

Mentawai Islands Indonesia

South-East Asia

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Geography - Mentawai

Mentawai Islands

The Mentawai Islands are a chain of four main islands and about 70 islets 150 kilometres across the Mentawai Strait off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. The largest, Sibarut, is about 3,800 km², and the other main islands are Sipura, North Pagai and South Pagai. They are largely populated by indigenous Mentawai people.

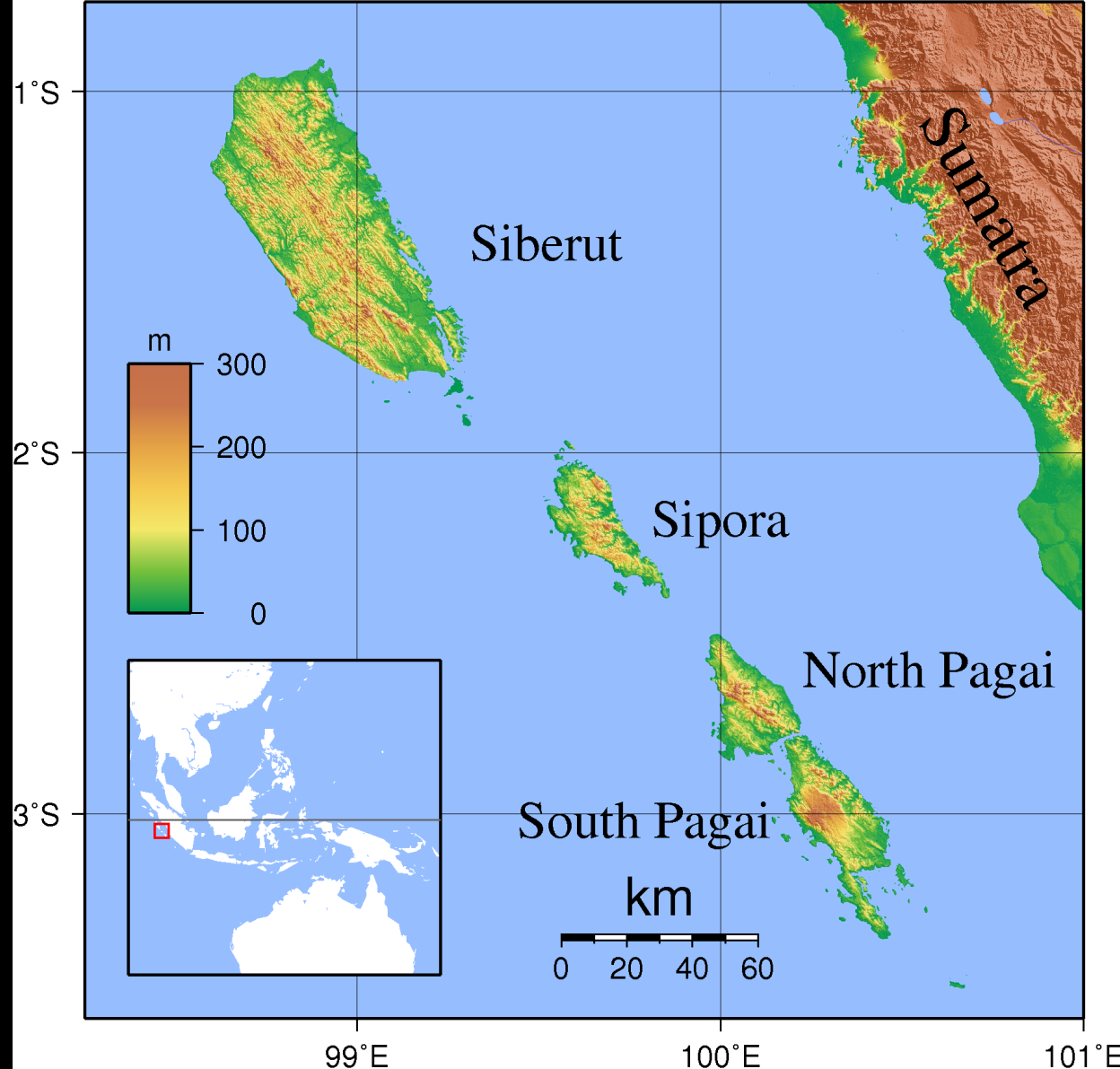


South-East Asia

Mentawai
Islands,
Indonesia



Mentawai Islands, Indonesia



Mentawai Islands, Indonesia





Mentawai Islands

Mentawai Islands

The population today is about 87,000, but was 25,000 in 1954. The main crop was coconuts, which the natives bartered for tobacco, since they did not know money. Later, Rahmat showed them how to trade for more useful goods.



Mentawai Islands



Mentawai Islands

Mentawai Islands





Mentawai Islands



Mentawai Islands

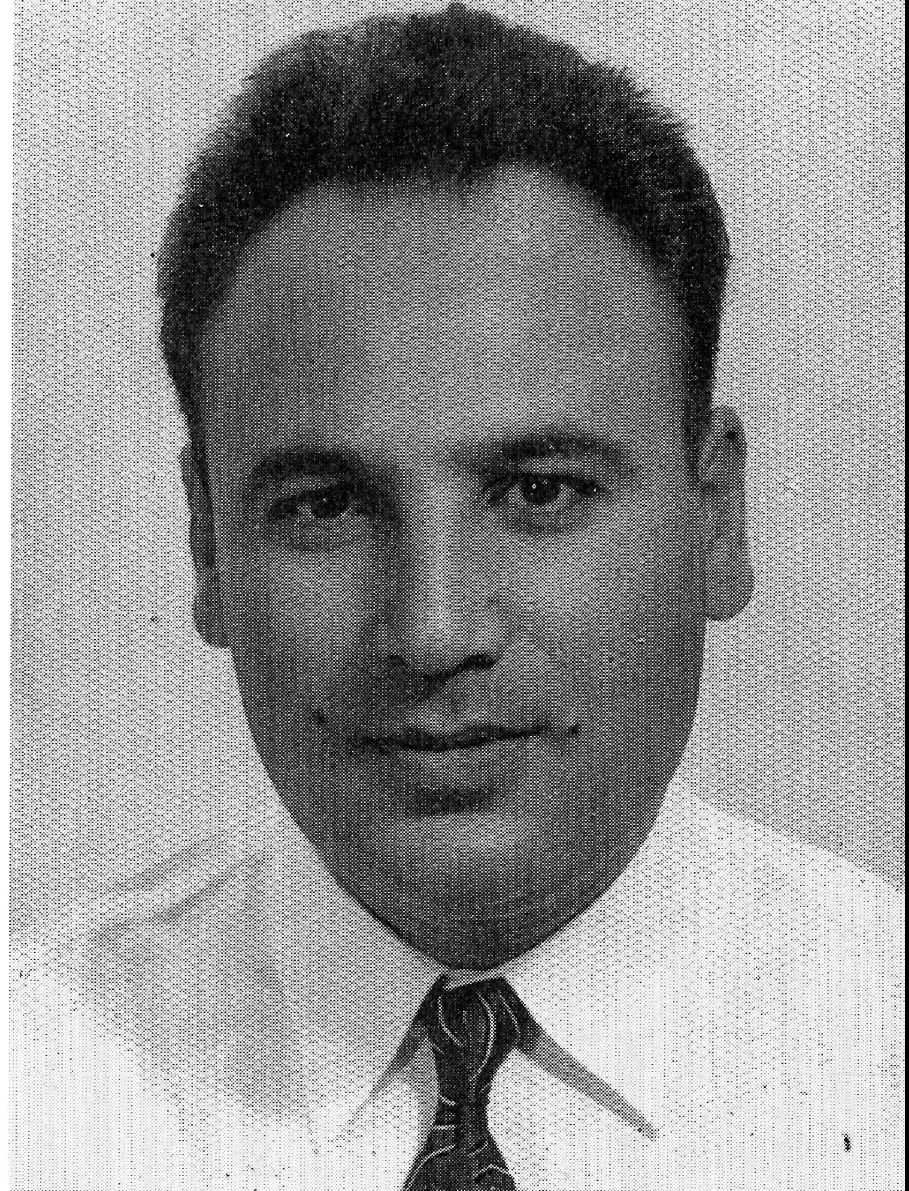
Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir (1923-1979) of a distinguished Bahá'í family, pioneered to Azerbaijan after high school before going to medical school. In 1951 he married Irán Furutan (b. 1933), daughter of Hand of the Cause 'Alí-Akbar Furútan. After pilgrimage in 1953, he and his 19-year-old bride offered to pioneer anywhere and were assigned the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia, which they had never heard of and did not know the local conditions. "He was confident that in obeying the wishes of the beloved Guardian, we were submitting ourselves to the Will of Bahá'u'lláh and would be protected by Him."

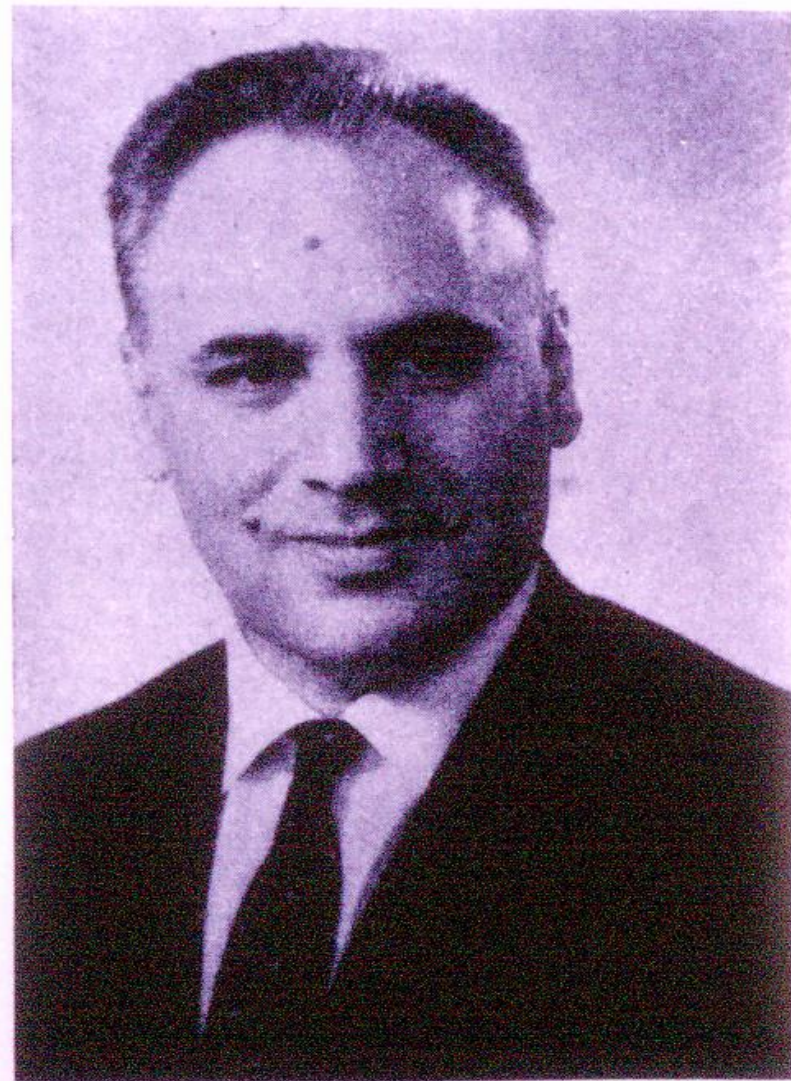
(Irán Furútan Muhájir, Dr Muhajir, Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1992, p.34)

Muhájirs

1953



Rahmatu'lláh
Muhájir



Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir

Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

The Muhájirs left Teheran in January 1954 for Jakarta, where Rahmatu'lláh went immediately to the Ministry of Health and, after turning down a well-paid job elsewhere, received a three year contract at \$25 per month as doctor in the Mentawai Islands. Flying to Padang, the capital of Sumatra, they took a boat that went to Mentawai every few months, and after a rough passage in heavy rain arrived offshore on 4 February 1954.



Mentawai Islands

Arriving in the Mentawai Islands

"Nothing in our life had prepared us for the Mentawai Islands. The boat had to drop anchor a long way from the shore, and we were told to climb down a rope ladder.... Then we had to board a rowing boat, crewed by two men who appeared to be completely naked. My first thought was to run back to the cabin and hide... However my hand was held firmly by Rahmat, who was quietly chanting the Tablet of Ahmad..."

([Írán Muhájir](#), quoted in [Earl Redman](#), *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 180)

Arriving in the Mentawai Islands

"Mixed with the mainland residents greeting us were a few native men and women clad only in very narrow loin cloths, their bodies covered from forehead to ankle in tattoos of the most ornate and fascinating designs. Everyone was wading through the mud, covering their head with banana leaves.

A narrow plank was thrown over the lake of mud for our benefit. Rahmat just waded into the mud while holding my hand and helping me... down the slippery plank... after a few steps, I was flat on my back struggling with the mounds of wet, slippery leaves, which were mixed in with the black smelly mud."

(Írán Muhájir, quoted in Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 180)

Mentawai
people



Settling in the Mentawai Islands

Irán was quickly taken in hand by several women. They were offered a house, but the roof had gaping holes, the walls were rotten, and the door-less rooms were occupied by goats, chickens, water snakes and huge rats observing them with curiosity. They settled in the school, but the toilet was two slippery planks over a stream filled with water snakes. Supplies like soap, salt and candles were non-existent and took most of a year to order at the one island store. One lady showed Irán how to cook over firewood, but Irán did not know how to cook at all. They quickly came down with malaria, which continued the five years they were in the islands.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 180-181)

Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

Shoghi Effendi told the Muhajírs that 'the spread of the Cause, while difficult, would lead to such wide acceptance by the Mentawai people as to eclipse even the victories in Africa. But to achieve this, great sacrifices were needed.'

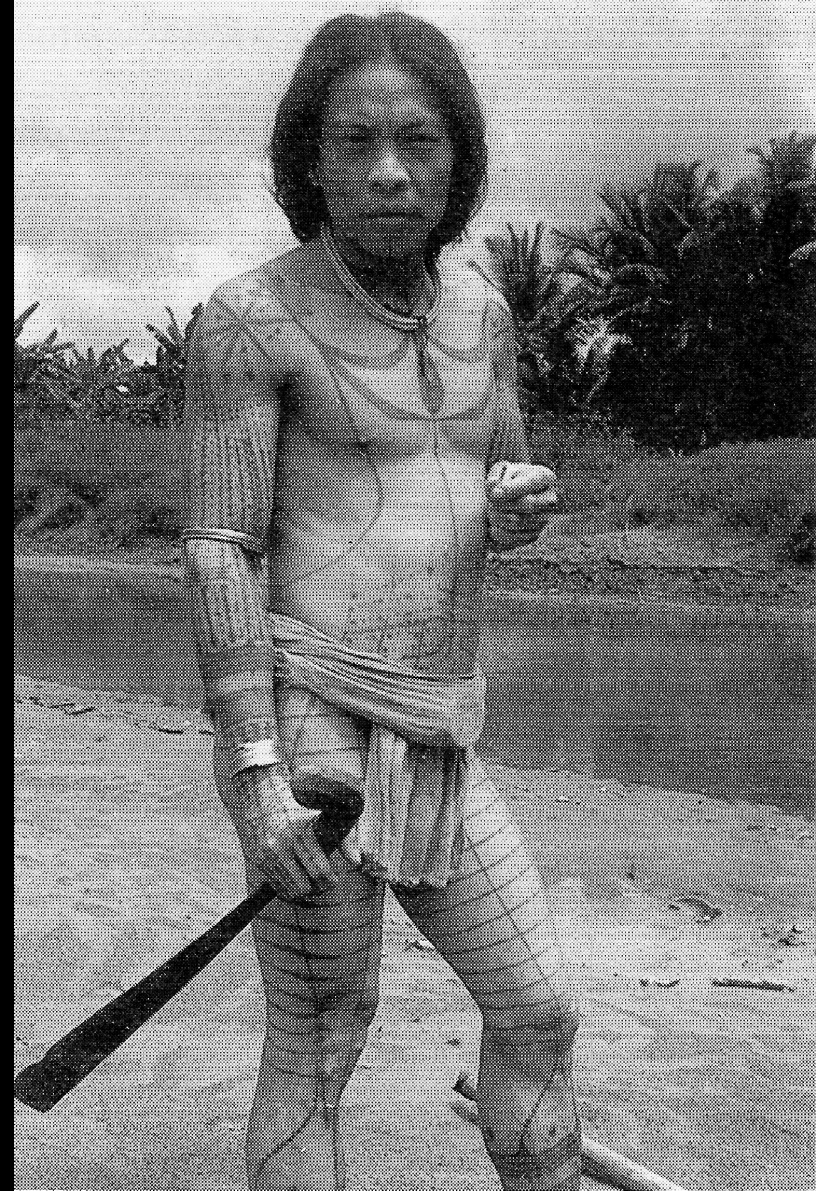
(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 181)

Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

"From his first encounter with the indigenous people, Rahmat established a systematic routine, the foundation of his mass teaching methods... The Mentawais were a simple people, with primitive traditions based on animistic beliefs. They had great respect for their ancestors but did not have formal rituals of worship." "We found the Mentawais to be the most friendly and gentle people we had ever known." "Rahmat tried to study the customs and habits of the Mentawais and learn their language. Although he told them about the Faith, he did not expect them to become Baha'is. He wanted them to get to know and trust him first."



Mentawai
people



Mentawai
people
at home



Mentawai
people

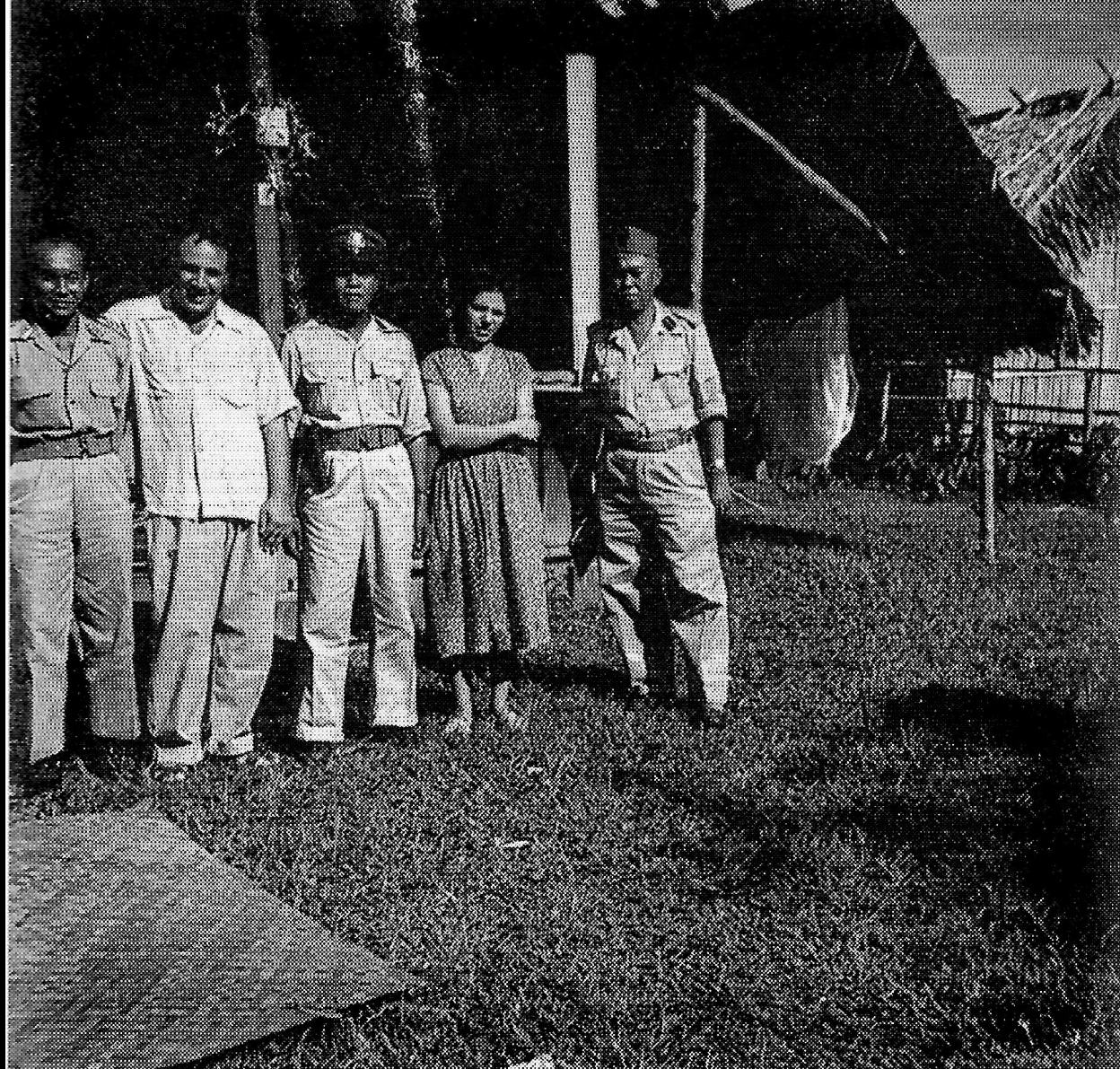


Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

Rahmatu'lláh made trips to the villages by foot or canoe for 10-40 days, meeting and treating the villagers. Irán stayed home and learned Indonesian. They had no calendar, and time had no meaning when their only watch broke. Their food was boiled rice and the juice of wild lemons, as well as coconuts and bananas. After four months, they moved to one room papered with old newspapers, in an old building with holes in the roof, their home for the next four years. A ship every six months would bring mail and supplies.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 181)

Muhájir's simple home, with village mayor (left)



Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

In mid-1954, Ramatu'lláh visited the village of Si Pai Pajet. He told one rower, a village elder named Amata Sinanga, about Bahá'u'lláh, who replied that people only accepted things collectively. When they arrived, he met the 25 village elders and told them about the Bahá'í Faith. They consulted for a few hours, came back and announced that what they heard was good and that they had all decided to become Bahá'ís. This became the first Bahá'í village. After two other villages declared, there were 200 Bahá'ís. At Ridvan 1956, Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected in the three villages.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 181-182)

Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

Rahmat's trips to the villages, teaching the Faith and tending to the physical ills of the natives, brought joy to the people. His love for them was so great and so obvious, that they immediately felt and responded to it. Hearing about the Faith and Rahmat's kindness, the other villagers sought his advice and treated him as their brother. They loved him dearly, and called him *Si Lottoro* - "Mr. Doctor".

(Irán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhajir, Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1992, p.57-58)

Dr. Muhájir



Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

"As the number of Bahá'ís grew, Rahmat spent more time with them in the villages. He taught them the Faith in a simple language that they could understand and commit to memory, and taught their children Bahá'í songs which he composed in Mentawai and Indonesian. He taught them prayers in Arabic and Persian, as none had yet been translated into their own language. The natives, though declaring their belief in Bahá'u'lláh, knew very little about the Faith, and since they had no concept of God, much time and patience was needed before they could grasp the significance of the religion they had accepted."

(Irán Furútan Muhájir, Dr Muhajir, Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1992, p.64-65)

Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

"Rahmat's willingness to participate in the traditional ceremonies and celebrations of indigenous people was one of his outstanding characteristics, and one reason for his success in dealing with native peoples throughout his travels. He loved and encouraged local traditions, believing them to be a thousandfold better than the customs prevalent in the so-called 'civilised' world."

(Irán Furútan Muhájir, Dr Muhajir, Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1992, p.69)

Mentawai
man



Teaching in the Mentawai Islands

One day, when canoeing up a river, Rahmatu'lláh heard people in another canoe on the other side of the river. One voice asked, 'Who is the Báb?' and another would answer 'The Báb is the Forerunner.' The first voice then asked, 'Who is Bahá'u'lláh?' and the second responded with 'He is the Prophet for today.' After four years, there were 7,000 Bahá'ís and five Bahá'í schools in the Mentawai Islands.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 182)

River on
Siberut
Island

Mentawai
Islands



Muhájirs
May 1957

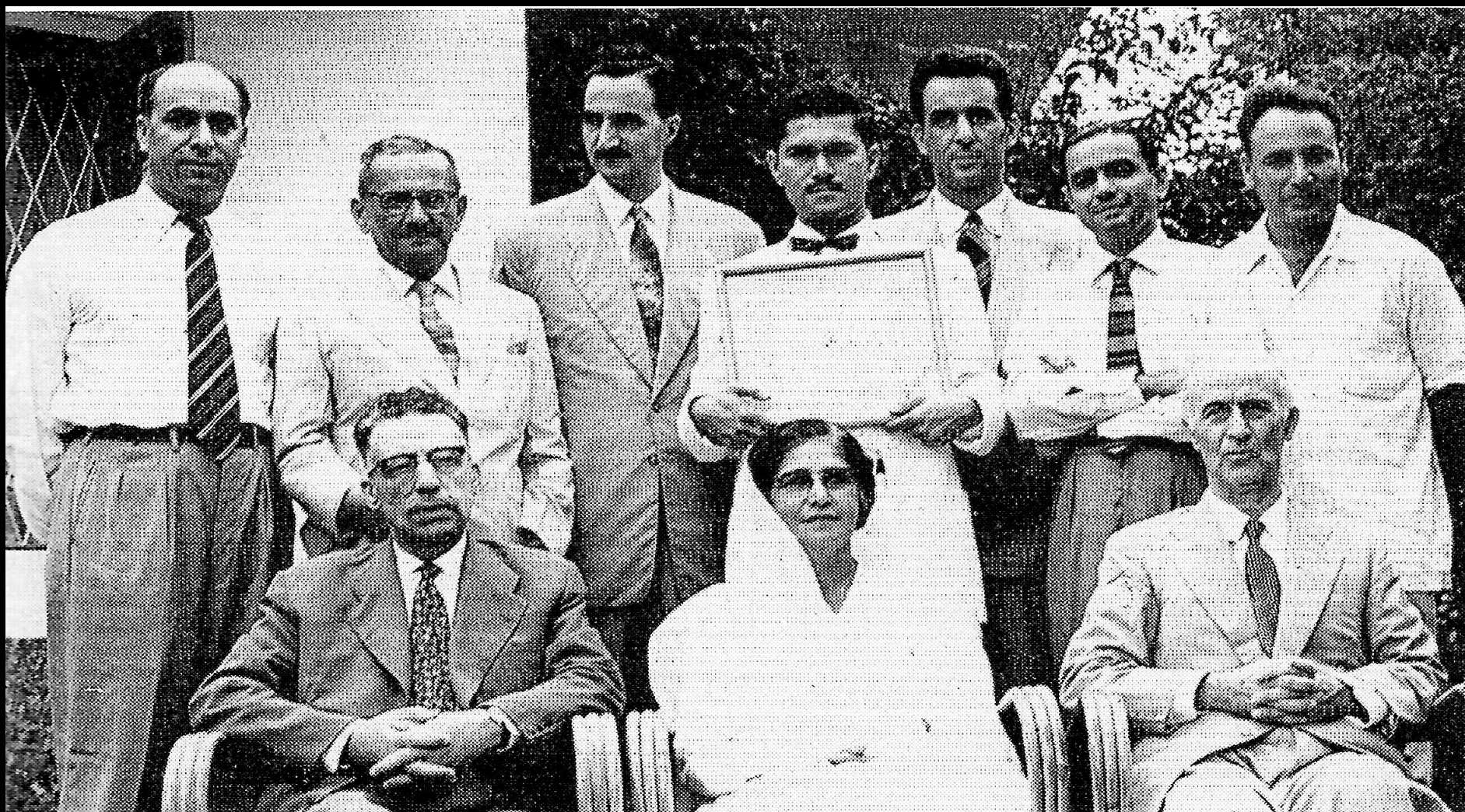


Leaving the Mentawai Islands

The Regional Spiritual Assembly of South-East Asia was formed in April 1957.

The Muhájirs left the islands in September 1957, after Rahmatu'lláh was appointed a Hand of the Cause. He travelled the world, visiting over 140 countries to teach the Faith, with thousands of new Bahá'ís in India and South America, until he died of a heart attack in Quito, Ecuador, on 29 December 1979.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 182)



Regional Spiritual Assembly of South-East Asia 1957

Rahmatu'lláh
Muhájir

Hand of the
Cause of God

