Total	47,000

2. The open-cast phosphate workings on Ocean Island, the copra plantations and the central Government or the island Governments are the main sources of employment.

ADMINISTRATION

3. The basic units of administration are the twenty-six Native (or island) Governments, which are established on most of the inhabited islands. The head of each island Government is the island magistrate, who is the representative of the central Government on the island and chairman of the island council. He is responsible for the administration of the island and is assisted by a chief of Kaubure or Fongaulu (who is the chief executive officer), the island scribe (who is secretary of the island council) and a chief of island police. These officers are local inhabitants who are appointed by the district commissioner after consultation with the island council concerned. Other local officials are appointed by the island council itself.

4. The island councils consist of elected members, nominated members and ex officio members. The elected members are elected by universal adult suffrage of all islanders over the age of 30 and there is a majority of elected members in all the island councils. In addition to appointing certain members of the island Governments, the island councils have power to make local regulations covering a wide range of subjects, and provide services for the general health, security and well-being of each island. The councils have full financial responsibility and make their own estimates of revenue and expenditure; in most cases they pay for the various island services out of local revenue but,

in cases where they are not financially self-supporting, they receive a subvention from central government funds.

5. The Territory is divided for administrative purposes into four districts, each headed by a district commissioner or senior district commissioner. These commissioners are responsible for supervising and guiding the work of the island Governments within their area under the direction of the Resident Commissioner (Mr. V.J. Anderson), who resides in Tarawa (the capital) and is the chief administrative officer in the Territory. He is assisted in his administration by the Secretary to the Government, the Senior Education Officer, the Legal Adviser, the Senior Medical Officer and other officials, who are responsible for the day-to-day administration of their respective departments.

6. The over-all responsibility for the administration of the Territory rests with the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific (Sir D.C.C. Trench), who resides in Honiara (Solomon Islands). The High Commissioner and the Resident Commissioner are both empowered to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Territory, due regard being paid to local customs; in cases where a proposed law might affect the lives of the local population, the island councils are consulted.

PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL INHABITANTS IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

7. As already noted, the various island councils, composed solely of indigenous inhabitants, enjoy a considerable measure of autonomy in running the local administration of each island. Participation by the islanders in the central administration of the Territory is made extremely difficult by the vast distances between the islands (the distance between the northernmost Gilbert Island and the southernmost Ellice Island is over 1,200 miles). A conference of local inhabitants has been held at regular intervals to advise the central Government on matters laid before it, particularly questions relating to the indigenous inhabitants themselves. The representation at this conference comprises island magistrates, elected representatives of groups of islands, representatives from the principal missions and various government observers. Meetings of this conference have given an opportunity for islanders from all parts of the Territory to meet together and encourage the growth of a...

national (as opposed to an insular) loyalty. As from early 1963, improved communications have overcome to some extent the difficulties imposed by distance, and an Advisory Council has been set up. The Resident Commissioner is President, and there are up to twelve local members and up to five civil servant members, appointed by the Resident Commissioner. It is intended that the Council should meet twice a year, and give advice on all matters relating to the administration of the Territory. The conference will continue to be held from time to time. It is also planned shortly to establish an Executive Council, with the Resident Commissioner presiding and four local and four civil servant members.

JUDICIARY

8. Under the provisions of the Western Pacific (Courts) Order in Council, 1961, a High Court of the Western Pacific was established in 1962. The judges of this court consist of a Chief Justice and a number of puisne judges, and the Court possesses and exercises similar jurisdiction to the High Court of Justice in England. The High Court has jurisdiction to hear appeals from the judgements of any other court in the Territory, and there is a right of appeal in respect of a judgement by the High Court itself to the Fiji Court of Appeal, and thereafter to the Privy Council in London.

9. In addition to the High Court, there is a system of local or Native courts which have wide jurisdiction over all local inhabitants. The local court on each island is presided over by the island magistrate, who can be assisted by four or more assessors. In addition, island land courts deal with local property, estate and land disputes. These are composed of the island magistrate and a panel of selected islanders.