

Abstract – Mylene Augustin Chagos for Chagossians

I am a second generation Chagossian in exile and a founder member of Chagossian Voices. Both my parents, all my aunts and uncles were born on Chagos. My parents left for health reasons, for an operation in a hospital. But they couldn't come back -they were told 'the island has been sold'. They had to stay in Mauritius -a foreign land in many ways. It was a difficult life: looking for jobs, places to stay, They left all their belongings on the island and were not happy in Mauritius. It was not their home and they had to leave their way of life and culture. The rest of the family then moved to Mauritius by force. Chagossians were abandoned in Mauritius, they were treated like animals. There was difficulty with work, a different language and some people treat us very badly. There was discrimination and we lost culture and way of life. We came from a place with fresh food-no need for money-and a barter economy.

We came to the UK as soon as we could. For a better life. I came in a group of 20 in 2004, but it was like when family came to Mauritius – nothing was prepared for Chagossians. We stayed at airport for 8 days and then were put in a hotel. Neither the UK Government nor Mauritius cared about us -Mauritius was looking for independence, the UK and US needed a base -neither cared. They wanted the island to protect the world, but nobody protected us. What about Chagossian people? UK treat its pets better! I have been supporting the Chagossian community all my life. In Port Louis I was fighting for rights in Mauritius – fighting for passports. People still need help. I also fought to keep our culture alive, and I also created a women's group to take my people out of stress, to give my people activities and make them happy and to help them across the language barrier

Even though we've been treated badly by both the UK and Mauritius I believe the Islands shouldn't pass to Mauritius. They have never asked the Chagossians what they want and never gave us a choice about our future. Chagossians have never been part of democratic process-never had a voice. Chagossians are like modern slaves, with their lives controlled by others. This conference is an opportunity to talk. Many see Mauritius as a paradise island, but we left it because life was so hard for us. Poverty and discrimination. The Mauritian government do not care about the Chagossians-except as a way to get the islands
We are not "Mauritians of Chagossian origin" I was only born in Mauritius because I was sent there. We don't feel Mauritian. We are Chagossian. Let us live our life as `Chagossians.

Now the international bodies must let the Chagossians decide what they want for the first time. Listen to us. Stop deciding on behalf of us. No-one ever asks us what we want. Life is still tough for us; I am still looking for a house after 18 years in the UK. But we want our island for our families. When my father died he requested his ashes to be put in the sea as a way to go back to island – many natives want to return by any means.