



*Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

*Sixteenth session 17-21 July 2023*

**Wednesday 19th July 2023**

**Speaker: Jean-François Nellan, Chagossian Voices**

### **Item 6: Country engagement**

Good afternoon distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. I am a member of the forcibly exiled Chagossian community, removed from our islands to make way for a joint UK/US military base. Our treatment by the UK and the US has been described as a “crime against humanity” in a recent Human Rights Watch report. The entire population was exiled to Mauritius and the Seychelles, where we have been victims of racism and marginalization.

The Chagossians, currently living mainly in the UK, Mauritius and the Seychelles have been forbidden to return to our islands, now known as the British Indian Ocean Territory. Despite the participation of at least three nations in the exile of the indigenous Chagossian population, it has been very difficult for us to engage with any of these nations since they do not acknowledge our status as indigenous islanders or fully accept responsibility for our fate. The United Kingdom, which carried out our removal has no mechanisms for us as the indigenous population to assert our human rights over our homeland. Mauritius, who claim sovereignty of the islands do not recognize the Chagossians as a people and define us as “Mauritians of Chagossian origin”. The Mauritian constitution does not acknowledge any indigenous rights.

The current bilateral negotiations between the United Kingdom and Mauritius for the sovereignty of our islands are taking place without the participation or consent of the Chagossian population.

We urgently request the Expert Mechanism and the Human Rights Council to look closely at the predicament we face and encourage the nations involved to provide effective mechanisms for consultation and participation of the indigenous Chagossian population in all matters concerning their islands and their future.