

**LETTER TO THE BRITISH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COLONIES,  
1946**

The Bakweri Land Committee,  
C/o The Native Administration Office,  
Buea, Cameroon under British Mandate  
24<sup>th</sup> August, 1946

The Rt. Hon. The Secretary of State for the Colonies,  
Colonial Office, Downing Street, White Hall, London  
Thro' The Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea  
Thro' The Chief Commissioner,  
Eastern Provinces, Enugu  
And Thro' His Excellency the Governor  
And Commander-in-Chief of Nigeria, Lagos.

**The Bakweri Lands under the Crown, Custodian and Missionary Bodies. Situated  
in the Victoria Division of the Cameroons under British Mandate – Petition – on  
claim of**

Sir,

We the undersigned for and behalf of the entire populace of the Bakweri people, i.e., including the sub-tribes of Bota and Bimbria of Victoria Division in the Cameroons under British Mandate (for which the Committee known as the Bakweri Land Committee stands) humbly bring forward a case which has been long-lying and overlooking of which has perpetrated very unbearable economic deprivation.

A similar petition dated 7<sup>th</sup> August this year was sent to the Chief Commissioner when he had an interview with the Clan here. In reply to the petition which was referred to in the agenda he said that when he was here as Divisional officer he had not got such a complaint for land, and, therefore was at a loss to see why it should arise now. He further

promised sending out a surveyor to see whether any increase in land was necessary and whether the indigenous native population had increased.

In our petition to the Chief Commissioner we gave figures which were from a certain book published in Berlin in 1911, but as we intend to make our case up to date we have now quoted figures as can be obtained from the Cameroons Plantation Head Office, Buea. Other particulars have been given fuller detail, thus bringing in some little differences.

This reply given by the Chief Commissioner has caused great unrest among all the people, as they were not asking for increase, but for the return of the whole land. It is therefore their/our desire that this case be brought to you and copy passed to the Permanent Mandate Committee of the League of Nations or any other “body” that has something to do with matters concerning Mandates for treatment. After all, we wonder if the case of population arises – we all know that even three people can own an estate equal to our whole area which is about 580 square miles.

### **Particulars of the Case**

- (a) Native Land Tenure – As a background to showing how land was owned we find it necessary to state what land tenure was in this place before the advent of Europeans.

Land was owned in the villages and each village had to choose its plots, and boundaries made. This land chosen by any family automatically became the family property. According to native law and custom this land has to be handed down by predecessors. It is considered a very serious crime if a member of any family encroached on the farmland of another family. This law is more intense now that there is very little or no farmland left to the native

- (b) *The Coming of the Germans and the acquisition of our land* – By 1892 the Germans had proclaimed our country (the Bakweri country) a German territory. When they had begun to settle they started surveying the land and piecing it out.

We the natives not knowing what was meant by this “making of tracks” – as we thought it – did not pay any heed except in very few cases. When the surveyors insisted on people removing their houses there were objections, which were of course quelled with most atrocious measures. There was no treaty or agreement whatever, in which we the natives gave over our land to the Germans, as was the case with our brothers the Dualas, who signed a treaty with the Germans in 1884 giving them their right of legislation and their land from 4°.10’ North Latitude to River Kwakwa to the South, with exception of the land on which they were building and farming at the time. This as the treaty shows did no include us all.

- (c) *Alienation of our lands by sale to individuals, missionary societies and companies* – The areas in Victoria division which belongs to the Bakweri Natives is about 580 square miles, under Von Puttkamer as Governor, over 400 square miles (250,000 acres) of what is now Victoria and Kumba divisions were alienated to European individuals and companies (See handbook of Nigeria page 257). Of this lot, about 83,000 hectares were alienated out of Bakweri lands situated in Victoria division. Some time ago the British government found that the native reserves were very inadequate so some land was added, thus reducing very negligibly of course the number of hectares alienated.

**1 – Present Figures of Plantations in Bakweri Lands**

<b>PLANTATIONS</b>	<b>HECTARES</b>
<b>Bwinga Amba Bay Trading Company</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>W.A.P.V. Bota, Tolle, &amp; Molyko</b>	<b>9,818</b>
<b>Misselle</b>	<b>2,445</b>
<b>Bimbia and Mabetta</b>	<b>4,455</b>
<b>Moliwe Plantation</b>	<b>12,900</b>
<b>Ombe</b>	<b>240</b>

<b>Likomba</b>	<b>6,345</b>
<b>Holforth</b>	<b>675</b>
<b>Ekona</b>	<b>4,056</b>
<b>Dibunsha</b>	<b>1,764</b>
<b>Bibunde A.G. Mukundange Isongo - Bibunde</b>	<b>14,705</b>
<b>Oechlhansen</b>	<b>2,200</b>
<b>Idenau (Sanje)</b>	<b>4,001</b>
<b>A. F. C.</b>	<b>4,999</b>
<b>Buea Farms (approximately)</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>Palotine Mission</b>	<b>500</b>
<b>Meanja</b>	<b>6,000</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82,503</b>

There are 259 hectares in a square mile. Therefore 82,503 hectares are about 318.5 square miles. The areas mentioned above do not include several plots, say in Buea, which were alienated to Messrs. Holforth, Justo Weiler and Baptist and Basel Missions, of which the acreage is considerable. Other parts of Buea still, are proclaimed “Crown Lands” thus keeping away the natives from using them.

We do not think this justifiable as we are but a Mandated Territory and not a British Colony or Protectorate.

2. *Useless Waste Lands* – Areas occupied by rocky barren upland slopes are equal to 220 square miles (see intelligence report on the Bakweri area prepared in 1941 by the District Officer in charge then). Areas occupied by swamps or bogs are equal to 30 square miles approximately. This leaves us with nothing which was once our own.

- (d) *Constant Complaints and Contemplated redress by the German Imperial Government* – Sever land deprivation (to a people like the Bakweris, who are by nature extensive farmers) grated increasingly on our forbearances, thus giving

rise to constant protests to Reichstag against Von Puttkamer and other officials, such as Chief Judge Von Brachitsch, was on the forceful obtaining of lands and labour for plantations in which they were financially interested, so no justice could be expected from them by natives (see handbooks prepared under the direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office – No. 111, page 23).

After the Reichstag Inquiry and Von Puttkamer's dismissal in 1907, Dr. Seitz (1907-10) and Glein (1910-12) followed, but no improvement no native land question was made until K. Abermeier came to power in 1913. He, after hearing this complaint over and over decided to tour the Bakweri villages in order to see for himself whether our complaint was founded.

After a seven day tour he returned fully convinced that we needed amends. So early in 1914 a surveyor known as Van da Laan was sent to re-survey the land. He had not quite started when the first World War came on (1914-18) thus leaving us in our old bounds still.

*(e) The Coming of the British – With the coming of the British who took up reigns of Government in 1916, we thought we were going to be saved from the wreck – we expected that the British would not regard as German all property that was not acquired in any constitutional way. With this anticipation we waited patiently to see what redresses were being contemplated. To our surprise in 1922 and in 1924 the plantations were put out to auction by the Custodian. At first there was enemy restriction but when it was withdrawn most of the plantations were bought back by their former German owners who took charge in March 1925. These yielded huge profits to Britain.*

We were not daunted still, for we knew that the promotion of our interests and development in all ways, formed sacred trusts to the British and therefore we needed only reminding them and they would set things right for us, but till this date despite constant

reminding of our Local Administrative Offices we are still as we were under the Germans (with regards to the German question).

We ask that this mistake should not be repeated, that is, the Lands should not be resold to Trading Companies or other Planters.

- (f) *Deprivation Resultant Upon our LAND having been grabbed* – Since the more fertile plans were taken from us, we had to try farming on the rocky mountain slopes about 6,000 to 8,000 feet, above sea level. No economic crop can thrive well on this height except probably coffee. All the former native staple foodstuffs which were yams of all species, gourds of all species, etc., cannot in any case do well on such height.

As a result to eking out a living we felon planting a foreign foodstuff which is the cocoyam (*Xanthosoma Sagitifoli*). It was introduced in this country in about 1860 by people who were imported from Fernando Po by the English Baptist Missionaries who began settling here in 1858.

This crop thrives fairly well on the heights of 4 to 8,000 feet above sea level and is considerably easy to cultivate. But unfortunately this is not a suitable foodstuff as the medical authorities testify and it forms the only or chief foodstuff here because of sheer necessity. Therefore it makes it obvious that *malnutrition is rampant*.

Our women, who by custom are the planters of our locally consumed foodstuffs, have to climb the above mentioned heights to farm and on their return from farms they carry very heavy loads, because it is not an easy task to frequent those ‘sky-high’ farms. This causes our women to have ‘early breakdown’ in health.

This climbing of heights by mothers is also responsible for the great infant mortality in this area because pregnant mothers have to climb these heights if they are going to provide for themselves and for their families. Their husbands, who have only known to work in the plantations as the only source of obtaining money for some domestic needs

(this is a psychological reaction on the minds of the people, which has been brought about by all the land having been taken away, thus making them/us slaves in our own land to work in plantations) are away, so they cannot give wives sufficient help as they ought to do. Malnutrition and exacting physical activities by mothers, both lead well to decrease in population and deterioration of a people.

Natives who want to plant some economic crops only rent land from Missionary bodies, etc., thus paying for what to all intents and purposes belongs to them. This we think does not promote our material and moral well being and our social progress, as was imposed by the mandate.

*(g) Summary of our Points.*

1. Our land which is our life blood property was acquired by the Germans most unconstitutionally, for there was no treaty or agreement of any sort concluded between the German Imperial Government and the natives of this place.
2. The Germans did not even proclaim those lands 'crown lands' and even if they did – which is not the case – they had no right to sell it out our lands to Missionary bodies and companies as records in our possession show (*vide attached copy of contract*).
3. We being a Mandated Territory and British Trustees, we do not consider it equitable that they should declare any part of our land as belonging to the Crown (King of England).
4. We all fought side by side for freedom and respect for other peoples rights and now we have conquered – conquered also cupidity by other peoples' property; so we hope like any other people to benefit by the struggle, or else we will be left to ask ourselves this question, *viz*: 'Over what or why did we fight, and what did we conquer.'

In view of the above mentioned points we hold by the common laws of fair-dealing, dictated by the love of simple truth and enforced by justice that, since these lands were

not acquired in a justifiable way, they were and are misappropriated property and therefore should rightly be returned to us the rightful owners.

(h) *Claims* – On the strength of the afore-mentioned points we make the following claims:

1. That all lands in this Mandated Territory known as ‘Crown Lands’ hereupon be known as “Native Lands” to be controlled by the Natives.
2. That all alienated land of the Victoria Division in the Cameroons under British Mandate, which belongs to the natives of Bakweri of the same place, be returned to us, the Bakweris. As Land is very important to our economic well-being, after getting it al back we shall conclude and regulate its keeping with the Native Administrations so that it shall not be liable to wrong use; that is the Native Administrations shall look after the plantations on co-operative basis, after enough of the cultivated and uncultivated areas have been given to the natives for growing local and other crops for consumption and economic purposes. Proceeds accruing from the plantations shall be used by the Native Administration in concert with the permanent land committee for the benefit of the people.
3. As compensation for the many years of exploitation of our land, we ask to be given costs equal to the proceeds which have accrued from all the plantations afore-mentioned for the past five years and everything now standing on the plantations.
4. All Mission lands should be returned to us without costs except plots on which, strictly speaking, houses for ecclesiastical and educational purposes are situated.

The above, Sir, is our case and our claims and we shall be extra grateful if early treatment is given to it and the developments made known to us.

We have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient and willing servants

**Sgd. David M. L. ENDELEY**  
*Hon. Secretary to the Bakweri Land Committee,  
And Gen. Secretary of the Bakweri Improvement Union*

Sgd. J. M. MOKENGE

Sgd. A. E. MOTUTE

Sgd. MOLINGA NGOLO

Sgd. A. E. HARRY MONJIMBO

Sgd. P. MALAFA

Sgd. D. TANDA MBUA etc...

*\*This letter was actually signed by 25 prominent Bakweri of the time. Unfortunately, we were unable to get a complete list of signatories.*

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