
STATEMENT BY GAANMAN JOACHIM-JOSEPH ADOCHINI, PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF THE ALUKU (BONI) PEOPLE

Transcribed and Translated from Aluku by Kenneth Bilby

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I send cordial greetings to you [Ken Bilby] — and, respectfully and humbly, to the entire United States. I also send greetings to the President of the United States and all his under-officers.

Today you sent a message and asked who will govern the Aluku territory as a leader — who will be the new Paramount Chief to govern the territory. Well, one can't go and claim such a post oneself. But the entire Aluku people have set their sights on a person they believe should speak for them today as their leader. This person is Brother Adochini; he is the one whom they have chosen as a leader. It is he who will become the Paramount Chief and oversee this territory.

So I am the one who will respond to what you asked about.

You asked what system of government the Aluku people have, and how I am thinking about administering the Aluku government. I am hoping to govern well, with the cooperation of all the people. For an individual cannot govern by himself. If a paramount chief is installed, then he has the village chiefs and under-officers behind him. The people of a territory in general — those who are not chiefs — also cooperate with him in working on behalf of the community to ensure that it does not break apart and cease to exist.

Well, today, this is the way I'm thinking about governing the territory: I would like to govern it as in the old days. I would like to govern it the way Gaanman Difu [Paramount Chief of the Aluku from 1937-1965] did. It is his type of government that I want. I would like to govern in his manner. I will call on God's help so that I may govern in that way. For I am not as knowledgeable as the elders before me.

I am about to become the 13th Paramount Chief, I believe, to occupy this office and govern the Aluku people since we made peace, and since we entered the forest. Therefore it will be a strong government, because it contains the strength of those 13. So I would like to administer the government honorably, so that it may continue to be respected.

I send thanks to you for asking me my thoughts

about the visit of the Aluku people who will be coming to the United States. This is what I want them to go and see: I want them to go and see how Americans live. I want them to go and see how the people over there live — how, even though there are so many of them, they understand each other. I would like them to go and see what your traditions over there are like. I would like them to go and see your ancestral heritage, over there where you have enshrined it — so they may come back with that kind of respect; so they will know that the things of the ancestors are valuable; so we may attend to the things of our own ancestors once again, and carry them forward. That is one of my thoughts regarding the visit of the people to the United States that you asked me about.

It pleased me too, that you asked me my thoughts. I wouldn't like it if my people were to learn the American way of life, when they go over there, in order to bring it back here; because we will never turn into Americans. I want them to go, and then to return as Boni people, so that it may be said that a Boni person has gone to the United States to observe how Americans live, just as an American can come to the Boni territory and observe how Boni people live. Nor would I like it if an American were to come to my territory, bringing his way of life and offering it to me, while saying that the traditions of the Aluku people should disappear. In the same way, now that my people are going over there, I want them to go with this very same understanding.

The thing that Aluku people have, and use to survive — their source of strength — is [our religious tradition of] *kumanti*. It was with the powers of *kumanti* that my people left the coast and became rulers of the Maroni River. I will never abandon that tradition.

I will not abandon the old dances of my people — *songe, awasa, mato, susa*. I won't forget them. I was born with those traditions. I will dance your dances. But when I perform my own — that is my tradition. Never will I abandon it.

I send thanks to you. I send greetings to the President of the United States, with the message that the Aluku people are still alive. The Boni people are still alive. We're still here.

Gaanman Joachim-Joseph Adochini is the newly-appointed Paramount Chief of the Aluku Maroons of French Guiana. After years of service as an elected official in the French Guianese government, he left French party politics in 1992 to take up the highest post in the Aluku government.