

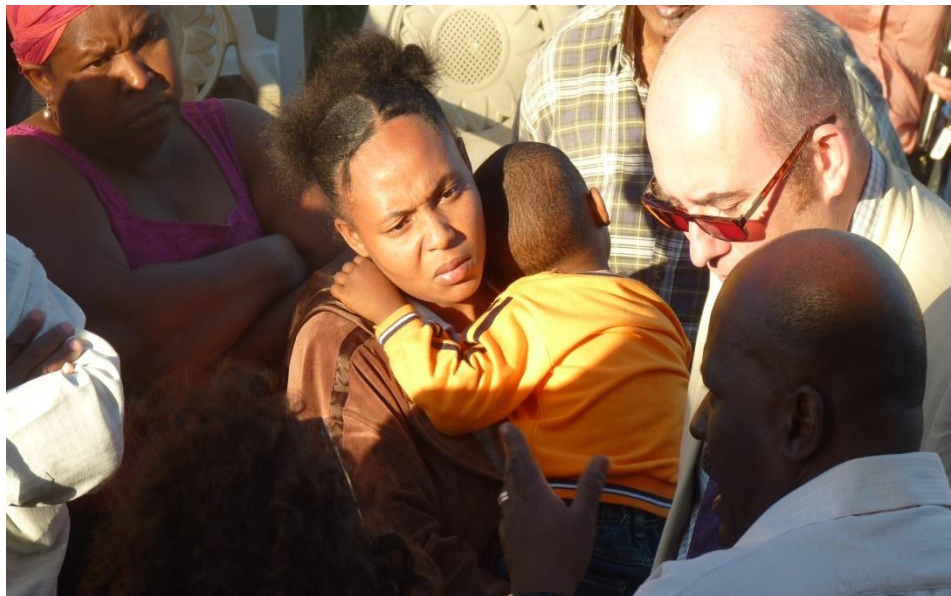


CHAGOS REFUGEES GROUP

**1983-2013: Celebrating 30 years dedicated to
The struggle of the Chagossian People for their Rights and Homeland
27 October to 3 November 2013, Mauritius**

**Chagos International Conference
29-31 October 2013**

Righting the Wronged: Let Our People Return Home



***Nou se Chagosien, Chagos se Nou!*
*We are the Chagossians, Chagos is us!***

**Venue: Lisette Talate Chagossian Community Centre
Chagos Training and Resources Centre
Pointe aux Sables, Mauritius**

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

In the 1970s desperate “ilois” women, unable to bear the brunt of all the misery and hardships of life in exile, took to the streets and went on long hunger strikes – the longest in the history of Mauritius – in order to force the British and Mauritian authorities to get them out of their unbearable plight.

Their heroic struggle was the foundation on which the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) was born in 1983, and their undaunted fighting spirit was the legacy that ever since has inspired the CRG all the way through the 30 years of its resilient struggle.

From victory to defeat to victory, it has been a long, difficult and constant but unequal battle. The last lap of return to home has yet to be completed, but what has already been achieved is considerable, invaluable and priceless. That achievement is our right of existence as a people with a history, an identity based on a shared cultural heritage, a nation with a homeland even though for the time being it has been stolen from us.

Following UK’s recently declared intention to review its policy on Chagos resettlement, meetings have been held with Chagossians in Mauritius and UK. Thus on 26 June 2013, two FCO envoys met the Chagos people in Mauritius. We listened to them, organized a site visit of places where Chagossians are living in expectation of the day when their fundamental right of return to their homeland will be respected and they will be resettled in their native Chagos. We welcomed them to the Chagos Training and Resources Centre – our little Chagos, recreated provisionally – and listened to the same old resettlement story retold with the usual words of noncommittal caveats, of commitments to defence and security, of climate change and sea level rise suddenly threatening low-lying islands Diego Garcia excepted, of high level cost and logistics being a heavy liability.

The last feasibility study was carried out 10 years ago and took 18 months to reach the unconvincing conclusion of non-feasibility. Between that study and now, more than 100 native born Chagossians have died. Among them two historical figures of the Chagossian struggle, Lisette Aurelie Talate who left us in January 2012 and Charlesia Alexis in December the same year. A special tribute will be paid during the Conference and on All Saints Day to them and to all those who devoted their life to the Chagossian cause.

By the time the proposed new study will be ready, and assuming that resettlement is recommended and becomes a reality, many more Chagossians of the elder generation will have disappeared without their right to be buried in their homeland being respected and fulfilled.

The Chagossian people is conscious that time is running out and it would be criminal for any UK – and USA – government, past, present or future, to bide time on the Chagossian tragedy. 2013 marks the 30 years of CRG’s struggle dedicated to the Chagossian people’s cause. Hopefully this year will also mark the beginning of the process of our return to our home land, our sea and its environment, with 2016 as a legitimate deadline for resettlement to be effective.

With this promising perspective in view, the Conference comes at the right moment for proposing a resettlement plan, set for and together with the people of the Chagos, as its key expected outcome.

Chagos International Conference
29-31 October 2013
Righting the Wronged: Let Our People Return Home

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

29 OCTOBER

14h-14h30 Registration of participants

14h30-15h30 INAUGURAL SESSION

- Word of welcome, by Suzelle Baptiste
- Universal Prayer by Rev. Mario Li Hing, Chaplain of the CRG
- Keynote Address by Olivier Bancoult, President of Chagos Refugees Group

**Opening Speech by H.E. Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK,
President of the Republic of Mauritius**

15h30 Break

16h-17h30 SESSION 1: The legal aspects of the Chagossian struggle (chair: Vinesh Hookoomsing)

Richard Gifford (Lead Chagos Solicitor in UK): *Thirty years on, the tide has turned.*

David Snoxell (Coordinator, Chagos Islands APPG): *The options for resolving the issues concerning the future of the Chagossians and of the Chagos Islands.*

André Oraison (Professeur de Droit, U. de la Réunion): *Plaidoyer pour le retour des Chagossiens sur leurs îles natales. Un objectif réaliste à la veille du renouvellement du bail consenti par la Grande-Bretagne aux Etats-Unis sur Diego Garcia.*

18h RECEPTION

30 OCTOBER

8h30-10h SESSION 2: Human Rights (chair: Olivier Bancoult)

Cassam Uteem (former President of the Republic of Mauritius, President of Chagos Solidarity Trus Fund): *Chagos out of bounds to Chagossians: For how long?*

Jocelyn Chan Low (Dean, Faculty of SSH, University of Mauritius): *Chagos et les crimes de la décolonisation: Quels recours?*

Maureen Tong (Head of T. Mbeki African Leadership Institute): *Territorial disputes over Gibraltar and the Falklands – A contrast to the British approach to the Chagos Islands.*

10h **Break**

10h15-12h **SESSION 3: Sustainable Human Development & Environment Protection (chair: Sabrian Jean)**

Richard Dunne (Legal adviser, scientist, worked on Indian Ocean coral reefs) & **Barbara Brown** (Professor, Leverhulme Emeritus Fellow, expert in coral biology): *The Chagos Islands - drowning or swimming?*

Richard Payendee (Commissioner for Environment & Forestry, Tourism, Marine Parks & Fisheries): *Relying on our People for Land and Marine Resources protection and development: Good practice results from Rodrigues that could enlighten the Chagos issue.*

Vassen Kauppaymuthoo (Environment Engineer/Oceanographer): *La protection des richesses marines des Chagos et la présence des Chagossiens.* (in absentia).

12h **Break**

13h30-14h30 **SESSION 4: Return and Resettlement (chair: Maureen Tong)**

Laura Jeffery (Lecturer & ESRC Fellow, Social Anthropology, U. of Edinburgh): *Economic livelihoods and sustainable development: Debates about the feasibility of resettlement of the Chagos Archipelago.*

David Vine (Associate Professor, Anthropology, American U., Washington D.C): *No Military Necessity: Why the U.S. Military Should Allow a Return.*

14h30-15h30 **SESSION 5: Return and Resettlement: The Chagos People perspective**

Panel presentation-discussion by Chagossians

Coordinator: **Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing** (Professor of Linguistics, Trustee of Chagos Solidarity Trust Fund)

Panelists: Group leaders of the Thematic Working Groups and Kishore Mundil

15h30 **Break**

15h45-16h30 **Setting up of Thematic Working Groups on Return and Resettlement**

31 OCTOBER

8h30-12h15 **SESSION 6: A FAST-TRACK RESETTLEMENT PLAN**

Thematic Working Group discussions on:

1. **WG1:** Social and environmental aspects (Group Leader: **Pascalina Nellan**, Chagos Welfare Fund)
2. **WG2:** Financial and economic aspects (Group leader: **Jean-Pascal Volbert**)
3. **WG3:** Infrastructure and logistics (Group leader: **Claudy Pauline**)

10h-10h15 Break

4. **WG4:** Housing, work and living (Group leader: **Sabrina Jean**, UKCHSA)
5. **WG5:** Culture and heritage (Group leader: **Olivier Bancoult**, CRG)
6. **WG6:** Management and sustainability (Group leader: **Bernard Nourrice**, Seychelles Chagos Association)

12h15 Break

13h30-15h30 Working Group Reports presentation and discussion

15h30 Break

16h Closing Session (chair: Olivier Bancoult)

- **Conference Report and Resolutions presented by Speak Human Rights**
- **Vote of Thanks by Corrine Aucharaz**
- **Closing address by Olivier Bancoult.**

17h RECEPTION