



Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Sixteenth session 17-21 July 2023

Tuesday 18th July 2023

Item 5: Interactive Dialogue with the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Bernadette Dugasse. Chagossian Voices

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Bernadette Dugasse and I am a Chagossian, born on Diego Garcia which now serves as a joint US/UK military and airbase in the Indian Ocean.

Like all Chagossians I live in exile, first in the Seychelles and now in the UK. We Chagossians have never had any rights to self-determination. We have been treated as people with no rights or voice. Our rights to continue our way of life and culture and to develop socially, culturally and economically according to our own wishes were stolen from us along with our land and our oceans.

We Chagossians are forbidden to return to our islands by the US and UK Governments and our wellbeing and livelihoods have been severely damaged by our forcible displacement to Mauritius and the Seychelles, where we have been victims of discrimination and marginalization.

We Chagossians were a happy and healthy people on our islands, we lived in harmony with our environment and were well nourished physically and spiritually through our music, poetry and community life. Now we are forced to live a life which is not ours.

We urge the Expert mechanisms to examine the rights to development of the Chagossian people whose indigenous rights have not been well known to member states and the United Nations. We are Chagossians not "Mauritians of Chagossian origin" as many at the International Court of Justice have been persuaded to believe.