Chagos Refugees Group

c/o Chairman Mr. L. Olivier Bancoult *OSK, GCSK*

13th October 2024

Her Excellency
The British High Commissioner

Yours Excellency,

Subject: Representation of the Chagossian Community in Mauritius - Mandate from Special AGM on October 13th, 2024

We, the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG), wish to convey the outcome of a Special Annual General Meeting (AGM) held locally on Sunday, October 13th, 2024. All the Chagossians residing in Mauritius - whether members of the CRG or not - were convened to discuss matters of utmost importance to the community. We were more than 300, including 190 natives who were born on the islands of the Chagos Archipelago. This is the largest grouping in the world.

This group has unanimously decided today to give the CRG, under my leadership as President, a mandate to represent the interests of all assembled Chagossians, both *les natifs* (the natives, which means those born on the islands) and their descendants. They have adopted a series of decisions which they have asked me to communicate to you and the British Government on their behalf, as well as to the Government of Mauritius.

The assembly has decided to **support the joint proposition made on October 3rd, 2024**, reflecting the agreement of the Governments of Mauritius and the United Kingdom on the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. It has done so while remaining vigilant in ensuring that the rights and interests of all Chagossians are fully safeguarded in the final agreement.

With this mandate and in this regard, we respectfully present the following critical points:

1. Recognition of the Natives' Urgent Situation

The CRG emphasizes the urgency of addressing the needs of the native Chagossians, particularly given the advanced age of many. The oldest Chagossian native in Mauritius is turning 100 in 7 months, and the youngest native Chagossian, born on the island of Peros Banhos is now 51.

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The process for resettlement and the restoration of their rights must be expedited to ensure the eldest live to witness their return to their homeland and benefit from the reparations due to them. While the descendants of Chagossians are an integral part of the community, the natives must come first and foremost. They are present and with us now, and they must not be forgotten.

2. Full Human Rights for Natives and Heirs, Including Diego Garcia

The CRG reiterates that the Chagossians' fight has always been centered on securing the full human rights of all Chagossians, including the right of return and the right to live freely in their homeland. It is deeply concerning that the current proposals exclude the full human rights of the native Chagossians from Diego Garcia. Indeed, in the present joint proposal, they are not given the right to live on Diego Garcia, while foreign workers from the Philippines and India are allowed to live and work there. We firmly request that all native Chagossians from Diego Garcia and their heirs be granted the right to freely visit and live on Diego Garcia, as is their natural right, given that foreign workers currently have this privilege. The United Nations Resolution of May 2019 demands the unconditional withdrawal of British colonial administration and the full restoration of Chagossian rights without any impediment or obstacle, and this must apply to Diego Garcia as well.

3. Support Package for Natives and Heirs

We request that within the funds to be allocated for the Chagossians as suggested in the present joint proposal, a special and comprehensive support package be negotiated for both the natives and their heirs. This support package must also include a lifetime pension for all native Chagossians, including those who have passed away, as their heirs continue to bear the burden of deportation. The support package is essential to honor the sacrifices made by the Chagossian people and to provide a meaningful form of reparations to those who have suffered directly, as well as their descendants.

4. Involvement in Drafting the Final Agreement

It is imperative that Chagossians be actively involved in every step of the negotiation process from now on, and the arrangements to give effect to the urgent adoption, entry into force and implementation of the treaty between Mauritius and the United Kingdom. We request that Chagossians, through their legally voted representatives - including the President of the CRG - play a decisive role in shaping the coming arrangements to ensure that their rights and interests are fully safeguarded.

5. Governance and Self-Determination

The Chagossians seek to be central participants in the future governance of their homeland, much like the people of Rodrigues, who actively contribute to their island's administration with respect for autonomy. We call for a governance structure that ensures Chagossians share responsibility for the future of the Chagos Archipelago and participate in its development, including the protection of its environment, in collaboration with the Mauritian government.

6. Dialogue with the Chagossian communities in Mauritius and abroad

The CRG in Mauritius is committed to working in dialogue with those Chagossians who support the joint proposal of the 3rd of October. Together, the CRG aims to ensure that the interests of all Chagossians, whether residing in Mauritius, the UK, the Seychelles, or elsewhere, are aligned and voiced clearly in all arrangements and discussions concerning the implementation of the agreement.

This letter represents the unified voice of the Chagossians living in Mauritius. We remain hopeful that these critical points will receive the necessary attention and that justice will be swiftly restored to our people.

We express our thanks to both the British and Mauritian Governments for their ongoing efforts, and we are committed to collaborating in pursuit of a just and equitable resolution for all Chagossians, one that fully respects all the obligations of international law.

Yours sincerely,

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