

VANUATU

Constitutional status: Independent republic.

Head of State: President John Bari (1999).

Head of Government: Prime Minister Donald Kalpokas (1998).

Main towns: PORT VILA (capital, on Efate; population 32 000); Luganville (on Santo; 10 000).

Land area: 12 195 sq km (12 main islands and 58 inhabited islets): Espiritu Santo, Malekula, Erromango and Efate—making up about half the total land area. Next in size are Ambrym, Tanna, Epi, Vanua Lava, Gaua (Santa Maria), Ambae, Maewo and Pentecost.

Sea area (EEZ): 680 000 sq km.

Population: 189 300 (1999 SPC estimate).

Languages: BISLAMA (Pidgin), English and French; and c100 indigenous (Austronesian) languages.

Adult literacy: 64 per cent (1994).

Currency: Vatu.

Time: +1100 hours UTC.

National day: 30 July (Independence Day).

GDP per capita: A\$1678 (1993).

Principal export earnings: Copra; beef; coffee and cocoa; tourism; timber; shells.

Political system: Elections are held every four years by universal suffrage for the 52-seat unicameral assembly. The president (who is head of state) is elected by secret ballot by an electoral college of parliament and the presidents of the provincial councils, to serve a five-year term. Executive power is vested in the prime minister, elected by secret ballot by members of parliament, and the council of ministers who are selected by the prime minister.

A national council of chiefs (*malvatumauri*) is elected by district councils. The *malvatumauri* meets at least once a year, with power to discuss all matters relating to custom and tradition and to make recommendations for the preservation and promotion of ni-Vanuatu culture and languages. The *malvatumauri* elects its own president.

Local government is managed by six provincial councils, and there are municipal councils, headed by a mayor, in Port Vila and Luganville.

Physical environment: The young volcanic islands of Vanuatu—some of which are still active—form a central chain extending south from the Banks Islands, broadly located to the west of Fiji and north of New Caledonia, between latitude 12–21° south and longitude 166–171° east. While several islands (the Torres Islands, Espiritu Santo, Malekula, Maewo and Pentecost) are formed from belts of older sedimentary rock, repeatedly uplifted and tilted, the eruptions which split a large island into the present Shepherd group in the east occurred only about 600 years ago. Santo has several high peaks, rising to a height of 1875 m above sea level (Mt Tabwemasana), with Mt Lairiri at 1650 m. Yasur on Tanna is an active volcano, as are Lopevi (Ulveah) and Mt Garet, on Santa Maria and Suretimeat on Vanua Lava. The predominant vegetation is dense rainforest, broken on some of the southern islands by patches of grassland, and there is some mangrove swamp. Coconuts grow widely as do introduced flora such as flamboyants, hibiscus and frangipani. Subsistence crops include yams, taro, manioc and bananas; subsistence fishing is significant, and cattle provide local and export meat. Timber is milled on Santo, Malekula, Erromango, Efate and Aneityum. The climate is hot and wet, with southeast trade winds most of the year and occasional hurricanes from January to April. Average humidity at Vila is 83 per cent. Annual rainfall: 2330 mm (Port Vila) and 3100 mm (Luganville).

History: The complex prehistory of Vanuatu suggests that the first Melanesian inhabitants may have settled about 4000 years ago (SETTLEMENT OF THE NORTHERN PACIFIC). Archaeological evidence indicates that LAPITA CULTURE existed on some islands between 1200 BC and the beginning of the Christian era, although there is also more pottery of a later tradition found in the central islands of the group.

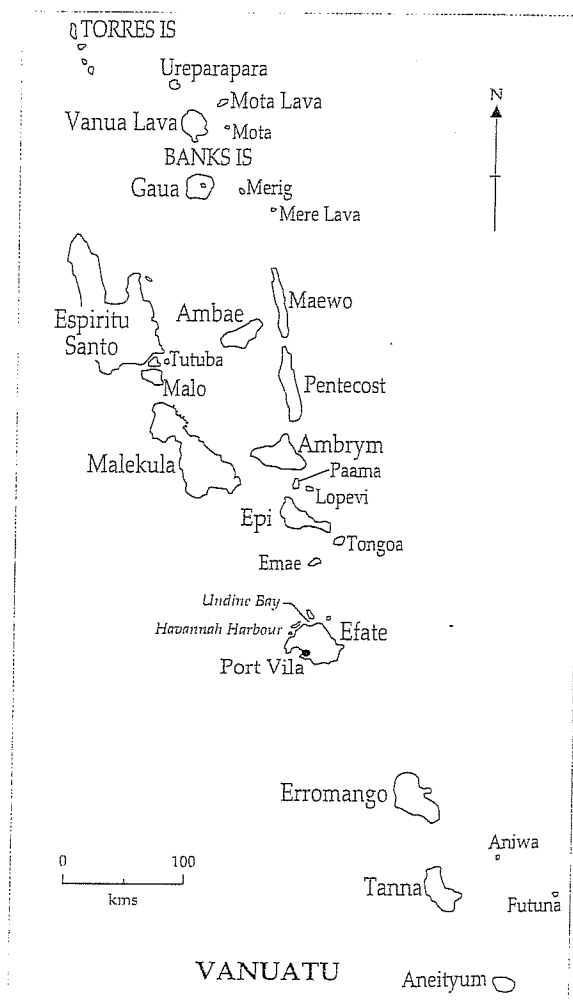
First European contact came with the arrival of the Portuguese explorer, Pedro Fernández de Quirós, in 1606. He visited the largest island in the archipelago and named it *Australia del Espíritu Santo*. More than 150 years later, in 1768, Louis Antoine de BOUGAINVILLE sailed into the area and named the archipelago the *Great Cyclades* (*Les Grandes Cyclades*). Then Captain James COOK arrived in 1774, charted the islands and renamed them the *New Hebrides*, apparently because the mountains recalled to him the islands off the Scottish coast. In 1789 William BLIGH noted several islands in what he named the *Banks group*, during his voyage by open boat following the *MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY*.

In the early years of the 19th century, the *New Hebrides* attracted both the *SANDALWOOD TRADE* (with the arrival of Captain Peter Dillon in 1825) and missionary interest. The death of the Reverend John WILLIAMS of the *LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY* (LMS), who landed and was murdered on Erromango in 1839, failed to deter later proselytizing attempts. The Rev T Heath of the LMS arrived with several Samoan PASTORS in 1840, followed by two more LMS missionaries in 1841, and then two Presbyterian missionaries—John Geddie in 1848 and John Inglis in 1852. Their efforts were more successful and by 1856, the islands were well on the way towards adopting Christianity. Bishop SELWYN brought missionaries from New Zealand to the northern islands of the group in 1859, establishing a station of the *Melanesian Mission* at Mota. His friend John Coleridge PATTESON settled there, successfully transcribing the Mota language and using it to train native teachers.

In 1847 the islanders were raided by labour recruiters in the *COLONIAL LABOUR TRADE*. The first shipment—65 men from Tanna and Erromango—were taken to New South Wales to work on Ben BOYD's sheep property, although the experiment was not considered a success. From 1863 Vanuatu labour was recruited for the cotton and sugar plantations in Fiji and Queensland. The sandalwood

trade ended in the mid 1860s, but *BLACKBIRDING* continued in Vanuatu until 1906.

European settlers began to arrive from 1865, establishing plantations on Efate in particular. The European powers negotiated an agreement in 1887 to establish a *Joint Naval Commission*. The Anglo-French *CONDOMINIUM* in 1906 gave the two countries joint administrative power, which meant the official introduction of two languages, two education systems, and two police forces. The majority of islanders who had been brought to Queensland as sugar workers were repatriated by 1906 (*KANAKAS IN AUSTRALIA*), but labour continued to be recruited for New Caledonia for several years. Not all migrants returned and, even among those who did, the death toll from disease was high. French settlers facing a shortage of island labour began to bring in Vietnamese workers on five-year terms of indenture from the early 1920s, although British planters were not permitted to employ Asian labour.

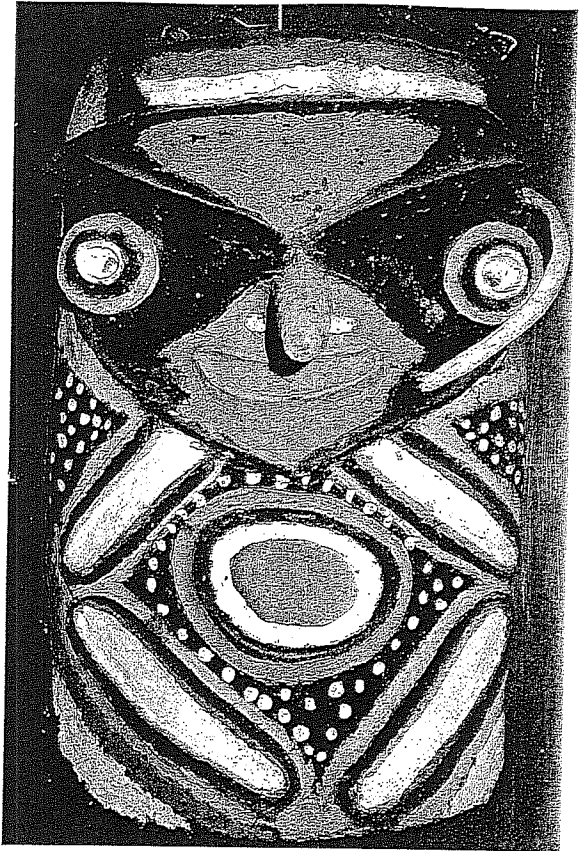


Vanuatu

In the Second World War, the French settlers declared their support for the Free French forces of General de Gaulle, and then at the end of 1941, American troops occupied Vila and Santo, providing considerable infrastructural investment as the islands became a major base for the Pacific War. The Americans and their visible prosperity became the catalyst for the rapid blossoming of the JOHN FRUM MOVEMENT on Tanna, a semi-political kind of cargo cult that has persevered into the 1990s.

In the late 1960s, a *kastom* movement emerged near Luganville under the leadership of Jimmy Moli Stephens. Calling himself Chief President Moses, he established a movement known as NAGRIAMEL (claiming a membership of 10 000 in 1969), which called for the return of alienated land. By 1971 Nagriamel had developed political aims and petitioned the United Nations for independence for Vanuatu. In June 1971 the New Hebrides National Party (later the Vanua'aku Pati) was formed, as was a new largely francophone party, the UPNH (Union de la Population des Nouvelles Hébrides), which later became the UCNH (Union des Communautés des Nouvelles Hébrides, today the Union of Moderate Parties). As more small political parties began to be established because of increasing agitation for change, the British and French governments were persuaded to initiate some constitutional reforms. Municipal councils for Vila and Santo (initially francophone-dominated) were established, and also in 1975, elections for the first Representative Assembly were held, in which the anglophone National Party/Vanua'aku Pati (VP) performed well. In 1977 a VP boycott of the elections left the francophone-dominated assembly in an untenable position of power, and a compromise was negotiated between all parties in 1978, to arrive at a 'government of national unity', with Father Gerard Leymang as chief minister, and the VP leader, Father Walter LINI, as deputy.

The 1979 general election produced a clear majority for the VP. Lini was elected chief minister, and the country became independent as the Republic of Vanuatu on 30 July 1980. Vanuatu, meaning the 'country that stands up', was the name chosen by the indigenous population. Meanwhile, rebels on Santo and Tanna (who had opposed the 1979 result, declaring their own independence separately in February 1980) continued an escalating series of disruptive tactics. In the absence of any British or French military response to the outbreak of violence, the new government asked for assistance from Papua New Guinea, which sent troops to Santo. Jimmy Stephens, whose son was killed in the process of capturing the rebels' headquarters at Vanafo, was



Traditional art, Vanuatu

taken prisoner along with about 200 secessionists, and other rebels fled.

In 1983 Vanuatu became the first island nation to declare itself nuclear free, refusing landing rights to American naval vessels and banning the dumping of nuclear waste. The 1983 and 1987 elections were again won by the VP, and Walter Lini remained in power until 1991, when he lost a no-confidence vote in parliament. In the subsequent elections, Maxime Carlot-Korman led a successful coalition group, the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP), into government and four years of unstable francophone-dominated alliances followed. The 1995 elections produced a record number of 170 candidates, with 12 political parties and 19 independents joining the contest. The internal disunity which beset the UMP centred on personal rivalry between Carlot-Korman and party president Serge Vohor Rialuth. The new assembly on 21 December elected Vohor—leader of a coalition of UMP and the National United Pati (NUP)—as prime minister. Walter Lini, now leading the NUP, agreed to become his deputy.

Their fragile partnership survived an ongoing series of crises over the next two years, with increasingly strident allegations of corruption, illegal acts and dubious investment decisions, and ending with an attempt to impeach the president, Jean-Marie Lény. At the start of 1998 Vanuatu's court of appeal

ruled that the president's decision to dissolve parliament (announced on 27 November) was 'lawful and constitutional', and new elections should be held. Public concern about political corruption erupted into a riot in Port Vila on 12 January, when members of the national superannuation scheme demanded the return of their contributions from the National Provident Fund (NPF), in the wake of a report by the OMBUDSMAN, Marie-Noëlle Ferrieux-Patterson, that NPF's coffers had been opened to provide discount loans to politicians.

Following the 1998 election, a new anti-corruption government was formed, with Donald Kalpokas (VP) elected as prime minister, supported by Walter Lini (NUP) as his deputy. After 7 months, this coalition was broken, and the government continued with the support of the UMP, with Willie Jimmy as deputy prime minister. Kalpokas, in his mid 50s, was prime minister briefly in the mid 1990s, and still retains his former portfolio of Foreign Affairs.

John Bani, elected president in May 1999, is a church minister, as was his predecessor Jean-Marie Lényé. Bani was an advocate of independence during the 1970s and he has not been involved in the political arena since 1980.—KRF

Further reading

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Van Trease, H N, 1987. *The Politics of Land in Vanuatu*, University of the South Pacific.