

Statement made by the Delegation of the Government of the Republic
of Mauritius

Madam Chair,

Let me at the outset affirm that my delegation is sympathetic to the cause of genuine indigenous populations and it is our belief that a recognition of their claims to land and landrights would be a major step in their aspiration to their legitimate rights.

The objective of my statement to-day, however, Madam Chair, is to clarify some of the issues raised by the *Comité Social des Chagossiens* in its previous interventions. Let me state for the record that Members of the *Comité Social des Chagossiens* are first and foremost citizens of the Republic of Mauritius and derive their status as citizens from the Constitution of Mauritius itself. As such Madam Chairperson, they enjoy all the rights conferred to Mauritian citizens including the right to own movable and immovable property.

It may be useful to recall in this context that the Chagos Archipelago was uninhabited until the latter part of the 19th Century when workers were recruited under contract in mainland Mauritius to work in these islands. Indeed, Madam Chairperson, the statement made by the Hon. Prime Minister of Mauritius at the United Nations General Assembly in September 1998, confirms the displacement of the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago back to Mauritius. In his

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statement, the Prime Minister, recalling the sovereignty of Mauritius over these islands, also reminded Members of the plight of some 1500 inhabitants referred to as “ Chagossiens “ or « *illois* » and stressed the need for the former colonial power to enter into a constructive bilateral dialogue with the Government of the Republic of Mauritius for the early and unconditional restoration of the Chagos Archipelago including Diego Garcia to the sovereignty of Mauritius.

Until this is translated in concrete reality, the Government of Mauritius will leave no stone unturned since the inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago including Diego Garcia are Mauritian citizens. The Government of Mauritius, as the legal representative of all its citizens, has already indicated in this context, its willingness to enter into negotiations with the Government of the United Kingdom for an early and unconditional return of the Chagos Archipelago including Diego Garcia to Mauritius.

My delegation requests that our statement be fully reflected in the Report of this Working Group.

Thank you Madam Chair.

Geneva, 29 July 1999