

# THE PACIFIC CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES



SELF-DETERMINATION INFORMATION PACK

# MAOHI NUI





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## MAOHI NUI

**1767**

Samuel Wallis arrives in Tahiti, kills many Tahitians and names the island 'King George's Land'. He sets up the first trade with the islanders and claims the island for England.

**1769**

Captain James Cook landed in the Matavai baie. He gave more information on Tahiti which raised the desire to the LMS to send missionaries

**1842**

The French Protectorate of Tahiti and Moorea was established

**1903**

The Polynesian islands officially became a part of France with the designation 'Etablissements francais d'Océanie' (EFO).

**1963**

French Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique for nuclear testing opens on Moruroa and Fangataufa

**1981**

Underground shafts are dug and the first underground tests begin

**1985**

French secret agents blow up the New Zealand-based Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior as it prepares for a protest voyage to the nuclear test site on Moruroa.

**1996**

In French Polynesia, the decision angered many Tahitians, and riots in the capital, Papeete, caused millions of dollars worth of damage and saw the airport terminal burned down. President Chirac ended nuclear testing in the Pacific that same year

**2009**

For years, the French government denied that the tests had any adverse impacts of French Polynesian health or environment until 2009. The French government establishes a programme to give compensation to victims of radiation exposure. Of more than 1,000 claims, only 19 people have ever received compensation

**OCTOBER 2018**

EPM, PCC and WCC take part in the UN 4th Committee on Decolonization.

**2021**

French President Emmanuel Macron makes his first official visit to Maohi Nui and states that France "owes a debt" to its Polynesian island territories over their historic use as nuclear weapons testing sites. A statement that two other Presidents have made in the past

**1768**

Louis-Antoine de Bougainville visits Tahiti, ogles the women and begins the myth of 'New Cythera'. Not knowing that Wallis had already been there, Bougainville claimed Tahiti for France.

**1797**

The London Missionary Society arrives with 30 missionaries and 4 ordained ministers at Pointe Vénus in Tahiti – the Tahitians are welcoming but hard to convert, so only a few of the missionaries stay.

**1888**

Annexation of Maohi Nui and the remaining island groups

**1957-1958**

The territory is officially named French Polynesia and votes to remain part of France amid riots in Pape'ete. Pouvana'a a Oopa, leader of the separatist movement, is exiled to France. France reclassified the colony as an overseas territory of the French Republic

**1966**

The first atmospheric nuclear test is conducted in Moruroa

**1984**

Maohi Nui gains internal autonomy from France, which is later expanded in 1990 and again in 1996

**1995**

A moratorium was eventually placed on nuclear testing, but that was lifted by president Jacques Chirac in 1995 so France could try out a new warhead for submarines

**2004**

Maohi Nui is given the status of 'Overseas Collectivity'. A Maohi Pro-Independence party takes office under Oscar Tenmaru, and soon after is removed through a "legal coup" by the French.

**2016**

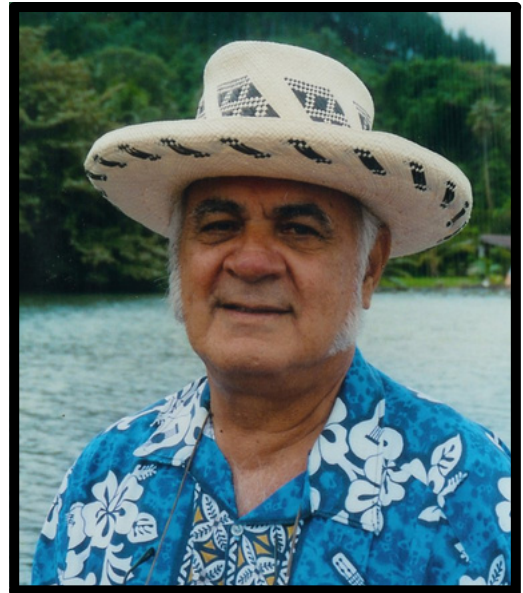
French Polynesia joins the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

**2019**

EPM Paroisse de Vaitape and the Pacific Conference of Churches take part in the UNC24 and 4th Committee on Decolonization

## PAPA JOHN DOOM

Born in 1936, in Papeete, Papa John grew up on the island of Tubuai, in the Austral archipelago. After leaving the French civil service, he would spend decades fighting for justice for the victims of the nuclear tests which continued His calm counsel but driving passion slowly forced the French State to acknowledge the need for clean-up of the nuclear test sites. France is still resisting however full compensation for the civilian and military personnel who staffed the military bases. In 2001, working with Roland Oldham and Bruno Barrillot, Papa John co-founded Moruroa e Tatou– the association of former Maohi workers from Moruroa and Fangataufa. John was deeply committed to the Protestant church, appointed as a deacon in 1962 and then, after 1972, serving for five years as principal of the Hermon Theological School. He was appointed s Secretary General of the Eglise Evangélique de la Polynésie française (EEPF)– later renamed the Etaretia Porotetani Maohi (EPM) – in 1971. After working on the executive committee of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), he took up an appointment with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva. From 1989 until his retirement in 2000, Doom served as the WCC’s executive secretary for the Pacific, carrying the voice of Pacific peoples into the wider ecumenical debate. “The goal is to help those who are oppressed and give a voice to those that have none,” he said in an interview. “We all have the capacity to intervene in world affairs.” Independence leader Oscar Temaru described Papa John as a man of letters, the divine word, and above all a humanist. “It was this curiosity that led him to witness France’s first atmospheric nuclear test – a monstrosity he immediately recognised,” Temaru said. “The anti-nuclear movement found in him a peaceful but committed warrior.” Thousands of Maohi (Polynesian) workers staffed the test sites during the thirty years of French nuclear testing in French Polynesia between 1966 and 1996. Five years after the last French test, Moruroa e Tatou (Moruroa and Us) took up their cause. The movement was founded by Papa John, Bruno Barrillot and Roland Oldham and eventually brought together thousands of former workers. They spent years challenging successive French governments and local leaders who refused to address the health and environmental consequences of nuclear testing. Papa John stood firm on nuclear testing until his death and was the region’s most vocal and respected advocate on the issue.



## THE RAINBOW WARRIOR BOMBING

IN July 1985, French secret service agents swam beneath the Greenpeace flagship, Rainbow Warrior, in Auckland harbour and placed two bombs on its hull. Close to midnight the bombs exploded, ripping a hole in the ship, killing Portuguese-Dutch photographer, Fernando Pereira. While the bombing stopped the vessel from its planned peaceful protest in waters off the nuclear test site at Moruroa Atoll in Maohi Nui it galvanised international condemnation against France. After initial denials, it became obvious that France was involved in the attack and its agents were arrested as they attempted to flee New Zealand. Then, French Prime Minister, Laurent Fabius, appeared on television and told a shocked public: “Agents of the DGSE (Secret Service) sank this boat. They acted on orders.” Secret agents, Dominique Prieur and Alain Mafart, who had posed as Swiss tourists, pleaded guilty to charges of manslaughter and wilful damage, attracting sentences of 10 and seven years. A UN negotiated settlement meant that they were transferred to Hao atoll, a French military base in French Polynesia where they remained for less than two years. The bombing drew attention not only to Greenpeace activities but to France’s continued nuclear testing in the Pacific. French nuclear testing in Maohi Nui ended in 1995.



## STRATEGIC ASSET IN THE PACIFIC

As one of three French assets in the Pacific – the others being Kanaky (New Caledonia) and Wallis and Futuna – Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) is strategic in military and economic terms. Made up of the Marquesas, Tuamotu, Society, Gambier, and Austral groups of islands, it straddles the Pacific between Japan and the United States on China’s Belt and Road Initiative. It has a large exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of around 5,030,000 km<sup>2</sup>, while only having a land area of around 3521 km<sup>2</sup>. Maohi Nui has around 70 per cent of its EEZ bordering on international waters, with the remaining EEZ bordering three Pacific countries, the Cook Islands to the west, the Republic of Kiribati to the northwest, and Pitcairn Islands (UK) to the southeast. It is a base for French military terrestrial, maritime and air units with a large signals interception and electronic intelligence gathering facility.

## QUICK FACTS ABOUT MAOHI NUI :

- Population: 275,918 (2017, Statistical Bureau of French Polynesia)
- Land area: 3,600 km<sup>2</sup>
- Exclusive economic zone: 4,767,242 km<sup>2</sup>
- Listed as a Non-Self-Governing Territory
- Maohi Nui is on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories from 1946 to 1947, following the transmission of information on French Establishments in Oceania by France under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations.
- In 2013, the General Assembly re-inscribed Maohi Nui, by recognizing that “French Polynesia remains a Non-Self-Governing Territory within the meaning of the Charter”.



## **TREATY FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (TPNW)**

Less than 40 months after the United Nations called for signatures, the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was ratified by the required minimum 50 countries, making it binding on all member states. The TPNW stops countries from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, or stockpiling nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Signatories are barred from transferring or receiving nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, control over such weapons, or any assistance with activities prohibited under the treaty. States are also prohibited from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. States cannot allow the stationing, installation, or deployment of nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices in their territory. In addition to the Treaty's prohibitions, countries are obligated to provide victim assistance and help with environmental remediation efforts. The PCC supported the ratification of the TPNW because of the enormous damage caused in Kiribati, Maohi and the Northern Pacific since the first nuclear tests in 1946. Britain, France and the United States conducted these tests, and all have failed to make just reparation for the physical and environmental damage caused. In early 2020, the PCC supported the World Council of Churches in a submission to Fiji's Parliament in support of the ratification of the TPNW. Fiji ratified the treaty in July of the same year. In the early 1970s the PCC was instrumental in organising marches and protests against nuclear testing in conjunction with the Young Women's Christian Association and the Student Christian Movement. Several books on nuclear testing were written to raise awareness, including one funded by the PCC and its partners.

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## **NEW CLEAR WAYS**

FRENCH nuclear testing on Mururoa ended 25 years ago, in no small way due to escalating global protests. For 30 years – first above and then below – the atolls of Fangataufa and Mururoa in Maohi Nui, France conducted tests of nuclear weapons. Records show that the first test on July 2, 1966 the first blast turned the peaceful lagoon into a cauldron of water, threw fish into the sky and bent coconut trees out of shape. A total of 193 tests on the two totals would turn Mururoa and Fangataufa into desolate wastelands which continue to leach toxic fluid into the sea. Some of the explosions were 200 times the strength of the bombs dropped by the United States on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. More than 1000 people – islanders and French civil servants and troops – would be exposed to radiation from the testing and believing they were safe. Today, former atoll workers and their descendants remain crippled, deformed or seriously ill as a result of the tests. Of more than 1000 claims, only 19 people have ever received compensation. Despite repeated claims for compensation, France has paid limited compensation to the victims and refuses to recognise any liability. Anger amongst locals overflowed in 1995 when street protests ended with attacks on property and the international airport, disrupting communications and the lucrative tourism industry. The test sites of Moruroa and Fangataufa – once the pride of the republic and source of employment for many – remain are French no-go zones. Environmental impact to the atolls appears to have been worse than previously conceded by France. The soil around the atoll remains highly radioactive, and there are fears that the atolls have been weakened by the blasts and could collapse, triggering a tidal wave. For years, the French Defence Ministry insisted that the tests caused no environmental damage and that the health of workers was not put at risk. But Richard Tuheiava, a member of the French Polynesian Assembly, said the effects were clear. "The fact is since the nuclear testing, most of the diseases are cancer and leukemia. Most of the diseases are a result of the nuclear testing," he said. Scientific studies have backed this claim, suggesting heightened rates of cancer in those exposed to radiation. The environmental impact, too, appears to have been worse than previously conceded by France. The soil around the atoll remains highly radioactive, and there are fears that the atolls have been weakened by the blasts and could collapse, triggering a tidal wave. Despite the mounting evidence, the French government denied all suggestion that the nuclear tests were harmful to health until 2009, when it introduced a programme to give compensation to victims of radiation exposure. Polynesian advocacy groups based in Maohi Nui continue to battle for justice and reparation for the victims of nuclear testing. They also fight for France to rehabilitate the once tropical paradise transformed so cruelly by the ravages of nuclear fallout. Territory president Edouard Fritch acknowledged that France had called for face-to-face talks with the people of Maohi to discuss nuclear testing and the subsequent damage to people and the environment. Fritch said the State had a duty of truth and justice towards the Polynesian community. But the Polynesians, led by the Maohi Protestant Church want the talks held in Papeete, not Paris. Today, 55 years after the first nuclear test, the people of Maohi Nui continue to seek justice with the help of the church and community advocacy groups.

## DECOLONIZATION, MAOHI, THE UN AND PCC

The Etaretia Porotetani Maohi (Maohi Protestant Church) and the Pacific Conference of Churches have cooperated for decades on two main issues – the end to nuclear testing and decolonisation. After nuclear tests ended in 1995, the focus shifted to reparation for victims of the tests and their families. There has been limited success in this area with France refusing to compensate or provide hospitalisation and medical care for victims.



The PCC delegation meets President Edouard Fritch at the Legislative Assembly in 2014

After 2000, the PCC joined the struggle for Maohi to be returned to the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation, known as the C24. A series of meetings between the PCC Self-determination Team and the Etaretia Porotetani Maohi saw a series of petitions to the UN and Pacific governments seeking support for the territory. This resulted in Maohi being returned to the C24 list – from which it was dropped in 1947 – in 2013. The PCC General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan, joined the Maohi Protestant Church at the UN and criticised the world body for its lack of action to get reparations for the victims of the French nuclear weapons tests. Rev Bhagwan urged the C24 to implement the decolonisation process. "Otherwise really what you're having is just having a meeting every year and the process does not continue. If there is a political will, if there is a true desire to ensure that territories go through this process of decolonisation, then there needs to be a work programme and there needs to be a budget allocation. And the lack of this, the lack of movement of this and the silence of this issue is deafening." Rev Bhagwan was part of the delegation to the UN which was made up of representatives of the Maohi Protestant church, of young people, the Moruroa e tatou – the organisation championing the issue of justice for the nuclear test veterans and representatives from the local communities. "The French-occupied Polynesia territory, as we know in the Pacific as Maohi Nui, has been reinscripted on the list of territories for decolonisation joining Kanaky-New Caledonia," he said. "So, a delegation from Maohi Nui accompanied by the Pacific conference of churches to the UN sitting of the special committee on decolonisation." The C24 recognized the concerns of the territory related to the consequences of those activities for the lives and health of the people, especially children and vulnerable groups. And it called on France to pay attention to that and to address the need for France to address the issue of reparations.



Left: PCC delegates in Papeete in 2014

Top Right: PCC delegates at the Executive Committee in Papeete in 2014

Bottom Right: PCC General Secretary Rev. James Bhagwan and Programmes Manager Frances Namoumou

## DO YOU WANT TO HELP?

When it comes to self-determination, everybody can lend a hand, even you. If you'd like to help by becoming an advocate on the issues you've seen here, send us an email at [media01.pcc@gmail.com](mailto:media01.pcc@gmail.com) and we'll be happy to put you in touch with our staff to work out a personal plan.

Should you wish to help financially, email us or contact our General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan [jamesb@pcc.org.fj](mailto:jamesb@pcc.org.fj) for details on how you can make a difference.

We also have a limited number of internships available. So email the Programmes Manager, Frances Namoumou, [francesn@pcc.org.fj](mailto:francesn@pcc.org.fj) to see how you can join our staff for a temporary position and help in the struggle for Pacific freedom. Thank you for your interest and God bless you!