**TNA FO 10/731/19/66557**

**Edward Bannister, Boma to Colonial Secretary, Accra**

**13 October 1894**

British Vice-Consulate, Congo

October 13, 1894.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of August 11th No. 74/94, with enclosure, viz., copy of the “Master and Servant and Foreign Employment Ordinance, No. 8 of 1893.”

2. With regard to His Excellency's surmise that men are being recruited at Accra (and other British Colonies) as police for the Congo state and that “the term policeman is simply a euphemism for soldier”, is quite a correct one.

3. When I first came here the agreements were all made out as between the Congo State and labourers, the term labourer also being a euphemism for soldier. I had hundreds of complaints, and am still occupied with grave charges of cruelty practiced on these men by officers of the State who stop short at nothing in brutality under the guise of discipline.

4. When I complained I laid stress on the fact that the men had been contracted to serve as labourers, and the State authorities had no right to submit them to their so-called discipline. I stigmatised the whole thing as “fraudulent enlistment”. Up to the present I have gained very little for these poor fellows, my efforts being met by remarks from the Governor-General (and echoed of course by his officers) to the effect that it was not my business to interfere, I must confine myself to commercial questions, pure and simple. That, however, did not deter me in the least, it simply had the opposite effect.

5. One case in point. Some time ago (about June last) 14 Accra men came to me from a place several days' march from here. They had been sent by the Commandant of the place to raid a town and seize men to be sent to Boma as recruits. If the men ran away on their approach the women were to be seized and held as hostages until the men turned up. Five women were brought to camp. The Chief came in and released the women and then complained that two of them had been outraged on the road, and that a duck had been stolen. The Accra men were paraded, and then thrown face downward on the ground, one by one, and 50 lashes administered to each. One died some few days afterward. Of course the commandant said “from fever”.

6. In the meantime, before the Chief of the town appeared, a brother of his who happened to be away at the time of the raid, appeared at the camp and was seized. On being questioned as to the whereabouts of the Chief he simply said he knew nothing as he had been away. The commandant ordered his boy to bring him a table knife and cut an ear off the native, which was promptly done. This and the flogging (discipline again) so frightened the Accra men that they ran away. They are now serving twelve months' imprisonment each for having “deserted”. On getting a copy of their agreement I found that they were all described as “labourers”, and they emphatically denied that they ever intended to be employed as soldiers. Of the 14 left one has since died and 11 are in hospital (another euphemism for a place worse than a dog kennel, and where the treatment is quite on par with the place.)I am doing all I can to procure the release of these men.

7. I mention these matters as I think that nothing but free ventilation of the subject will have any beneficial effect. I am told by people from the interior that what I see and hear of taking place in the Lower Congo is insignificant as compared to what is perpetrated in the regions of the Upper Congo.

8. How is it that these men are not given a copy of their agreement? They come in most cases without one, and lately on my applying to the Commandant of the Force Publique for a copy of agreement of 95 men from Sierra Leone as “police”, I was told by him that he was not to provide me with a document which “pertained to the archives of the Congo State.”

9. It would materially assist me in my endeavours to protect these people if a copy of each agreement were sent to me.

I have &c

(signed) E. Bannister.

The Colonial Secretary, Accra.