

ROTUMA DAY

Fiji may mark Rotuma's 135th Anniversary of its historic and multilingual Deed of Cession in 2016

Speaking after a recent Labour Day protest march last month in Brisbane, Australia, Suva-born Mr Vaivao J.E. Antonio OAM of Northern Brisbane, indicated he hoped to hear from Fijian Prime Minister, Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, and the Chiefs of Rotuma about the forthcoming Rotuma Day anniversary.

Mr. Antonio, 80, is better known as John to his Fijian friends and relatives including Rotumans. He contacted Commodore Bainimarama and the Rotuman Chiefs to remind them of the event. He suggested the possibility of issuing Fijian commemorative postage stamps and first day covers of Rotuman design for the Deed of Cession anniversary celebration.

He also proposed the need to permit international cruise ships to visit Rotuma specifically for the actual anniversary date on May 13. He also suggested that members of the Royal Family be invited for such a rare and significant Rotuman occasion.

John is affectionately known by his fellow Rotumans as the **fa re filo` ne puku**, meaning the stamp man, because he put their beloved far flung island of Rotuma onto the world map of postage stamps, firstly, in 1966, to mark the island's 175th Anniversary of European Discovery by Capt. Edwards in HMS Pandora, the ship that was sent to the Pacific to search for the mutineers of the Bounty.

Twenty-five years later, in 1991, he organised Rotuma's bicentenary of discovery. Once again, the beautiful tiny Polynesian island attracted world-wide publicity. He was assisted by well-known Sydney radio broadcaster, Australian-Rotuman Elizabeth Gibson-Benz.

John is an international freelance photo-journalist and a member of the Australian Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAAA). He is also an ardent amateur philatelist. Previously, in the early 1950s, he encouraged and helped the Fijian government to issue a set of local stamps of Rotuman design. It depicted Rotuma's Paramount Chief Fakaraufono and his wife Lalo, both in Rotuman costume.

It may be of interest to some Rotumans that two Rotuman participants of the Deed of Cession, namely, Ralifo (Surname: Fesau) and Kitione, prepared the Rotuman and Fijian translations of the Deed, and also assisted in the interpretation of its English version. Both were Wesleyan/Methodist clergymen. The former was a great grandfather of John Antonio.

Footnote. The latter would like to hear from Kitione's descendants concerning his surname, as well as a brief genealogical history of Kitione. Contribution will be acknowledged.

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