

Abstract – Frankie Bontemps

The views of a second generation Chagossian living in the UK

I am a second generation Chagossian, born in Mauritius and living in the UK. My mother was born on Diego Garcia. I came to the UK in 2006 and have lived in Crawley since then, working for NHS at Crawley Hospital. My family migrated to the UK in stages - I first stayed with a friend and my wife and son followed 6 months later. I have been supporting the community in Mauritius and UK for many years, fighting injustice. I have worked with the Chagos Islanders Community Association – Chagos Islanders Welfare group, Chagos Islanders Movement and I am a founding member of Chagossian Voices.

I don't agree that islands should go to Mauritius. Chagossians have never been consulted at any stage and Chagossians were never represented, either at the International Court or before. Chagossians have been used by the Mauritian government at ICJ to get sympathy by providing an account of suffering for emotional engagement. Then they were dismissed in the question to the court and the judgment as "Mauritians of Chagossian origin". They have erased our identity. The Mauritian Government was also complicit in the exile of Chagossians and the "sale" of the islands in 1965.

Chagossians do not feel they are Mauritians and Chagossians feel they are still being exploited by the Mauritian government. Mauritius wants sovereignty of the islands for financial gain and I do not think there will be resettlement of Chagossians. The question to the court speaks of resettlement by Mauritians.

It is wrong to describe Chagossians as Mauritians. Their origins are as slaves from Africa and Madagascar. The Chagossians have been there for 5 or 6 generations with their own language and culture, food and music traditions. It is a remote and unique culture different to Mauritius. Recently, the Mauritian Government has been describing Chagossians as Mauritians but until now has used the derogatory description "Ilois" to describe us.

Chagossians have always been looked down on in Mauritius

The judgment of Lord Justice Laws & Mr. Justice Gibbs in November 2000; said Chagossians are the 'belongers' on the islands. As 'belongers' Chagossians should be their own deciders of their futures, not the Mauritian Government. Self-determination should have been for the Chagossians not for Mauritians who have their own island more than 2,000 km away. So far only UK and Mauritius have been consulted. Chagossians have never been allowed to participate in decisions about their future, from exile until now. Chagossians should now be asked to decide the future of the islands. Chagossians should be around the table. It's our human right.

Mauritius presented itself at the court as a victim, yet they have behaved and behave as colonial power. The situation in Agalega is a bit like Chagos and many Chagossians went there because life reminded them of Chagos. Now they are being deported and the island is leased to India through a 2016 memo of understanding between Mauritius and India. In Chagos Mauritius will want to lease islands and resources to superpowers and is only interested in money. The depopulation of Agalega is happening today in international view. Chagossians should ask for a right of self-determination. No-one is hearing us. We want to decide for ourselves. How can UN and others turn a blind eye? The UN must take on board the Chagossian view. Chagossians should be in all the talks. Another question needs putting to the International Court and new hearing with Chagossians as equal partner. Why should we not decide what is best for us?