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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: Tuesday 18th April 2023

Item: Item 3 (Conference Room 4)

Theme: Discussion on the theme "Indigenous Peoples, human health, planetary and territorial health and climate change: a rights-based approach"

Speaker: Mr Jean-François Nellan

Mr Chair, distinguished delegates, indigenous brothers, and sisters. Today I urge the Permanent Forum to understand that the indigenous rights of the Chagossians go to the heart of today's themes of human and planetary health and justice. The Chagos Islands are a vast archipelago in the Indian Ocean more than a thousand miles from Mauritius. We are a Creole people of African origin and the descendants of slaves. We were forcibly exiled from our Indian Ocean archipelago to make way for a US airbase - and have all been forbidden to return. This exile broke our longstanding sustainable relationship with our land and our ocean and has forced us into environments where our health has suffered due to the trauma of enforced exile and the poverty and marginalization we have experienced in Mauritius, the UK and the Seychelles. We have been abandoned by the US and the UK and neglected and marginalized in Mauritius and the Seychelles

Mauritius has claimed our islands as part of its territory, which are currently under British rule and exist only for the vast military base on Diego Garcia. In 2019 at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Mauritius won an advisory opinion that it should take ownership of the islands from the UK. The exiled Chagossians had no official representation at this hearing and were once again ignored. We were appalled when the UN General Assembly approved this decision without once asking what the Chagossians wanted. Does the UN only represent nations? What about indigenous peoples like the Chagossians? We are not Mauritians.

The Chagos Islands are currently one of the world's largest Marine Protected Areas. It is a vital resource for the health and sustainability of the oceans and the planet. They are a pristine and vital resource for us all. The Chagossians

should be able to return to the islands to continue their sustainable stewardship of the islands, in harmony with nature. However, the current secret negotiations between the UK and Mauritius mean that this vital resource is under threat.

The Mauritian government will be allowed to settle their population on the islands if they take ownership and the indigenous population will struggle to be heard. The islands and the oceans surrounding them could be exploited for fishing, mineral resources and tourism and there will be nothing the world can do to stop it. We urge you to back us now and support the Chagossians in our bid for self-determination and a sustainable future - alongside Human Rights Watch and many other international humanitarian organisations. Thank you.