

"When I was living on Diego I was like a beautiful bird in the sky. Since I've been living in Mauritius we are living a worthless life. Help me my friend, help me to sing to send our message to the world" - Chagossian song



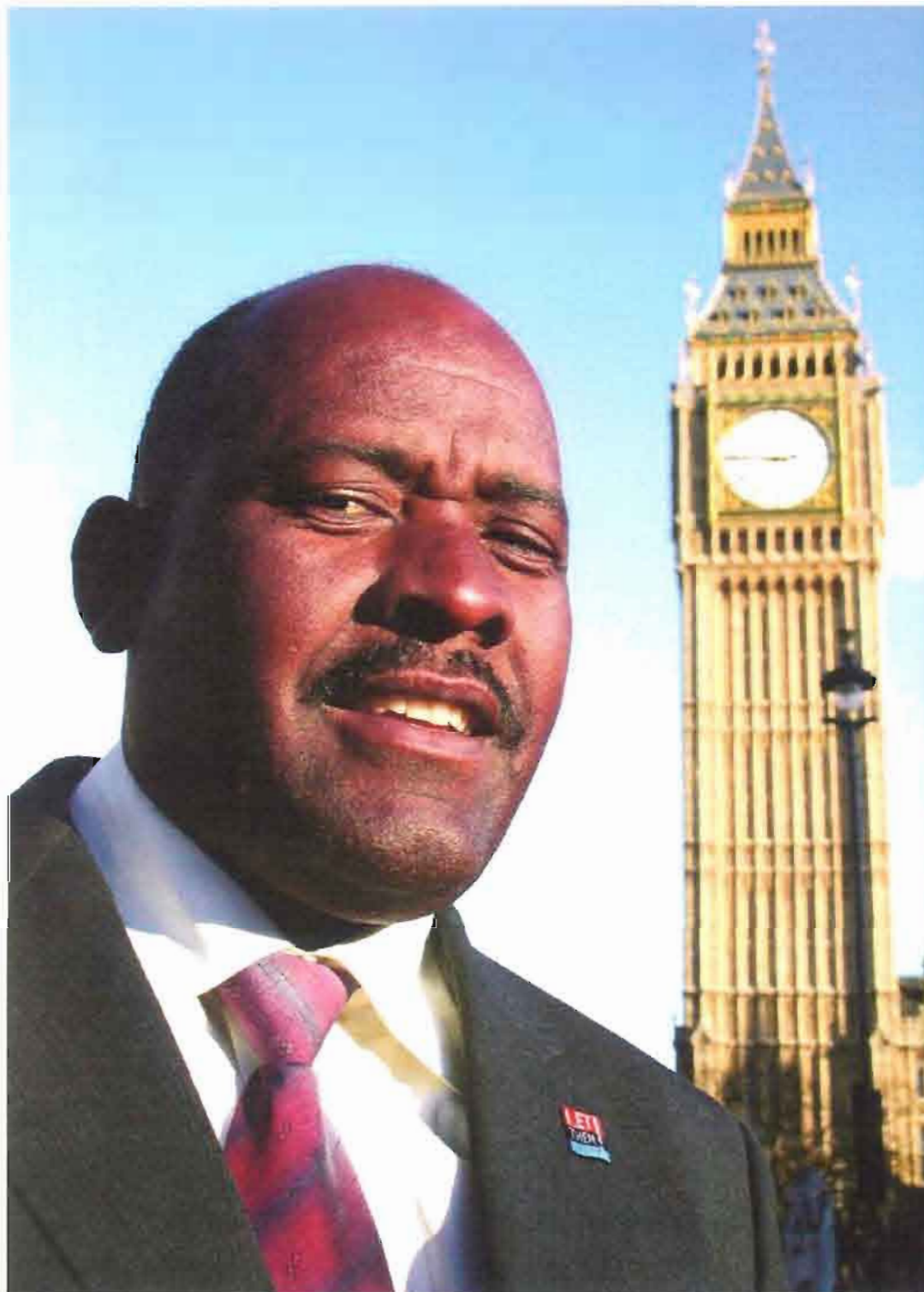
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Let Them Return, 113-119 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EB, United Kingdom
Tel: +44(0)870 8033 459 Email: julie@letthemreturn.com

A CRUMBLING DEFENCE

THE EXILE AND DERELICTION OF THE PEOPLE OF CHAGOS AND THE PLAN FOR THEIR RETURN





OLIVIER BANCOULT

CHAIRMAN - CHAGOS REFUGEES GROUP

Dear Friends

It gives me enormous pleasure to introduce this campaign brochure.

It is a part of the biggest ever movement to persuade the British Government to allow the Chagossian people to return to the outer islands of the Chagos archipelago.

It will come together under the banner of LET THEM RETURN!

The removal of the Chagossian people by the British Government started in the 1960s - we were all evicted and forced to leave everything behind because the American Government wished to build a military airbase on Diego Garcia - something that had to be acquired at the expense of us.

I was had to leave my home on one of the other islands, Perhos Banhos, when I was just four years old. I was never to return.

I have few memories from my time there. My mother tells me that life was wonderful in those days. Everyone had their own house, job, and we all lived as one happy family.

Arriving in Mauritius, where many of us still live, was a nightmare for us. No planning had been made. We had no houses, very little money and no jobs; we were cast aside without any provision. We had no training and so we couldn't integrate.

As a result we suffered hardship and dreadful living conditions. Dumped into the slums of Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius, we faced many problems, such as drugs, prostitution, unemployment and early death.

Throughout the forty years since our expulsion we have never lost our identity or the hope that one day, we would be allowed back to our Indian Ocean homes.

Eight years ago we won our first legal victory in the English courts for the right to return but like our other legal victories the British Government, for all their talk of protecting human rights, stymied this move to hand back our birthright.

A fourth, and we hope final legal appeal to enshrine our rights will be heard at the House of Lords on 30 June this year.

By supporting the Let Them Return campaign you can help us achieve our greatest wish to return home to Chagos and support our hope that we can achieve a new life and a new beginning for our people.

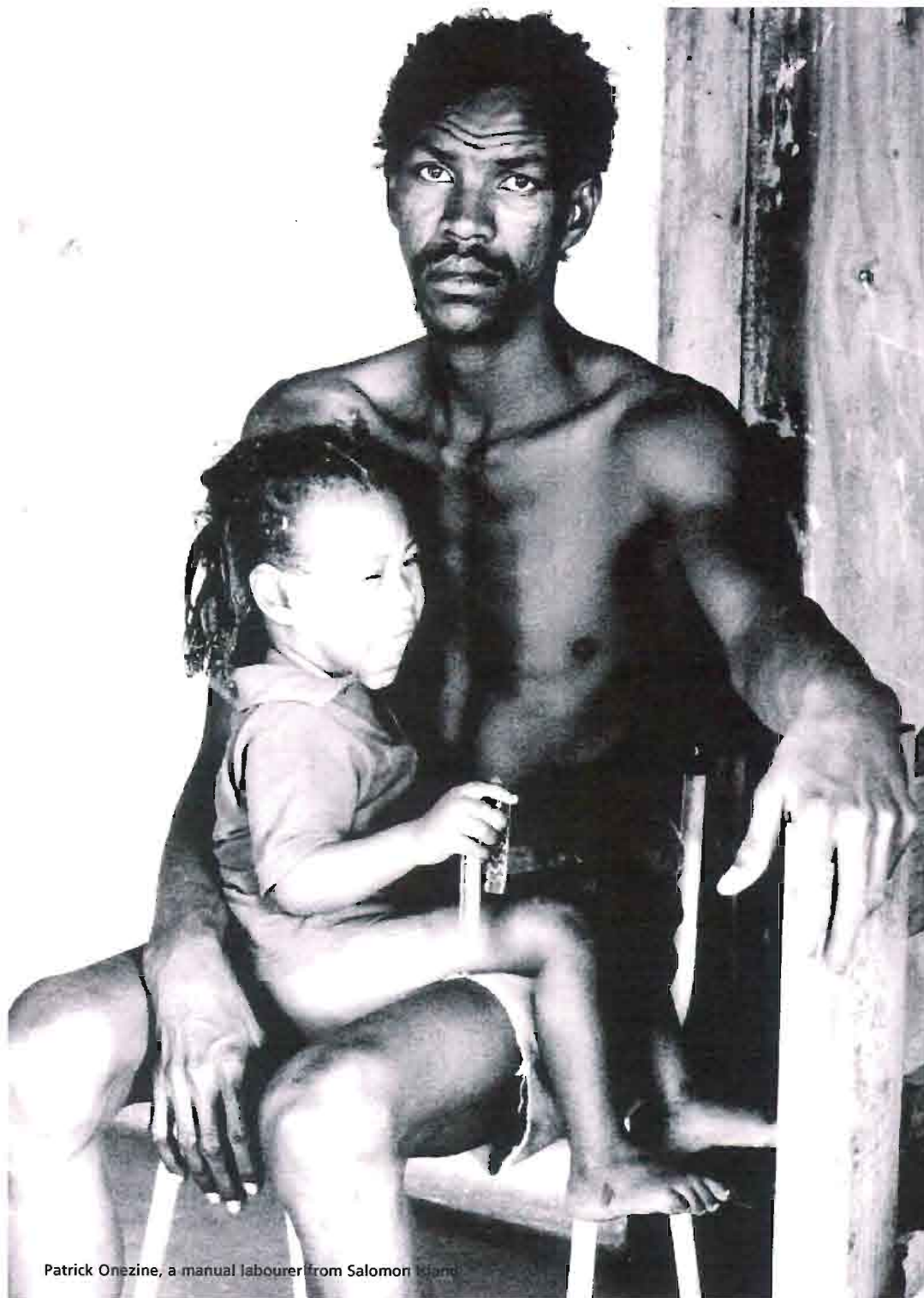
To find out how you can help bring about this change please log on to www.letthemreturn.com

My kindest wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Olivier Bancoult'.



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Patrick Onezine, a manual labourer from Salomon Island

THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY

The Chagos archipelago is a place of phenomenal beauty. It is also one of the most remote in the world. It is situated in the Indian Ocean 1200 miles (1931 km) northeast of Mauritius.

The territory of the archipelago is immense - 21,000 square miles of ocean covering the peaks and troughs of an ancient Gondwanaland mountain chain known as Limuria.



Human settlement on these once gentle islands began in the mid-1780s when a French sugar and plantation owner from Mauritius established a coconut plantation.

Worked on by dozens of African slaves the plantation soon prospered.

Between the late 1700s and 1828 the islands temporarily became a leper colony, hosting sufferers from Mauritius - by the end of the 18th century, the colony numbered around 300 people.

After the Treaty of Paris in 1814, Chagos passed from the French to the British flag.

In 1835 slavery was abolished and soon after the leper colony was officially closed.



Records show that there were 448 people living in the Chagos archipelago with more than half living on Diego Garcia, six miles wide and thirteen long - the largest island in the group.

As more plantations were developed, new workers were needed. Many came from the Indian sub-continent and gradually integrated into settled society.

As Diego Garcia became populated so too did Peros Banhos and Salomon to the north and the Egmont Islands at the western edge of the group.



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Marie Veronique Elfrasier,, from Diego Garcia, and a B2 Stealth Bomber, operated from that island



By the beginning of the 19th century the entire islands' population was around 750 people with around a third of that number inhabiting the curiously foot-shaped atoll of Diego Garcia.

Here there were three copra factories, a church, a hospital, a railway and a coaling station for Australia-bound steam ships.

Life was hard but afforded people the dignity of being self-sufficient; they fished off the coral outcrops in their off-duty hours, raised livestock and grew vegetables, turning them into small-scale farmers in imitation of continental peasantry.

A 1950s British government Colonial Office film shows the islanders' children splashing in a sheltered, palm-fringed lagoon. It noted that the people here 'lived their lives in surroundings of wonderful natural beauty.'



Next the film shows a line of proud mothers in all their finery with their babies awaiting their baptism. Here was Britain's empire at its most benign.

Then, in the 1960s British foreign policy intervened and soon the Chagossian people would be forcibly removed to live in squalor. Their happiness was lost, and the graves of their ancestors, bearing poignant lists of old family names, would soon be a memorial to a way of life that would, in a little time, be gone forever. For the vast majority had lived and died largely unknown and un-regarded, and now it seemed their vanished world would keep its silence for all eternity.



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A Chagossian shelter in the slumlands of Port Louis, Mauritius

THE PATH TO EXILE

In November 1965, when many countries were undergoing a process of liberating colonies, Britain created a new one called the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT).

This included the Chagos Archipelago, which had been a dependency of Mauritius.

As an inducement to Mauritius and as part of the negotiations on independence Britain offered the country £3 million as compensation for the loss of the Chagos Archipelago. Within weeks BIOT was born, to be under direct rule from London.

"We would not wish it to become common knowledge that some of the Chagossians have lived on Diego Garcia for at least two generations and could therefore be regarded as 'British'."

— Foreign Office 1971

"It is very important to maintain the fiction that the inhabitants of Chagos are not a permanent or semi-permanent population."

— Foreign Office 1970

After Mauritius had reluctantly accepted the offer, the British government under prime minister Harold Wilson secretly signed an agreement with the United States on December 1966. This gave over Diego Garcia to the US until at least 2016.

The incentive to offer the use of Diego Garcia without any charge was a secret linkage to millions of pounds being wiped from a multi-million dollar deal to buy the Polaris nuclear submarine, designed to carry the latest A-3 missiles.

"I remember when Michel left the island. There were a couple of people there and a lot of them were crying... a few days before all the family dogs had been exterminated and the donkeys killed."

— Marcel Moutine — eye-witness & manager of copra plantation on Diego Garcia

"When the boat finally arrived in Mauritius the conditions were filthy. They had given four days to travel and weeks of the winter and children were sick. The boat deck was covered in manure, urine and vomit and so was the hold. When they arrived there was no accommodation for them and the administration put them in the local prison..."

— Marcel Moutine — eye-witness & manager of copra plantation on Diego Garcia

The deal was kept from Parliament, the US Congress and the UN and attracted virtually no media scrutiny. The reason for US interest was that the Pentagon had selected Diego Garcia as the ideal place to keep watch on the activities of the Cold War Soviet navy and had ideas about turning this small island into a heavily fortified military base.

The American government made it clear that they did not want people living on the island nor anywhere near the base and turned to Britain to forcibly remove every man, woman and child from the archipelago. All their livestock was to



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Lionel Modliar and Leonide Jaffar, December 6, 2005. Outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London

be slaughtered, their family pets gassed. Nothing was to remain of these people who had lived in their scattered paradise for over 150 years.

Carrying few possessions and having to endure a five-day, 1000 kilometre crossing, the islanders were dumped on the dockside in Port Louis, Mauritius. While some made it to the Seychelles, without homes, jobs or money, the Chagossians were forced to live in deep poverty in filthy conditions. Forgotten by the British Crown almost nothing was heard of their plight until 1975. Ever since the Chagossian people have refused to remain silent and have campaigned tirelessly for redress and justice.

"We must be very tough about this. The object of the exercise was to get some birds which will remain ours, there will be no indigenous population except residents who have not got a committee (the Status of Women Committee does not cover the rights of birds)"

- Foreign Office 1966

"Unfortunately along with the birds go some few Tatars or Ides Fildays, whose origins are obscure, and who are being hopefully washed onto Mauritius etc"

(Hand written addendum to the above - Foreign Office 1966)



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A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

MID 1780s - French colonist from Mauritius establishes a coconut plantation on Diego Garcia.

AUGUST 1964 - A joint US/UK military survey of the islands takes place.

NOVEMBER 1965 - The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) is formed. This includes Chagos.

DECEMBER 1965 - UN resolution 2066XX is passed by the General Assembly. It called on the UK 'to take no action which would dismember the territory of Mauritius and to violate its integrity.' Britain refused to implement this resolution.

DECEMBER 1966 - British and US Governments sign a secret military agreement giving Diego Garcia to the US for military purposes. Forced expulsion of the Chagos islanders begins.

MARCH 1971 - First US military personnel arrive on Diego Garcia; construction of huge US naval listening station begins. Islanders' villages and graveyard are destroyed.

SEPTEMBER 1971 - the last Chagossian is evicted from Diego Garcia and their return is barred by section 4 of the BIOT Immigration Ordinance 1971 – in 2000 this provision removing the Chagossians was declared unlawful in the London High Court.

1971-73 - Over 1,000 Islanders are living in desperate poverty in Mauritius and Seychelles. The UK washes its hands of its own citizens, stating that it is now the responsibility of these poor island states to provide for the exiles.

1973 - Britain decides on a complete depopulation of the outlying islands in the Chagos Archipelago and the islands are cleansed of their remaining communities.

1975 - Some aspects of the Chagossian affair surface at a US Congressional Committee hearing.

NOVEMBER 3 2000 - At the High Court of Justice in London, Lord Justice Laws and Mr Justice Gibbs hold Section 4 of the BIOT

Jean-Louis Lemaitre, a retired docker and fisherman from Salomon Island



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Chagossian Oula Lemaitre outside her home

Immigration Ordinance to be unlawful and that it should be quashed. The Chagos islanders should in consequence be allowed to go home.

The British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, announced that the government would not appeal against the ruling. Later the same day, the Foreign Office published a new Immigration Ordinance which confined the banning order only to the island of Diego Garcia.

JUNE 2004 - Using its Royal Prerogative, the British Government announced two 'orders in council' - in effect overturning the High Court ruling and banning the Chagossians from returning to the outlying islands. FCO Minister Bill Rammell claimed the two orders restored the legal position to what it was before the High Court decision of November 2000.

APRIL 2006 - In a visit organised by the British & Mauritian Governments, 100 Chagossians return on a short trip to the islands, some 40 years after they were forcibly expelled and some 19 years after the US & UK Governments allowed the Dallas Cowboys' Cheerleaders to visit Diego Garcia to entertain US forces.

MAY 2006 - The Chagos islanders' case is brought back to court. In a damning verdict, two High Court judges condemn as 'repugnant' the UK Government's choice to 'exile a whole population'. The High Court states the two orders in council are 'null and void.' The FCO appeals.

MAY 2007 - The Chagos islanders win another victory in the Court of Appeal that confirms their right of return to the outer islands. On 23 October the House of Lords gives conditional permission to the Government to appeal the verdict.

JANUARY 2008 - The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee takes oral evidence from Olivier Bancoult leader of the Chagos Refugees Group and their lawyer, Richard Gifford.

MARCH 2008 - The launch of the Let Them Return campaign.

JUNE-JULY 2008 - Anticipated publication of report by House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on the UK's Overseas Territories.

30 JUNE 2008 - Expected hearing of FCO Appeal by the House of Lords.



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THE RETURN OF A PEOPLE

The Chagossian People hope to return home soon. They call on others to support them as they build a viable community, one very different from the coconut plantations of forty years ago. The outer islands retain their great natural diversity and beauty.

But they and a restored Chagossian community will now be in the front-line of adaptation to climate change. The islands, their coral reefs and the archipelago's marine resources will all benefit from active management by a people committed to protecting their own homes and livelihoods.

All activities on and around the islands, from fishing and wildlife conservation to sewage disposal and energy efficiency, will adopt the best current practices for vulnerable island ecosystems. At last it will be possible to provide a long-term research base for visiting scientists and conservationists.

Controlled and responsible tourism will be far more than just a source of income. Those who visit as tourists and who support the new Chagos in other ways will all be sharing in a historic enterprise: a dispossessed people taking back control of their future; and those who have been opponents in the law courts at last becoming partners in a victory for justice and freedom.

"Chagos" will become a story in which to take suitably qualified pride. Comparable to the Campaign for the Abolition of Slavery - at last, an injustice is being righted.

Enjoying the freedom to go home will not be easy. It will require new skills from the Chagossians, sensitive support from interested parties and imaginative investment in activities that respect the environment. Many people consider that the archipelago deserves listing as a World Heritage Site.

Now is the time for all who care about Chagos, from many different perspectives, to start preparing for the cooperative discussions that will be needed to make this shared vision a reality.





A real future? - Lysette-Marie Bancoult - born 24th May 2010, on Peros Banhos Island

WE WANT OUR FUTURE BACK

This year offers the Chagos people a truly exceptional set of opportunities effectively to plan and build a new life.

Contrary to British Governments claims, studies currently underway already make plain that there is no physical, economic or environmental reasons why resettlement on two of the outer islands of the Chagos archipelago (Peros Banhos and Salomon) with a possible return to Diego Garcia in the future, should not take place.

We are confident that 2008 will also be a special year for our campaigners and supporters to remember.

With good will, proper consultation and co-operation by all concerned, resettlement should be possible for those who wish to return.

So what can you do to help?

First, visit www.letthemreturn.com and see the variety of actions including downloading an Action Card to send to the Foreign Secretary.

We are particularly keen to hear from entrepreneurs who may be interested in investment opportunities within the resettled areas of the archipelago. We will be forming a body to look at all forms of opportunities available to the Chagos community and offer advice on investment. If you are interested please email richard@letthemreturn.com

The global symbol for the campaign is the Let Them Return metal badge, set to become the symbol-with-a-purpose in 2008. You can buy them online at our website for £2.50 (incl p&p) or you can send a cheque for the total amount to the campaign address overleaf. Please make cheques payable to the Ilois Support Trust. Or become a member which entitles you to some fantastic benefits. Details of how to do this are on our website.

You can also help the campaign by donating money to the Ilois Support Trust online at www.letthemreturn.com/donations.

Remember that discrimination and indifference are not sustained by chance, but by turning a blind eye to social injustice and human rights.

By mobilizing popular support through a series of events and actions, we can press the British government to rise to the challenge of this year. They alone have the opportunity to right so many wrongs. Let our message to them be clear.

Allow the Chagossians to go home. Let Them Return!



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