

REPORT OF SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, ON PETITION
OF LAGAAIA AND 144 OTHERS.

Department of External Affairs,
Wellington, N.Z., 28th July, 1927.

The Clerk, Joint Samoan Petition Inquiry Committee.

SIR,—

I am directed by the Hon. Minister of External Affairs to return herewith the petition of Lagaaia and 144 others, praying for amendment of certain features of the administration of Western Samoa, which petition was forwarded under cover of your letter of the 28th instant, and to forward to you my preliminary report thereon as follows:—

1. The rules of procedure in respect of petitions concerning inhabitants of mandated territories laid down by the Permanent Mandates Commission and adopted by the Council of the League of Nations provide—

- (a) All petitions to the League of Nations by communities or sections of populations of mandated areas should be sent to the Secretariat of the League of Nations through the mandatory Government concerned; the latter should attach to these petitions such comments as it might think desirable.
- (b) Any petitions from the inhabitants (of mandated areas) received by the Secretariat of the League of Nations through any channel other than the mandatory Government concerned should be returned to the signatories with the request that they should resubmit the petition in accordance with the procedure prescribed above.

2. It is considered advisable that in respect of petitions from Samoa to the New Zealand Parliament a similar procedure should be followed, and that such petitions should be forwarded through the Administrator, whose report would thereby be available to Parliament when the petition was presented.

3. The Department in New Zealand has not at present full material to enable it to report in detail on each of the matters complained of in the petition, and in any case the Department could not properly so report without prior communication with the Administrator and receipt of his comments.

4. Accompanying the petition are statutory declarations signed by Matautia Karauna (Samoan Native interpreter) and Edwin William Gurr (European interpreter and legal agent), declaring that—

“Attached hereto and marked with the letter ‘A’ is a true and correct translation into the English language, correctly setting forth the terms, meaning, and effect of the petition typewritten in the Samoan language, which petition is annexed hereto and marked with the letter ‘B,’ and I have compared such translation with such petition.”

5. In the English text one paragraph has been omitted. The paragraph which appears in the Samoan text but not in the English text reads—

“22. We wish to declare also that we thoroughly understand all we have said in this petition, and we are certain also that it expresses the true opinion of the majority of the Samoans.”

6. With respect to the matters mentioned in articles 5, 18, and 19 of the petition—

As to (5), the Department is satisfied that the Native petitioners have been misinformed, as they have never been refused the fullest and freest opportunity of representing any matter whatsoever, either in person or in writing, to the Administrator in Samoa, or in writing through the Administrator, in accordance with League of Nations procedure, to the New Zealand Government or the Minister of External Affairs.

As to (18), the Samoan text reads, “that was, the ‘fine mat’ of the Government.” The important words “of the Government” are omitted from the English text. The allegation or complaint of the petitioners is without meaning, as they admit that “the presentation by the Fono of Faipules to the New Zealand Government in the first month of the past year, that was, the ‘fine mat’ of the Government and other valuable articles of our country, we approve of whole-heartedly.” It is strictly in accordance with the most ancient and unfailing custom of the Samoan people that the orator, whoever he may be and whatever the occasion, should act as the “voice” in publicly expressing the sentiment, opinion, or wishes of his chief, his district, or his *fono*, as the case may be. Toelupe, who is alleged to have spoken without authority, is the leading orator of Samoa, and for many years past has been the official “voice” of the Fono of Faipules. Toelupe acted as the “voice” of the Fono when the Faipules met the New Zealand parliamentary party in 1920; also when the Fono of Faipules met the Hon. E. P. Lee, Minister of External Affairs, in 1921; also when the delegation of the Fono of Faipules visited New Zealand in 1924–25; also when the delegation from the Faipules and people of Samoa presented a loyal address to T.R.H. the Duke and Duchess of York in New Zealand this year; also when the Fono in December last discussed the present agitation (see page 42 of Mandate Report, under heading “Statement by the Fono of Faipules”). On each and all these occasions Toelupe acted as the “voice” of the Fono, in accordance with ancient Samoan usage and custom, without comment or without challenge.

As to (19), the statement that the Minister of External Affairs was due to arrive in Samoa in October was made without authority by Mr. Nelson, the chairman of the Citizens Committee, on his return from his visit to Wellington. The Minister of External Affairs at that time had given no indication of the date fixed for his first official visit to the Mandated Territory, other than the assurance he gave in the House of Representatives in Committee on the Samoa Bill on the 12th August last year that he would pay his first visit to Samoa before he met the House again this year.