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**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)
Twenty-Second Session: 17-28 April 2023
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

STATEMENT BY CHAGOSSIAN VOICES

Date: Thursday 20th April 2023

Item: Item 4 (Conference Room 4) a.m.

Theme: Discussion on the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum (economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights), with reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Speaker: Mr Louis Elyse

Good morning distinguished delegates, indigenous brothers and sisters, members of the Permanent Forum. I thank you for this opportunity to ask for your help - and beg you to fight side by side with us for the return of our motherland, the Chagos Archipelago, now known as the British Indian Ocean Territory.

It is 50 years since we were forcibly exiled and forbidden to return by the US and UK Governments to make way for a US Military Airbase, turning our beautiful homeland into an instrument of war.

On Chagos we lived in harmony with nature and each other. We lived sustainably and healthily as part of the islands' complex and vital ecosystem. Our forced removal has deprived us of our land, oceans and liberty. We have suffered a massive degradation in the health and wellbeing of our community.

On the islands we were surely one of the healthiest communities on the planet. We lived happily to old age with a healthy diet and an active and productive lifestyle, immersed in our culture and music and the life of the community. In exile we have lived in poverty, victims of marginalisation, racism and discrimination. Our physical and mental health have suffered terribly due to the neglect of the Mauritian, US and UK governments.

The UK courts recognised in 2000 that we are the belongers on the islands and that our exile was illegal, but the UN institutions have given our rights to the

Mauritian Government, who refuse to recognise us as a people. Instead, they used Chagossian natives as a bargaining chip for their own claim on sovereignty.

The Human Rights Watch report in March 2023 found the UK and US government guilty of a Crime against humanity towards the Chagossian people. There has been no official apology, no remorse, no solution, and no reparation has been proposed to the Chagossians. However, the UK and the Mauritius governments have already started negotiations for the sovereignty of our beloved motherland without consulting us (the Chagossians- belongers who have become tenants).

Are the United Nations just going to sit and let this injustice carry on till the death of the last native Chagossians?

We are not Mauritians of Chagossian origin. We are Chagossians. We have a unique culture, way of life and generational links to the land and oceans of our islands. The institutions of the UN also seem to think we are a people with no rights and no say in our future. Distinguished members I ask for an urgent investigation and review into how the UN will protect the indigenous rights of Chagossians. Where was the Mauritian Government or politicians when Chagossians were dumped in the dock like animals? Where was the Mauritian Government when Chagossian women and children were gassed by Mauritian police in the Jardin de la Compagnie? Thank you.