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Human Rights

SAVIMBI IN THE U.S. MEDIA

Elaine Windrich

PERESTROIKA'S IMPACT ON U.S. POLICY
TOWARD SOMALIA

Maina Kiai

*THE ILOIS TRAGEDY
Joseph E. Harris

HUMANITARIANISM AND THE LEGACY OF
MICKEY LELAND

Edward M. Kennedy

NKRUMAH AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Michael W. Williams

HAITI: A TEST FOR U.S. POLICY

Walter Fauntroy

NAMIBIA'S INDEPENDENCE PROCESS

TransAfrica Forum Seminar

nance facilities, a weather unit, a cargo and passenger terminal, air reconnaissance patrol, radio tracking facilities, and a medical unit.¹

Although Britain and the United States administer the base jointly, the latter is clearly the dominant partner. In 1980, for example, a British unit of about twenty-five was stationed on the island while the United States team numbered about 800. Initially planned for a team of 1500, the American military and civilian complement had grown to about 2100 by 1988.²

The justification for this highly strategic installation on such a small piece of distant real estate is military preparedness. Back in 1974 when reporting on the defense budget, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger outlined the strategic importance of Diego Garcia in the face of Soviet naval capabilities and deployment as well as in the unsettled situation in the oil-rich Middle East. At that time, Schlesinger said that "we are operating around 4000 to 5000 miles out of Subic Bay" in the Philippines. There were thus military and economic reasons for developing the base at Diego Garcia.³

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Chief of United States Naval Operations, expanded Schlesinger's account by pointing out that the Diego Garcia facilities would support naval forces in relief of air transport to the distant Indian Ocean area which required flight over other countries. Diego Garcia facilitated flexibility of naval and air support, maintenance and communications.⁴

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General George S. Brown, also weighed in with a report which stressed the importance of the Indian Ocean to oil and mineral resources, air and sea lines of communications. He noted that seventy-five percent of Western Europe's oil and eighty-five percent of Japan's oil came from the Middle East and could not be supplied by other sources. The Diego Garcia installation would protect those interests.⁵

These and other reports confirm the strategic importance the United States placed on Diego Garcia, an island Westerners first visited during the sixteenth century when Portuguese explorers arrived there. They were soon followed by the French and British and all of them took African slaves with them from Madagascar and the East African coast. By the 1780s Frenchmen had established a company to extract oil from coconuts, and over the years dried coconut (copra) became a major industry on the island which was seized by the British after defeating Napoleon. Thus, for nearly two hundred years prior to the development of the base, a permanent African settlement existed on British-ruled Diego Garcia. Those people became known as the Ilois and most of them worked on the coconut plantations which were well established by the end of the nineteenth century. The Ilois had

amount requested—on condition that the victims of the evacuation formally renounce all future claims. Circumstances compelled the Ilois to comply and the British set aside £250,000 of the settlement as an indemnity against future claims.⁹

Provision was made for the appointment of an Ilois Trust Fund to be supervised by a board of an equal number of Ilois and Mauritian government representatives and an independent chairman. Plans were developed for employment, housing projects, and social facilities at two sites, Tombeau Bay and Points aux Sables. But those plans remain to be realized.¹⁰

Meanwhile, several Ilois who received money to build their own homes found the costs prohibitive. Other homes were destroyed by cyclones in 1984. Those waiting for the housing projects to be constructed continue to incur debts and sink deeper into poverty. Many live in wretched circumstances such as overcrowdedness, crime and disease. To complicate matters further, Ilois who were not counted initially began to seek assistance. As a result, additional funds, better planned and executed social and economic solutions are necessary.¹¹

Some political groups, notably the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien*, have supported the Ilois cause by appealing to the governments of Britain and Mauritius to resolve the issue. The National Support Fund for the Ilois and the *Komite Moris Losean Indien* have also embraced the cause. In addition, the Minority Rights Organization in London has publicized the case and asked the United Nations Working Group on Slavery to consider the situation.¹² Still, very little has been done to alleviate the Ilois condition.

In January 1984 Ilois representatives made an appeal to the United States through the embassy in Mauritius. Washington's response was that the United States had no responsibility in the case. Two additional appeals were written in May and September of the same year, including a request for a written reply which never came. The Ilois argue that the United States as the principal beneficiary of their ejection from Diego Garcia and the establishment of the base should provide funds for housing, job-training programs, investment, health care and education.¹³ The United States takes the position that the matter is Britain's responsibility.

In 1985 the Ilois declared themselves a government in exile and now plan to send a delegation to the United States in an effort to mobilize support for their cause. Whether or not they will be able to make the trip remains to be seen because of a lack of funds. But there is no lack of determination on their part.

The Ilois are tragic victims of big power diplomacy. They were unable to protect themselves when Britain, in order to meet American

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 14. Diego Garcia: The Debate, 1975, 47.
 15. "The Diego Garcians," Editorial, *Washington Post*, 11 September 1975.