MEMBER PROFILE

WESTERN TOGOLAND

Homeland Study Group Foundation
Status: Underrepresented and occupied territory. Population: 4 million

Official language: English

Local languages: Ewe, Dangme, Avatime, Nyagbo, Tafi, Logba, Likpe, Ahlor, Nkonya, Santrokofi, Bowiri, Akpafu Buem-Leleemi Anyanga, Atwedi, Akebu, Ntrobo, Adele, Kotokoli, Kokomba, Nanumba, Nawuri, Sisala, Nchumuru, Chokosi, Getaba, Moba, Gruma, Mamprusi and Busanga, among others

Ethnicity: tied to local languages of the peoples. Religions: Christianity, Islam, Afa, Voodoo and Yeveh

OVERVIEW

Before the arrival of imperial powers and the region becoming a German Protectorate, the various peoples that comprise present day Togo and Western Togoland were organised in different traditional areas, each administered by its own ruler. However, the Protectorate of German Togo was divided between the British, who took control of what is Western Togoland today, and the French, who took control of present day Togo, following the defeat of Germany in World War I and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Western Togoland remained under British control up until and after the Second World War, when the political situation changed and it became a United Nations (UN) Trust Territory still under administration of Great Britain. During the period of decolonisation in Africa the UN called for a plebiscite on the future of Western Togoland, whether it would become independent or join in a union with the Gold Coast (now Ghana) after the latter’s independence. Organised by Great Britain, the plebiscite pointed towards union with the Gold Coast and upon the independence of the State of Ghana in 1957, Western Togoland was incorporated into the new State.

Despite concerns over the lawfulness of the referendum and questions about Britain’s concerns for the peoples of Western Togoland and their will for independence, unification with Ghana as an administrative region became a reality. The denial for the people of Western Togoland to have a fair say in their future is something that persists to this day. Earlier in 2017 seven members of the Homeland Study Group Foundation (HSGF) were arrested for wearing T-shirts with the inscription "9 May 2017 is OUR DAY Western Togoland", referring to the date when the organisation attempted to declare independence. Under-development and investment in Western Togoland is the norm, with the few initiatives that are in place such as the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Centre discontinued with no valid reason. This has led to its overall progression being severely compromised. Some districts of Volta such as Adaklu and Kadjebi are amongst the poorest in Ghana.

UNPO REPRESENTATION

The HSGF has been a Member of UNPO since 2017. They represent the movement for self-determination, secession and independence of Western Togoland from Ghana. The group was founded in 1994 by Mr. Charles Kormi Kudzordzi as a platform from which to discuss the political, civil and human rights of the people of Western Togoland.
UNPO PERSPECTIVE

UNPO supports the peaceful campaign for self-determination that the HSGF has undertaken. It is important that the true will of the people in Western Togoland be heard, without coercion, threat or misuse of the judicial system to silence advocates of independence. Furthermore, UNPO believes in the importance of the history and culture of West Togoland to be taught freely and condemns all violence and discrimination against the people of the region in its entirety. To this extent, it is important for Western Togolanders to have an equal chance to develop, both socially and economically.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The British and French fought the German military in a battle to control the Kamina Wireless Station, which linked Germany’s African colonies to Berlin. In the ensuing battle, German troops lost control of the Station and consequently the entirety of their protectorate. Following Germany’s defeat Togoland was occupied by the allied powers, and in the subsequent Treaty of Versailles it was divided between the French and British under mandates of the League of Nations. Following WWII, Western Togoland became a UN Trust Territory under the administration of the United Kingdom.

In December 1955 the United Nations Trusteeship Committee carried out a mission to the region in which they decided that a referendum in Western Togoland to decide its future as independent or unified with the Gold Coast must be held. The referendum was organised by the British and the results indicated, 63.9% to 36.1%, to unification with the soon to be independent State of Ghana. The following year Ghana gained its independence and Western Togoland was reduced to an administrative region being renamed “Volta”.

The British claimed at the time that Western Togoland was too small to be independent, with no coastline to harbour foreign trade and lacking minerals to sustain its economy with, and with these points in mind pushed for the referendum. However, there is a strong sentiment that the referendum and its outcome were orchestrated by the British to serve their own interests.

CURRENT SITUATION

Due to the fact that the union with Ghana was not carried out with due diligence and care for the needs of the people, Western Togoland has since faced innumerable hardships. Currently, the constitution of Ghana does not address the particularities of Western Togoland, resulting in massive administrative neglect by the government of Ghana. The consequence of this is large-scale social and economic underdevelopment, leading Western
Togolanders to feel like second-class citizens vulnerable to marginalisation and discrimination.

Politicians periodically further this marginalisation: in 2008, Kwabena Agyapong, from the New Patriotic Party (NPP), attacked Ewes and the people of Hohoe stating that "there are no human beings in the Volta region". Four years later, in 2012, Congressman Kennedy Agyapong called for activists of the NPP to take machetes and attack the Ewes living in the Ashanti region. When, as a result of an evacuation exercise on Dija Island, 120 Ewes including pregnant women and children drowned in the Volta Lake, a Ghanaian Member of Parliament asked "of what importance is it for 120 Ewes dying in the Volta Lake to cause a national furor?". As was demonstrated by the unjust arrest on 9 May 2017 of seven members of the HSGF, any call to address the matter and finally settle the issue of Western Togoland's continuing existence in Ghana is heavily suppressed.

CULTURE

The peoples of Western Togoland have a very rich culture that places a high premium on respect for womanhood. Puberty rites idolising chastity as the pride of womanhood and as marriage rites are of primary importance for Western Togolanders. Women should not be exposed to what is considered to be public ridicule.

Traditionally, the people of Western Togoland give due regard to the natural environment hence traditional laws protect common resources such as community watersheds and forests, as well as wild and aquatic life. Taboo forests and totems span the territory.

Western Togoland's culture places huge importance on traditions, heritage, respect for the elderly and leadership.

OCCUPATION

Some of the traditional occupations of the people of Western Togoland include fishing, subsistent farming, wood carving, weaving, hunting and metal crafting. After the arrival of the Germans, intensive agriculture and new forms of craftsmanship were introduced to Western Togolanders and incorporated into their culture.

FAMILY SYSTEMS & TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE

Polygamy is practiced among the peoples of Western Togoland but coquetry and vanity are considered a disgrace to women. Although a father is the patriarch of each family, grandparents also play a significant role in the guidance of the family. This is how an order is maintained, with a unique chain of command. Therefore, each father is responsible to the
extended family's head, answering to the clan head, who himself is under the authority of the town chief, who responds to the Paramount Chief or the King of the People.

ENTERTAINMENT
The wealth of Western Togoland's culture is displayed in the traditional dances of its people, such as Agbadza, Gadzo, Keinka, Borborbor and Asafo. Such dances play a big part during festivals, funerals and other public events. They are also practiced in smaller gatherings as a form of entertainment.

Funerals are instances in which community members and relatives come together to solidify cordiality through expressions of condolence to the bereaved. People travel hundreds of miles to attend funerals of loved ones.