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Authority NND969023
By NARA Date 11/17/05

Sub-Num 7073, 58/150/67/1/S
Bx 17/5

(21)

1/21/72

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Dear Phil: Herbert

REF SEY YR DEF 15 IND-2

Thank you for your letter on January 10, 1972, commenting on Port Louis' A-246 of December 20, 1972.

While I agree the basic responsibility for the relocation of the inhabitants of those islands of the Chagos Archipelago required for defense purposes resides with the British, it is in our interest to see that those relocated are treated humanely. As this interest was phrased in State 019430 of February 4, 1971, a joint State/Defense message which I believe you have seen, "USG realizes it will share in any criticism levied at the British for failing to meet their responsibilities for the inhabitants' welfare." This liability to criticism arises not only from the fact that the inhabitants were removed at our request and for our convenience. In order to meet our self-imposed timetable, their evacuation was undertaken with a haste which the British could claim has prevented careful examination of resettlement needs. **

I appreciated your description of the history of our discussions with the British on the use of the BIOT for military purposes. You refer in your outline to a British proposal that islands without indigenous populations be selected, to avoid protests by native peoples. Unfortunately, this apparently was not done, for when we decided in December 1970 to construct the facility at Diego Garcia, we learned that one third of the island's population of 375 had been born on Diego Garcia.

The welfare of the Ilois is a subject of legitimate interest to our Embassy in Port Louis for several reasons. Mauritius retains certain residual rights in the Chagos Archipelago, and many of the Archipelago's residents, including almost all of the Ilois evacuated from Diego Garcia, are Mauritian citizens. Shoddy treatment of them, either by Moulinie or by the British Government, provides anti-American Mauritian opposition elements with ideal ammunition for attacks on the United States and on the Diego Garcia facility.

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During the past two months, greater attention has been paid by the world's press to our military role in the Indian Ocean, and to

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[David D. Newsom]
- Inferred from 1/21/72 letter

** DEF 15 IND-2 YR SEY