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STATEMENT BY CHAGOSSIAN VOICES

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Item: Item 5 (d) (Conference Room 4) p.m

Theme: Human rights dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Speaker: Mr Frankie Bontemps

Distinguished delegates, members of the Permanent Forum, Special Rapporteur, and the members of the Expert Mechanism I thank you for this opportunity to present to the world the numerous human rights abuses which have been and continue to be committed against the Chagossian community. I am Frankie Bontemps and am a Chagossian, born in exile in Mauritius and now living in the UK.

The human rights abuses of forced removal without prior consultation, forced transfer of population, denial of nationality, destruction of culture and way of life, denial of self-determination, systemic racism, dispossession of lands and territories are well documented in the recent report by Human rights Watch on the Chagossians and I urge all members to read it. The report concludes that the US and the UK were guilty of a crime against humanity in the way we have been treated. Also, in Mauritius and the Seychelles the Chagossians experienced marginalisation and denial of rights.

But I have an awkward question to ask the United Nations. What have the UN done to support the Chagossians? It is well known that the Chagossians have been denied a voice at all stages of their history since 1965. We were removed from our homeland and our homes without consultation or warning, we had had a new nationality forced on us without our consent, we have been subjected to neglect and discrimination. Our people have been divided across the world and our culture and way of life have been uprooted and damaged. But what have the institutions of the UN done for us?

In 2019 Mauritius, through the African Union persuaded the UN General Assembly to request an advisory opinion on the decolonisation of the Chagos islands, which are currently under UK administration as the British Indian

Ocean Territory. The question to the court erased the identity of Chagossians - as did its judgment. The question asks for the resettlement of MAURITIANS not CHAGOSSIANS and Chagossians are obliquely referred to as Mauritians of Chagossian origin.

So, the judgment and the ensuing resolution at the General Assembly are entirely about Mauritian rights and settlement- not Chagossian rights. How was this allowed to happen? We see this as neo-colonialism. Why has this not been challenged? Are the rights of member states always paramount? What about the rights of the indigenous population? This sets an appalling precedent. It allows member states to trample on the rights of indigenous peoples through the institutions of the United Nations!

We are not Mauritians. Our islands are more than 1,000 miles from Mauritius. We have a unique culture, way of life and generational links to the land and oceans of our islands. We are Creoles. Yet it seems for the UN too we are a people with no rights and no say in our future. Distinguished members I ask for an urgent investigation and review into the how the UN has and will protect the indigenous rights of Chagossians. Thank you.