MEMBER PROFILE

BAROTSELAND

Barotse National Freedom Alliance

UNREPRESENTED NATIONS & PEOPLES ORGANIZATION
unpo.org

Last updated: August 2015
Status: Occupied territory
Population: 902,974
Area: 126,384km²
Capital City: Mongu Lealui

Language: Silozi (lingua franca/national language), English (official State language) and many other languages and dialects
Religion: Christianity and traditional beliefs

Ethnic Groups: 38 ethnic groups, among which Kwangwa, Mafwe, Matotela, Mambukushu, Masubiya, Imilangu, Matoka-leya, Makwamashi, Mambunda, Makwamakoma (Bamakoma), Mbowe (Mambowe), Mishulundu, Muenyi (Mwenyi), Mahumbe, Makwamulonga, Ndundulu, Manyengo, Mashanjo, Mankoya, and Simaa.

OVERVIEW

Barotseland is the traditional land of the Barotse and comprises the upper Zambezi Valley, in Southern Central Africa. Nowadays, the Barotse territory falls largely within the borders of Zambia and coincides with the delimitations of the Western Province of Zambia. Mongu is the administrative and commercial capital of Barotseland, while the traditional winter and summer capitals are Lealui and Limulungu. These are the homes of His Majesty the Litunga.

The Barotse are traditionally a diverse people. The Barotse nation was born when Ayuli migrants from the Congo settled along the Zambezi River in the 15th century. They were joined by migrants from South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. As many as 38 ethnic groups can be found in the region, in a state of cohabitation (for an overview of these groups, please see above). Each ethnic group has its own dialect or language; however Silozi - a hybrid language, influenced by the many ethnic languages of Barotseland (the main influences being the Luyana and Kololo languages) - serves as lingua franca. It is spoken by approximately 722,600 people and is taught in primary and secondary schools. English is also spoken by a portion of the Barotse population and used mainly for official purposes.

The upper Zambezi Valley is a floodplain, providing the Barotse with fertile land. Naturally, their livelihoods are mostly reliant on wetland resources. Barotseland’s economy is based on combined crop farming, livestock keeping, fishing and natural resource exploitation. The Barotse also benefit from the floodplains being somewhat of a tourist attraction. Natural resources include oil, gas, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, gold, copper, iron, quartz, limestone, cobalt, uranium, diatomite, silica sand, and salt.

UNPO MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

The people of Barotseland reject the position taken by the Government of Zambia to continue exercising authority over Barotseland, as this amounts to the annexation of the territory of Barotseland.

The people of Barotseland consider current Zambian control over the territory to be in violation of the 1964 Barotseland Agreement, which transferred all the obligations and rights regarding Barotseland to the Government of Zambia, under the clear provision that Barotseland were to remain autonomous. However, instead of becoming an autonomous
region, Barotseland found itself dispossessed of the status of an autonomous region and incorporated into Zambia as an ordinary province.

For the past decades the Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE) has advocated, negotiated and sought external support writing letters and petitions to the African Union, the South African Development Community and the United Nations. In response they have been arrested, killed, detained without trial and persecuted by the Zambian government.

On 26 and 27 March 2012, the Barotse National Council resolved that Zambia and Barotseland should go separate ways as independent sovereign States. The Barotse Government is putting in place measures to secure the reconstitution of Barotseland as a Nation State separate from the Republic of Zambia. Barotseland, represented by the Barotse National Freedom Alliance, was admitted to UNPO on 23 November 2013.

CURRENT ISSUES

Land ownership and right to self-governance
Up until 1964, Barotseland was a fully-fledged national State with a rich cultural heritage derived from centuries of existence and traditions. However, it was incorporated into Zambia as a violation of the 1964 Barotseland Agreement. Barotse nationals do not consider themselves Zambians and wish to enforce their right to self-determination and self-governance.

Repression
In 2011, Barotse people were shot and killed in Mongu when police broke up a meeting of activists calling for secession. Protests for the restoration of the 1964 Barotseland Agreement have been met by the Zambian Government with repressive measures. Hundreds of Barotse activists have been arrested and imprisoned based on charges of treason. This goes against the principles of human rights and freedom of expression.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
The Barotse nation was founded by Queen Mbuywamwambwa, the Lozi matriarch, over 500 years ago, and was composed of migrants from the Congo, who were later joined by migrants from South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia. The Barotse (the Lozi) reached the Zambezi River in the 15th century and their kingdom grew to comprise some 25 peoples from Southern Rhodesia to the Congo and from Angola to the Kafue River. By 1880 the Kingdom was stabilized and King Lewanika signed a treaty on 26 June 1889 to provide the Kingdom international recognition as a State.
After the discovery of diamonds, King Lewanika began trading with Europe. The first trade concession was signed on 27 June 1889 with Harry Ware. In return, King Lewanika and his Kingdom were to be protected. Ware transferred his concession to John Cecil Rhodes of the British South Africa Company. Seeking improvement with regards to the military protection and with the intention to sign a treaty with the British Government, King Lewanika signed on 26 June 1890 the Lochner Concession, which put Barotseland under the protection of the British South Africa Company, while being regarded as another unit of Northern Rhodesia. At the beginning of the 20th century, during King Yeti III's reign, the King petitioned the British Crown, inter alia, the "direct crown rule of the Imperial Government as a protected native State over the entire territory known as Barotseland-North-Western-Rhodesia" and the cancellation of all the concessions. In response, in 1923, the colonial office informed the King that the crown "was to take over the administration of Northern Rhodesia in 1924."

In 1953 Barotseland was declared a protectorate, while Northern Rhodesia joined the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In 1957, the Barotse Native Government appointed a Constitution Review Committee and the Barotse National Council resolved the secession of Barotseland from the Federation, and remained under the protection of her Majesty's Government, in line with the 1900 Agreement, which specifically provided for the case of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland being allowed to proceed to independence. After the dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1963, Barotseland leaders sought their secession from Northern Rhodesia. Barotseland and Northern Rhodesia signed the 1964 Barotseland Agreement to bring the two British Territories (Protectorates) together as one nation. Through this agreement, a transfer of all the obligations and rights between Barotseland and Zambia took place. The Agreement presented Barotse autonomy within independent Zambia. However, soon after independence, the Republic of Zambia frustrated the operation of the 1964 Barotseland Agreement and unilaterally terminated this treaty in 1969. The people of Barotseland, disappointed by this turn of events, attempted to find ways to peacefully gain their independence from Zambia. In the last few decades, they have lobbied, negotiated and sought external support writing letters and petitions to the African Union, the South African Development Community and the United Nations, in this regard.

On 7 November 2012, the Barotse Royal Establishment petitioned the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), an African Union organ based in Banjul, Gambia, to determine that:

a) The rights of the people of Barotseland to self-determination, as enshrined under Article 20(1) of the African Charter, have been violated by Zambia;

b) Zambia should cease to administer Barotseland immediately, and;

c) Zambia should immediately engage in a discussion with officials of Barotseland's institutions with the sole purpose of working out modalities for a handover of the administration of Barotseland within the shortest possible time under the auspices of the African Union and the United Nations.

The 13th Extra-Ordinary Session of the ACHPR, held in Banjul from 18 to 25 February 2013, decided to be seized of the Complaint and registered it as Communication No. 429/12. The decision of the Commission on seizure held that "the Complaint revealed prima facie evidence of violation of the rights guaranteed by the African Union. Consequently the Commission called on the Complainant to present evidence and arguments on admissibility in accordance with Rule 105(1) of its Rules of Procedure." On 3 December 2013 the Barotse Royal Establishment presented to the Commission in a 300-page dossier its evidence and arguments to buttress the petition in order to achieve a peaceful settlement towards the formal separation of the two States of Barotseland and Zambia.
POLITICAL SITUATION

Barotseland was a protectorate under Great Britain and became part of Zambia at the country’s independence in 1964. Barotse representatives signed the 1964 Barotseland Agreement, whose purpose was to transfer Barotseland from British to Zambian protection. However, while Zambia was supposed to inherit Britain’s obligations with regards to Barotseland, it chose to incorporate Barotseland into the newly formed Republic of Zambia, in clear violation of the 1964 Agreement. Since 1965, the Barotse have been committed to a peaceful disengagement with the Zambian Government. However, their efforts to raise international awareness on their situation and to protest for their rights have been met with repressive behaviour from the Zambian Government. On 27 March 2012, the Barotse National Council resolved that Barotseland should be a sovereign State.

The Barotse have maintained their political organization and societal structure. Traditionally an absolute monarchy, the system has undergone reforms to become a democratic monarchy. It is led by a king, the Litunga, who acts as a ceremonial Head of State, and a full Government including a Prime Minister, the Ngambela. The Barotse political system comprises many levels: the base unit is the village, which is administrated by a Munzi, or village headman. Villages fall under the jurisdiction of a branch (which usually oversees twenty to forty villages), administrated by a Silalanda. Branches are overseen by wards, which are administrated by a Silalo. Each ward oversees several branches. Wards fall under the jurisdiction of districts administrated by Sikiliti. Each district oversees several wards. The highest level is the national level, which is administrated by the Government, with executive, legislative and judiciary organs.