

# Vanuatu

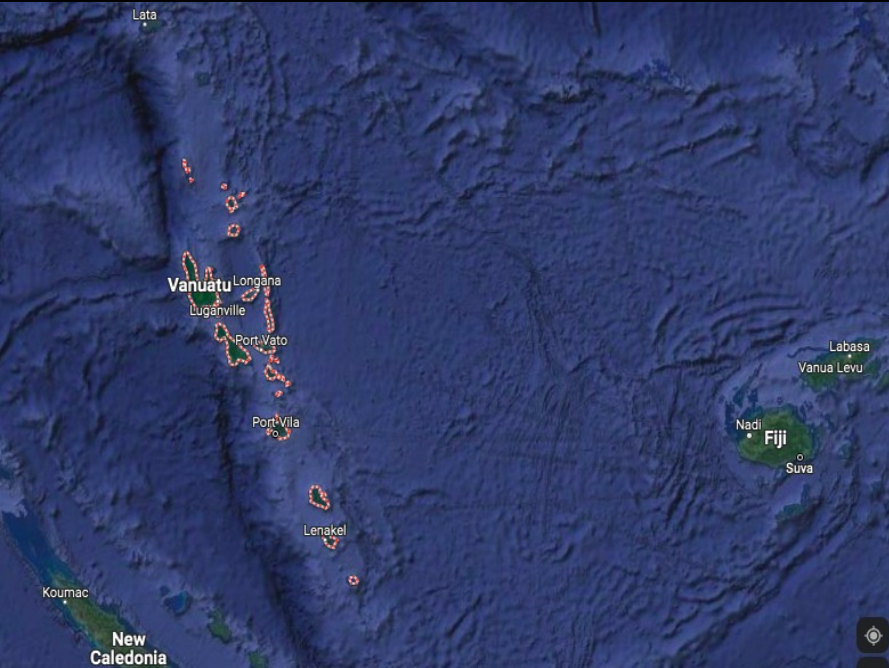
Melanesia – South Pacific

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Geography - Vanuatu

# Vanuatu (New Hebrides)

The Republic of Vanuatu, formerly the New Hebrides, is a volcanic archipelago in a tectonically active region, with eruptions producing ash falls, acid rain, earthquakes, tsunamis and strong cyclonic storms, making it one of the most vulnerable countries. There are 83 islands (65 inhabited), along a 1300 km line, including Espiritu Santo, Malakula, Efate, Erromango, Ambrym and Tanna. The capital, Port Vila, is on Efate, and the second city Luganville is on Espiritu Santo, with Mount Tabwemasana the highest point at 1,879 metres, and a total land area of 4,700 sq km.



# Vanuatu





Vanuatu





Vanuatu



Port Vila, capital of Vanuatu



Port Vila, capital of Vanuatu



Cattle under coconuts are a major agricultural activity



# Ni-Vanuatu

The Ni-Vanuatu are Melanesians with great cultural diversity and 113 languages in a population now of about 300,000. The official languages are Bislama (a kind of pidgin English), English and French. The ancestral Lapita people arrived about 3,000 years ago, bringing with them crops such as yam, taro and banana, as well as pigs and chickens.



Ni-Vanuatuan



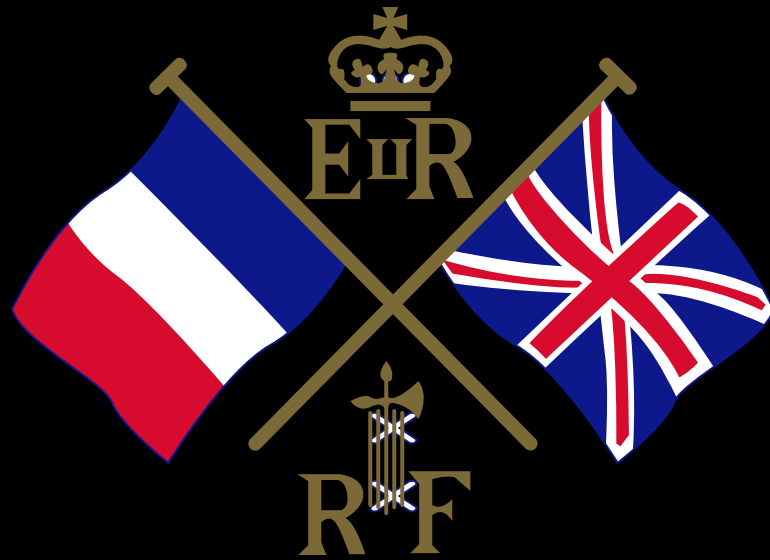


Ni-Vanuatu

# Colonization

In the 1880s both France and England claimed parts of the New Hebrides, and in 1906 they agreed to an Anglo-French Condominium, meaning two colonial governments in the same territory at the same time, with two Resident Commissioners, two police forces and courts, both British common law and the Code Napoleon, and two school and health systems. A village reached by the London Missionary Society was Protestant and spoke English, while the next village might have a Catholic priest and speak French. The natives were stateless. This lasted until independence in 1980.





Coat of Arms of New Hebrides

# Tablets of the Divine Plan

A party speaking their languages, severed, holy, sanctified and filled with the love of God, must turn their faces to and travel through the three great island groups of the Pacific Ocean—Polynesia, Micronesia and **Melanesia**, and the islands attached to these groups, such as New Guinea, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Philippine Islands, Solomon Islands, Fiji Islands, **New Hebrides**, Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia, Bismarck Archipelago, Ceram, Celebes, Friendly Islands, Samoa Islands, Society Islands, Caroline Islands, Low Archipelago, Marquesas, Hawaiian Islands, Gilbert Islands, Moluccas, Marshall Islands, Timor and the other islands.

# Knight of Baha'u'llah Bertha Dobbins

Bertha Dobbins from New Zealand (1895-1986) was a teacher and member of the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand. In 1953, she and her husband Joe wanted to fill one of Shoghi Effendi's goals, but they could not both go, so she went alone, and Shoghi Effendi said Bertha should stay at her post until the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) was established, so Joe stayed home to support her and take care of their two children aged 17 and 19 until he passed away in 1969. The NSA was first elected in 1971.



Bertha Dobbins – Knight of Bahá'u'lláh





Bertha Dobbins – Knight of Bahá'u'lláh

# Bertha Dobbins

Bertha sailed for the New Hebrides on the *Caledonia* along with Gladys Parke and Gretta Lamprill going to fulfil the goal for Tahiti.

# Bertha Dobbins

“I arrived in Port Vila on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 1953, and said the Greatest Name as my feet touched New Hebridean soil. On 29 March I moved into the hut... and although living facilities were practically nil, I was glad to have a home. Later, this hut acquired an atmosphere of its own. A never-ending line of visitors, mostly native, came to hear ‘the Story’, so I called the place Nur Cottage, and it was here, on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1954, that the Bahá’í school began.... The message has spread from the little cottage on the hill to all the islands.... One cannot but feel that some day the... South Pacific will become ablaze with the glory of God.”

(quoted in Earl Redman, 2017, *The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*, p, 197-198)



Bertha Dobbins at National Convention 1974





Bertha Dobbins – Knight of Bahá'u'lláh

# Bahá'í school in Port Vila

The Bahá'í school that Bertha created was one of the first in the New Hebrides and children educated there went on to become leaders in the country. In 1958, the NSA of Australia sent a prefabricated building so that Bertha could continue her school until 1971, when it was closed at the direction of the Universal House of Justice because of costs, when Bertha turned the building into the local Bahá'í centre.





Building that served as the Bahá'í school, then centre



Building that served as the Bahá'í school, then centre



# First believers

One of the first to accept the Bahá'í Faith was Peter Kaltoli Napakaurana, who wrote:

Peter Kaltoli  
Napakaaurana



# Peter Kaltoli Napakaurana

“During 1953 there were many stories circulating in Port Vila... about the arrival of a woman missionary who had brought new teachings from God. This person was Mrs Bertha Dobbins. In 1954, I heard this news inside the chief’s nakamal [traditional meeting place]... and decided that I should go and find out for myself the new Message. So one Sunday morning, I went to visit this woman missionary. She explained some of the sacred verses in the Bible, and I heard the name Bahá’u’lláh for the first time. I was very interested in her explanations. Some time later, I went back to Mrs Dobbins and told her that I wished to join the Bahá’í Faith.”

(quoted in Earl Redman, 2017, “*The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*”, p, 198)

# Bertha Dobbins

Bertha's steadfast efforts finally resulted in success in 1971 when the first National Spiritual Assembly including the New Hebrides was formed. Bertha finally returned to New Zealand in 1977.





National Spiritual Assembly SW Pacific 1975

# Vanuatu Bahá'í Community

As of 2010, 1.4% of the people of Vanuatu were members of the Bahá'í Faith, making Vanuatu the 6th most Bahá'í country in the world. After Cyclone Pam devastated the island of Tanna in 2015, the junior youth immediately started cleaning up the villages (see videos <https://vimeo.com/158819708> (11 min) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBm5V2C12ek> (30 min)).



Tanna after cyclone Pam 2015





Tanna after cyclone Pam 2015





Youth cleaning up after cyclone Pam 2015



Junior youth on Tanna after cyclone Pam 2015



Junior youth on Tanna after cyclone Pam 2015



# Youth and community building

Again, the junior youth saw the need to restore coastal fisheries and convinced the communities and chiefs on Tanna to recreate fishing reserves as their ancestors had done (see *Tanna, a study in leadership and action*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBm5V2C12ek>).





Tanna youth saw empty giant clam shells but no giant clams



Tanna youth realised that the absence of large fish and other animals on the reef was due to overfishing





Tanna youth consulted with the whole community



The village chiefs agreed to the youth proposal  
to create no fishing reserves





Fish multiplied in the reserves and repopulated the reef so fishermen could again catch fish outside reserves

# Bahá'í House of Worship

One of the first local Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the world was dedicated on Tanna on 12 November 2021

<https://evt.live/dedication-ceremony-of-tanna-bahai-house-of-worship>





Tanna Bahá'í House of Worship



Tanna  
Bahá'í  
House of  
Worship







Tanna Bahá'í House of Worship





Tanna Bahá'í House of Worship



Tanna Bahá'í House of Worship