

## **Abstract – Bernadette Dugasse**

### **The views of a native islander exiled to the Seychelles**

I was born on Diego Garcia and left aged 2 ½ when my father was expelled to the Seychelles. We didn't feel at home in the Seychelles and were not fully part of the way of life or culture. These were tough years plagued by both unemployment and very long working hours. I came to the UK in 2005 but already knew the UK quite well and felt at home – I went to the court case with Olivier Bancoult and have worked with CRG, UK Chagos and Philippa Gregory in the past. I also worked with the Seychelles group 'SCS' alongside Janette Alexis. In the UK I've tried to work with anyone who needed help and I'm a founder member of Chagossian Voices. I have been twice to Diego Garcia/Peros/Salamon – it was never enough days!

I do not agree that the Chagos islands should go to Mauritius. I believe the judgment of the International Court is completely wrong and should be redone. We native islanders are still around, and we are not Mauritian-and I don't feel at all Mauritian. How could I feel Mauritian, born in Diego Garcia and having lived in the Seychelles and the UK? – Chagossians should decide the future of the islands. We fear that Mauritius might sell or lease the islands to India or China, and we believe negotiations are already taking place. Seychellois Chagossians were not Mauritian and Chagossian culture and Mauritian culture are quite different – Chagossians are mainly Creoles of African origin, and the Mauritian Government are mainly from Indian/Hindu origins.

The Mauritian government does not know how many Chagossians are in the Seychelles and Seychelles Chagossians have always been left out from decision making and compensation. It's as if we don't exist for the Mauritian Government. We did not receive compensations or land and were never even told about the compensations. Where does the Mauritian plan for Chagos leave the Seychelle Chagossians? We are never mentioned – Seychelles Chagossians are always forgotten.

The court should listen to the voices of the Chagossians. We are a community and a living community. It is not a community of the past -we are still here. There should be another court hearing and it should be the Chagossians not Mauritius who are heard. Mauritius didn't contact the community over the court case.

The Mauritian boat trip to Chagos in February 2022 was an unfair trip to promote the Mauritian case. Why did they choose just 5 natives? Many natives could have gone but didn't. The community were not consulted about it. It didn't create a good impression for us and achieved nothing for Chagossians. If it was a choice between Mauritius and the UK running the islands, I would choose the UK if I had to. I do not trust the Mauritian government. In the end Chagossians must decide the sovereignty of the islands.