

29 JUN 1981

MEMORANDUM	
TO: OFFICER	FROM: PA
SUBJECT: Ilois Community in Mauritius	

Mr. Hewitt

Handled over at the  
talks on 29 June

See attached  
for CIOF +  
FNSI 375-55

The purpose of this memorandum is to give a general view of the problem and sufferings of the 942 Ilois households at present in Mauritius ever since the Ilois born in the Chagos Archipelago were either displaced in 1965 and thereafter, or were prevented from going back after having come to Mauritius for various reasons - visit, vacation, purchase of goods, medical care, etc.

#### Background

2. The decision to displace the "Ilois" from the Chagos Archipelago in 1965, before Mauritius became independent, was a British decision taken unilaterally in Whitehall.

3. The British Government made it clear in 1965, that the cost of resettling "elsewhere" those inhabitants of the "Oil Islands" (Chagos Archipelago) who could no longer remain there would be its responsibility.

#### 4. Conditions under which the Ilois were displaced from the Chagos Archipelago

It is sad to record that the Ilois displaced from the Chagos against their will were "offloaded" on to Mauritius in most inhuman conditions. They were not given the slightest information on what would be their lot in Mauritius. No census whatsoever was carried out to determine the number of Ilois who were going to be displaced and no prior notice was given to them. Furthermore, no resettlement scheme was prepared for them by the British Government and no arrangements were made to receive them in Mauritius. The terrible conditions under which the Ilois were uprooted from their islands are recorded in the attached statement (Appendix A).

#### 5. Sufferings of the Ilois following their displacement

As a result of their displacement to Mauritius, the Ilois were left to themselves, not knowing where to go for food and shelter. They endured all sorts of sufferings. Some even went to the extent of committing suicide. An account of their plight is given in the annexed statement (Appendix B).

6. Ever since Independence, in March 1968, every opportunity was taken to remind the British Government of its commitments to the displaced "Ilois", while efforts were made by the Mauritius Government either to consider employment opportunities for or to grant public assistance to those displaced "Ilois" who were in fact uprooted and stranded persons.

2./....

1698

The expenditure incurred by the Mauritius Government since 1965 up to the end of November 1971, in providing assistance to the displaced persons who had registered themselves amounted to Rs 214,485 as follows:-

	Rs.
Old Age Pension	46,262
Family Allowance	56,773
Outdoor Relief	111,450
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>214,485</b>

\* Mu just assist

Release of £650,000

8. After an exchange of correspondence and consultations between the Government of Mauritius and the British Government through the British High Commission in Port Louis, it was only on the 28th October, 1972 that the British Government released an amount of £650,000 (then Rs. 8.65 million) for the resettlement of persons displaced from the Chagos Archipelago including those who were still then (in 1972) in the Chagos Archipelago.

British responsibility and moral obligation

9. The fact that the British Government released the amount mentioned in para. 8, confirmed in no uncertain terms, its full and sole responsibility for having displaced the "Ilois" and its moral obligation towards them.

Resettlement

10. As soon as the money was received, a Ministerial Committee was appointed to implement a scheme for the resettlement of the "Ilois". The scheme was meant to provide to each household of a house and a suitable plot of land which would allow enough space for backyard farming and pig and poultry breeding.

11. The sum of Rs 8.65 million was meant to cover the following costs :-

	Rs.
Housing Estates	5,300,000
Job Rehabilitation	553,000
Refund of Outdoor Relief	225,000
Cost of resettling and rehabilitating other persons expected to arrive in the near future	2,500,000

34/.....

Survey

12. A survey carried out amongst the displaced persons indicated that the majority preferred to reside in Roche Bois area. Others had indicated either Cassis or Pointe aux Sables. Land was found to be available in Roche Bois and Pointe aux Sables and it was proposed to construct a housing estate at these two places. The implementation of the scheme was withheld because the Ministerial Committee came to know that a substantial number of Ilois were left out of the scheme and that there were practical difficulties in converting fishermen and labourers of copra plantations into small holder-producers. It was thus decided that a new survey should be carried out.

New Survey

13. A new survey was then carried out in 1974 by the Ministry of Social Security to determine the exact number of "Ilois" displaced from the Chagos Archipelago. It was found in that survey that 426 Ilois and their families were displaced after the excision of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius. This figure was always challenged by the "Ilois" community and consequently further surveys were carried out, one of them with the assistance of the Institut pour le Developpement et le Progres (I.D.P.). Despite several public invitations to register themselves, culminating in the invitations made in 1977, a large number did not do so for various reasons.

Mr A.R.G. Prosser

14. The British Government was requested by the Government of Mauritius to advise on how best to solve the resettlement problem of the Ilois in Mauritius. Mr A.R.G. Prosser, Adviser on Social Development in the British Ministry of Overseas Development, was detailed to prepare a report on the subject from 24th January to 2nd February 1976. His report contained the following main recommendations:-

- (a) setting up of a Resettlement Committee grouping Government and "Ilois" representatives;
- (b) training of unemployed "Ilois" into semi-skilled labour;
- (c) proper survey into conditions of living of "Ilois";
- (d) construction of suitable houses for the "Ilois".

4./.....

15. The recommendations were examined by the Government of Mauritius which appointed a Resettlement Committee under the Chairmanship of the former Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service (then Mr D. Burrenchobay). The Prosser recommendations could not be implemented because in the meantime the Ilois community had run into serious financial difficulties and a good number of Ilois were pressing for a cash compensation. The request was acceded to by the Government of Mauritius and the British High Commission in Port Louis was informed accordingly.

#### Payment

16. On the basis of a survey carried out by the Ministry of Social Security in 1977, the following categories of persons were made eligible for compensation and payment was effected in 1978:-

	<u>Cases</u>	<u>Rs.</u>
Children under 5	410	1,000 (each)
Children between 5 and 11	563	1,200 (each)
Children between 11 and 18	356	1,500 (each)
Adults	1,222	7,590 (each)
Old Age Pensioners (additional)	103	250 (each)
Females with children (additional)	118	250 (each)

#### New Suggestions

17. Subsequent to the distribution mentioned above, the "Ilois" came forward with new suggestions and new requests. The Ilois community pressed Government for compensation for (a) those who had failed to register themselves and (b) those who, at some time or other had worked in the Chagos Archipelago.

#### Ad Hoc Committee

18. Following a hunger strike by some Ilois (women), the Government of Mauritius decided in September 1980 to appoint an Ad Hoc Committee comprising representatives of Government Ministries, 2 M.L.A.'s (Hon. David and Hon. Berenger) and three Ilois representatives. The Committee recommended that a fresh registration should be carried out and the recommendation was approved by the Government.

#### Registration

19. The registration was carried out in Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega and St. Brandon and the Committee subsequently identified 582 adults and 727 children and added their names on the list of persons who were entitled to a compensation in 1978.

5./4...

s the balance of Rs 2,483,973 (including interest) remaining from the original sum of Rs 8.65 million was not sufficient to pay to the "Ilois" the same amount of compensation as in 1978, the Committee suggested, and the Government agreed, that a part-payment be effected as follows:-

	<u>Rs.</u>
Adults	3,000 (each)
Children under 5	500
Children between 5 and 11	600
Children between 11 and 18	750

Payment was effected as from the 16th December, 1980.

#### Agreement

Following another hunger strike by some Ilois (women) in March 1981, the Government of Mauritius, conscious of the difficulties of the "Ilois", agreed to help them further and signed a four-point agreement on Saturday the 4th April, 1981 relating to:-

- (i) an advance of about Rs 3.5 million by the Government of Mauritius despite current economic problems;
- (ii) the sending of a delegation to London;
- (iii) the terms of reference of the delegation; and
- (iv) immediate assistance to destitute Ilois, as generous as the country could afford.

20. It is worth noting that the British Lawyer, Mr Bernard Sheridan, acting on behalf of some "Ilois" came forward with an offer of £1.25 m from the British Government, which again confirmed the recognition by the latter (a) of its full and sole responsibility for having displaced the Ilois and its moral obligation towards them and (b) that the compensation of £650,000 already paid was inadequate. This sum is also considered inadequate by the Ilois. The British Government has not made known the basis on which the figure of £1.25 m had been arrived at. The Ilois representatives, in a memorandum delivered to the British High Commission in Port Louis on the 28th March, 1981 have requested for a final compensation of the order of £8 m. The Government of Mauritius has agreed to support the request.

6,/,.,.

Efforts made

The Government of Mauritius has done everything within available means and resources in finding a satisfactory and final solution to a problem which, it is emphasized, is not of its making.

22. On a number of occasions, Mauritius Ministers and the Prime Minister have individually and collectively taken up the question of additional and adequate compensation for the "Ilois" with the British Government. The Minister of Finance expressed in March 1981 to the British High Commissioner in Port Louis, the Mauritius Government's concern that the British Government should consider urgently the overall question of compensation. The Prime Minister subsequently also took up the matter with the British High Commissioner.

Difficulties and sufferings

23. Parts II - VI of the Sylva Report following his survey on the conditions of living of the "Ilois" community in Mauritius give an insight into the present problems faced by them. It is worth noting that 76.6% of the ilois have expressed therein their wish to return to the Chagos Archipelago. ★

24. It is emphasized that in the Chagos Archipelago, the "Ilois" had no housing problem, no employment problem and no financial problem and were happy with their way of life. Since their displacement to and arrival in Mauritius, they have led a miserable life in difficult and trying conditions.

Hope for a fair and final settlement

25. It is the hope of the delegation that the British Government will favourably grant an additional and final compensation of £8 m and will, in addition, release a sum of Rs 3.5 million which the Government of Mauritius has advanced for the payment of compensation to newly registered cases.

Conclusion

This memorandum does not pretend to have covered all aspects relating to the "Ilois" Community, and in detail, but has set out to give an idea of the sufferings endured by the "Ilois" community, whose problems, it is emphasized, are not of the making of the Government of Mauritius and of what has been done in Mauritius to help towards alleviating these sufferings.

Government House  
Port Louis

24th June, 1981

PAPER PREPARED BY FRONT NATIONAL DE SOUTIEN AUX ILOIS

Depopulation

Although only the southernmost island of Diego Garcia was to be used as a base, the decision was taken to depopulate the whole archipelago, leaving many of these islands unexploited by man and going to waste. This depopulation occurred in stages, and ended with the arrival of the last batch of Ilois by the ship "Nordvaer" at the beginning of 1973.

This depopulation of the Chagos of a people who had lived in these islands for several generations, (the main settlement was reported to be 200 years old) caused much suffering to this community; uprooted from its homeland and traditional society, to be transferred to this far-away island of ours, here in Mauritius in a very different society - uprooted from a semi-subsistence economy with practically no demographic pressure, to a monetised market economy in a heavily populated country.

Plantations closed

The British government proceeded by cutting off their economic base in the islands; the company controlling the islands' coconut plantations was bought out for £1,100,000 (according to the Sunday Times article of the 21st September, 1975 entitled "The Islanders that Britain Sold"); and in 1967, Mr Marcel Moulinie, an ex-major shareholder was entrusted with the task of running down the plantations.

The immediate effect of this decision was that Ilois families or individuals who were then in Mauritius, for various reasons (visiting, vacation, making purchases, medical care, child birth etc.), were not allowed to return to the Chagos. They were left stranded in Mauritius, with no help to enable them to settle here. They were left to fend for themselves, without jobs, without housing and without money. Many had to seek shelter with friends. Their poverty was great and their living conditions difficult - some having to sleep in kitchens and in verandahs. They were cut off from their families and their possessions - these were taken care of, as far as they could be, by friends who volunteered to help in the Chagos.

Supplies curtailed

The other element of force which was used against the Ilois, was the curtailment of supply boats, leading to a reduction and eventually scarcity of medical, food and other supplies. "... there would be no ship to feed us", Mrs Chamona quoted in the Sunday Times article, page 1, op.cit. Some Ilois have been greatly handicapped due to lack of medical care during this period. However, due to the partly subsistence nature of their economy, many Ilois families managed to survive on local food supplies. But, most had to leave Diego Garcia by 1970, initially either for the other islands in the Chagos or for Mauritius. The last group left Diego Garcia on the 28th September, 1971 when work on the plantations actually stopped, and shortly after the first Americans had arrived.

### Resistance and the Stay in Prison

The Ilois were eventually moved from the other islands by 1973. During the last stage of their forcible exile, it is reported (by Colin Legum in the Observer of the 14th September, 1975) that around 10 families refused to leave, and had to be forced out - one Ilois woman, Marie Vencatessen was reported as saying that the last batch to leave the Chagos (35 in all) had to live for 9 days in prison in the Seychelles, as there was no accommodation which had been organised for them. (apparently, the suggestion to use the prisons was made by the then administrator of B.I.O.T.). They ate prison food, slept on prisoners' mattresses and were locked up at night - others have reported that they did not receive any allowance whilst there, and so had to use up part of their meagre savings.

The conditions under which the Ilois were transported to Mauritius were most deplorable. "Each of the voyages cramped under tarpaulins above the copra on the rolling decks of the Nordvaer were clearly a nightmare for the islanders. But it was only a foretaste of what was to come" (Sunday Times article Op.cit.).

Promises were also made of jobs, houses, financial compensation, verbally by Mr M. Moulinie, it is reported by some Ilois; whilst others claim that even written promises were made. As it is when the last batch of Ilois got to Mauritius in 1973, they refused to disembark until some of these promises, if only in the form of housing, materialised .....

### The loss and the reaction

Many Ilois owned their own boats, fished, cultivated gardens and tended livestock. They lived in a community. When they were exiled, they had to leave their homes behind, their animals (chickens, ducks etc.), much of their furniture, their church and their cemetery where their ancestors were buried. They were not migrant workers as some officials of the British government have claimed, but a community in its own right, with its own specificities in the creole language, with its own culture ..... A community, part of the Mauritian people, part of the developing Mauritian nation - uprooted from its land because of the military aims of the big powers in our ocean.

This explains why, one of them, Michel Vencatessen, has entered a test action against the British government on the grounds that he was "ordered, coerced and compelled" to leave - Indeed they were!

---

Most of the information above is extracted from the Sunday Times articles entitled "Shabby truth about the exiled islanders" and "The Islanders that Britain Sold" - September 21, 1975.



## Appendix B

### Paper prepared by the Comite Ilois - Organisation Fraternelle

#### The Ilois are homeless

When the last ship, the NCRDVAKER, anchored, the Ilois did not want to leave the ship.

The Captain of the ship and Mr. Vallet had to persuade them to get down.

Some were promised a house at the Dockers' Flats, and others at Cite La Cure.

A few of the Ilois accepted to leave the ship and the others believing that they will all be offered a house, followed suit.

Finally, some families did obtain a house either at Baie-du-Tombeau or at La Cure.

The rest sought shelter with relatives or friends or had to rent a house. But most of them had to sleep on blankets in the verandas of well wishers.

To obtain a roof, some had to help as watchmen in bungalows, some had to be separated from their families and find a room in servant's quarters; some continued to live in verandahs, some slept under a tarpaulin. In one case, 23 persons slept under a tarpaulin for 22 days. Their names: Cherri family, Thomas family, Tyatons family, Alexandre family.

#### The Ilois who have been imprisoned

Many Ilois have been imprisoned. Some have been sent to prison because, after landing in Mauritius, they did not get a job, and through poverty, *became* burglars. We don't have information about them, but we have been able to obtain a few names. Poverty has driven them on a wrong path.

1. Sakir, Elphese: Unemployed
2. Alexis, Cyril : Unemployed
3. Cherri, Yves : Unemployed

#### The Ilois who became prostitutes

A large number of women and young girls - some of them aged only 13, 14 and 15, have left their husbands or their parents to lead a prostitute life in order to earn a living.

This is the result of poverty which struck them on their arrival to Mauritius.

In the course of the survey, we could not get all the names. Some of them willingly gave us their names so that it would be known that they are still in that situation.

1. Soupain, Marie Claire
2. Thomas, Lilette
3. Thomas, Gisele

/2.....

The Ilois who needed psychiatric treatment

1. Uranie, Gerard: As soon as he landed in Mauritius, his family admitted him at Brown Sequard Hospital because he was considered mentally affected.
2. Bothman, Arcel: One month after his landing, he was admitted at the psychiatric hospital.
3. Georges, Willehmine: While on the ship, he showed signs of being sick and had to be admitted to the hospital as soon as he landed.
4. Thomas, Stello: Some time after his landing, he continued feeling dizzy. He too had to be admitted.
5. Stanislas, Aurelien: Mentally affected and had to be admitted at Brown Sequard Hospital.
6. Elemait, Willy: Mental patient.
7. Payron, Antoinette: On the death of his child due to lack of food, he burnt his wife and wanted to commit suicide. He became mentally sick and had to be admitted.
8. Rabebrune, Marie: While on the ship, he had lost his head and was admitted as soon as he landed.
9. Volfrin, Paul: Aged 18, mentally sick.
10. Mandarin, Charles: Came to Mauritius in 1970. In 1971 he had to be admitted to the psychiatric hospital. He had attempted to return to Diego Garcia and when he failed, he was mentally affected.
11. Flore, Madelaine: Because of poverty he had to separate from his children whom he admitted in a convent. Sometimes later, he was mentally affected.
12. Piron, Elvar: The death of his children (whom he did not have the means to nourish, was responsible for his losing his head).
13. Uranie, Carl: He too had to be admitted at Brown Sequard Hospital.
14. Louis, Gerard: Psychiatric trouble, had to be treated at Brown Sequard Hospital.
15. Georges, Will Emile: Treated at Brown Sequard Hospital.

Note:

The Ilois state that there had, at no time, on Diego, been so many mental patients. Those who have made the Ilois leave their land for Mauritius, should have to bear the responsibility for those Ilois who have been admitted at the psychiatric hospital and for those who have found death there.

The Ilois who committed suicide after landing in Mauritius

There have been several cases of suicide. Suicide is an act of despair. According to an enquiry made with their parents and friends, the reasons behind these suicides are disgust of the life they have been living in Mauritius and of poverty: no roof, no job and uncared. They were demoralised, and instead of living a depraved life, they found in death a remedy.

/3.....

Information available:

1. Eliane & Michele Mouza: mother and child committed suicide.
2. Ginette Alexis
3. Syde Laurique: no job, no roof, drowned himself
4. Christian Simon: aged 28, he committed suicide through despair on the ship.
5. Leone Rangasamy: born in Peros, drowned herself because she was prevented from going back. Died on 2.2.1965. Lived at Nicolay Road, Port Louis.
6. Josep France Veerapen Kistnasamy: born in Six Iles, burnt himself on 23.12.1972.
7. Olivier Elysee Alfred: committed suicide through electrocution on 2.5.73. Came from Peros.
8. Tarenne Chiatoux: committed suicide, no job, no roof.
9. Josue et Maude Baptiste: poverty - no roof, no food, committed suicide.

Note: The Ilois committee would like to note that the Ilois threatened on several occasions to burn themselves alive in front of the British High Commission. Much had to be done to avoid these incidents. It is a great threat and it can happen at any time.

Deaths occurred among Ilois during displacement period

In the course of our survey we have come across an impressive number of cases where Ilois have found death after having landed in Mauritius, i.e. from one to 12 months' stay in Mauritius. The causes mostly are: unhappiness, non-adaptation of Ilois within the social framework of Mauritius, extreme poverty particularly lack of food, house, job. Another cause of this mortality rate was family dispersion. The main cause of the sufferings of the Ilois was the lack of proper plan to welcome them in Mauritius. There was also no rehabilitation programme for them.

Ilois dead because of unhappiness, of poverty and lack of medical care

1. Uranee family.  
William Uranee  
Frank Uranee
2. Cassambeau family.  
Bertin Cassambeau - dead through illness, distress  
Bernard Cassambeau - unemployed, died through poverty
3. Volfrin family.  
Volfrin Daisy: no food for three days; obtained Rs. 3 and no more as Public assistance. Died through poverty.  
  
Joseph Volfrin: died through poverty. Henri Volfrin: ill from the time of landing to death.

/4.....

4. Boucari family.  
Elyse Boucari: died through poverty.  
Bertha Boucari: was a jovial person, but once in Mauritius was taken by unhappiness and his death remains a mystery.
5. Issaie family.  
Avril Issaie: died through poverty.  
Louis Clovis Issaie: had fever from the time of landing.  
Died on 11.1.65.
6. Botjeanne family.  
Louis Botjeanne: 111, died on 7.4.74.
7. Thomas family.  
Ministre Thomas: died in poverty.  
Willy Thomas: died in poverty and of grief.  
Elric Thomas: died in poverty. Not known if he committed suicide or if he died of grief.
8. Pauline family.  
Widecley Pauline: had severe diarrhoea and vomiting.  
Died in poverty.  
Isidore Pauline: died when landing.
9. Mandarin family.  
Ito Mandarin: died after landing of grief and poverty.  
Haroon Mandarin: no home, died in poverty.
10. Aristide family.  
Florine Aristide: died through poverty.
11. Saminaden family.  
Marie Madelaine: died of grief.
12. Jean Baptiste, Marie Ange.  
Jean Baptiste, Gerard.  
Jean Baptiste, Jean Noel.
13. Codor family.  
Roger Codor.  
William Codor.
14. Emilien Moujai: his death was very trying. Died in hospital and his corpse had to be left in hospital as there was no money to buy a coffin.
15. Marie Elisabeth Cibalam: slept in a kitchen where she passed away in great poverty.
16. Israel Louis: corpse was kept in house for three days as there was no money to buy a coffin.
17. Eliezer Louis: had gone to Rogers so as to return to Diego. When he failed, had much grief and died.
18. Helena Louis: was ill on landing. Died some time after.
19. Marie Louina: died in Diego when she learnt that she would have to leave Diego.

/5.....

20. Zeline Vital: died through poverty.
21. Lia Bothman.
22. Alexis family: Michel, Jules, Justice, Anne-Marie:  
died successively in great poverty.  
They slept in the verandah.
23. Rabruné family.  
Victorrien, Michel, Vivil, Sabine, Rabruné. Had no  
property. Were abandoned by everybody. Died in  
disgrace.
24. Marcelin family.  
Enertine, René Marcelin: died through poverty.
25. Thalât family.  
Arthur Thalât: had no food, no work, lived in a  
neighbour's verandah, died in distress.
26. Medore family:  
Albertine and Evana Medore: one died on the ship,  
the other of grief.