

Letter retrieved from
<http://chagosrefugeesgroup.net/blog/?p=617>
on the 10th June 2011.

Notes taken from the following sources:

- (1) House of Lords judgement 22/10/2008
- (2) *Stealing A Nation* by John Pilger
- (3) David Snoxell interview in
New Statesmen 01/04/2010
- (4) Richard Gifford's speech at Southampton
University School of Law 05/11/2009
- (5) Richard Gifford's speech at Warwick
University School of Law 27/05/2004
- (6) *Web of Deceit* by Mark Curtis (extract)
- (7) The UK Chagos Support Association
- (8) Chagos Conservation Trust
- (9) Newsnow, Mauritius 13/12/2010
- (10) *The Guardian* web site 02/12/2010

A list of web site links for the above
sources and printable copies of this pamphlet
can be found on <http://ewire.co.uk/>

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a Ricoh JP5800.

I am generally inclined to but usually fail
to find the time to make a proper list of
further reading and further action. The
sources listed above are a good starting
point, particularly John Pilger's
documentary which can be viewed on the web.

Conveniently, the UK Chagos Support
Association has some suggestions towards
'how you can help' which might point you in
the right direction:
<http://chagossupport.org.uk/how-you-can-help>

This pamphlet was produced to be handed out
in East London and so it seems quite
fortuitous that a local representative in
parliament, Dianne Abbot, has brought these
matters to the attention of other MPs.
Writing to her to express your support for
the Chagossians can only help to further
their cause.

In 2016 the United States' fifty year lease
of the islands comes to an end. An option to
extend the lease for 20 years is available
to the US. As John Pilger explains in
Stealing A Nation, "The reason the
government won't allow the islanders to go
home is not money; it's power, American
power and its self given role to dominate."
The build up to the end of the lease
coincides with greater public awareness of
the terrible crimes that have been
perpetrated against the Chagossians by our
former and current governments. American
power means nothing in the face of popular
opposition by the people of Britain.

Please distribute this pamphlet.

A Simple Message for Britain: You should be ashamed

Open Letter to the British High Commissioner in Mauritius

from
Rita Bancoult

&
notes on the
history of the
Chagos Islands
and the
experiences of
the Chagossians

Dear Mr Leake,

I am Marie Rita Elysée Bancoult, the mother of Olivier Bancoult, leader of Chagos Refugee Group (CRG). I am sorry to take your precious time, but I would pray you to bear with me while I pour my heart out to you. I must tell you that the recent revelations of WikiLeaks were in no way a revelation to us, Chagossians. We always knew that the creation of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) was to prevent us going back on our islands. This is a very mean and cruel way of denying us the right to live as a whole nation. Your government should be ashamed of this. The released secret documents came only as a proof of what we already knew.

Today, as a Chagossian, aged 85, I want you to understand my plight, my suffering, and to realise all the pains that I have been through since I set my feet here in Mauritius. I have lost my husband, I have lost five children, of whom I have buried two on Peros Banhos and three here in Mauritius. Today I am left only with Olivier, my last-born. He is my messiah. He is the one who will free us all. He is not alone in this battle. All our people are behind him. So do not make the mistake of thinking that we are a harmless bunch. We may not have education and arms, but we have our faith in God and the will to fight injustice.

Your government has taken us heartlessly and brutally from our heaven and dumped us here in hell. My son is relentlessly struggling to get us all back on our island.

I want you today to know that I will stop fighting only when I breathe my last and lie down with my hands crossed over my chest... I will not surrender my dignity and I will show the British of what mettle I am made.

Today, December 10, is also Human Rights Day. But for us Chagossians, there have been no respect for our rights. This is something that is unknown to your government – our rights. I am also very disappointed that my dear Olivier has not been able to meet the Mauritian Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, this week.

The Chagossian community had high hopes about this meeting as this would have given us a sense of direction and we would have then celebrated Human Rights Day. You must know that, for me, the British have robbed the Chagossians of their right to live. Believe me, this crime will not go unpunished.

The day I heard that I would never be allowed again to go back to my island it was as if a knife had been plunged into my heart. I could feel the blood oozing out. I can still feel it. We have been sold like animals. Do you know how it feels to be snatched from one's homeland and dumped in the wild? You are treated worse than an animal. You have no dignity. But worst of all, you have no identity. We, Chagossians, have been robbed of our dignity. This is how I feel here. Mr Leake, my navel is buried there, in Peros Banhos. I cannot stop craving for my land and the tombs of my near and dear ones I left behind.

The day I lie on my death bed, with me will also die the craving I have carried in my heart since the day I left my homeland – that is to go back there. Living far from Peros Banhos has been a curse on my family and my people. Please understand me. I have only one wish now and that is to die in Peros Banhos and be buried in the cemetery where I have already buried two of my children, and my parents.

Foreign Office] announced that the government would not allow the islanders back to Diego Garcia, the main island. (2) By June 2004 the Blair government had run out of excuses but there was still one more trick to play: an Order in Council, a Royal Decree using archaic powers which unknown to most of us is still invested in the Queen. It is a cosy arrangement, the Queen rubber-stamps what in many cases politicians know they cannot get away with democratically. On November the 5th 1965 an Order in Council was issued by the government of Harold Wilson. The aim was to secretly expel the population of the Chagos Islands, all of them loyal subjects of the Queen. In June 2004 the Blair government used the same powers to bypass parliament and the High Court in order to ban the Chagos Islanders from ever returning home. Dictators do this... but without the quaint ritual. [It took place on] June the 10th 2004, election day in Britain when they thought no-one would notice.(2)

On Thursday 11 May 2006 the High Court overturned the orders in council of 2004, giving the Chagossians back the right of return that they won in 2000. The Government appealed against the ruling, and a year later, was defeated again at the Court of Appeal, with the judges calling its treatment of the islanders unlawful and an abuse of power. It then took its appeal to the House of Lords, where the Law lords ruled in October 2008 by a majority of three-to-two to allow the government's appeal. The islanders took their case to the European Court of Human Rights. An All Party Parliamentary Group on Chagos was established in late 2008 and has gone on to become one of the most active cross-party groups in existence. In March 2010 an Early Day Motion tabled by Labour MP Diane Abbott, calling for the government to drop the case, racked up signatures from 62 MPs.(7)

The Chagos has the world's largest coral atoll and 55 tiny islands in quarter of a million square miles of the world's cleanest seas. It is by far Britain's [?] greatest area of marine biodiversity. In an announcement of the UK Government on 1 April 2010 the designation of a strict Marine Protected Area out to the 200 mile limit creates the largest marine reserve in the world, a conservation legacy almost unrivalled in scale and significance.(8) [In late 2010] WikiLeaks released American diplomatic cables which revealed that one of the reasons for the UK setting up a Marine Protected Area in the archipelago was to make it more difficult for the displaced Chagossians to return to their homeland.(9) "HMG would like to establish a "marine park" or "reserve" providing comprehensive environmental protection to the reefs and waters of the British Indian Ocean Territory, a senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office official informed Polcouns on May 12. The official insisted that the establishment of a marine park -- the world's largest -- would in no way impinge on USG use of the BIOT, including Diego Garcia, for military purposes. He agreed that the UK and U.S. should carefully negotiate the details of the marine reserve to assure that U.S. interests were safeguarded and the strategic value of BIOT was upheld. He said that the BIOT's former inhabitants would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue their claim for resettlement on the islands if the entire Chagos Archipelago were a marine reserve."(10)

million, together with a far more modest sum of £650,000 to spend on the islanders. Ever since their removal, the islanders have campaigned for proper compensation and for the right to return. In 1975, for example, the islanders presented a petition to the British High Commission in Mauritius. It said: "We, the inhabitants of the Chagos Islands have been uprooted because the Mauritius government sold the islands to the British government to build a base. Our ancestors were slaves on those islands but we know that we are the heirs of those islands. Although we were poor we were not dying of hunger. We were living free... Here in Mauritius... we, being mini-slaves, don't get anybody to help us. We are at a loss not knowing what to do."(6) [At the time] a survey of their conditions in exile told of 26 families that had died together in poverty; of nine suicides; of young girls forced into prostitution in order to survive. The report gave these examples: Elaine and Michelle Mouza, mother and child - committed suicide. Leonie Rangasami - prevented from going back, drowned herself. [Josie and Maude Baptiste] - no job, no roof, committed suicide.(2)

In 1981, a group of Illois women went on hunger strike for 21 days and several hundred women demonstrated in vain in front of the British High Commission in Mauritius.(6) A report commissioned by the Mauritian government in the early 1980s found that only 65 of the 94 Illois householders were owners of land and houses; and 40 per cent of adults had no job.(6) In 1982 a further agreement was made between the British and Mauritian Governments in which a sum of GDP 4 million was put into a trust fund for the Ilois. This was distributed to 1,344 identified islanders who each received a little over GDP 2,000, some of them managed to get rudimentary housing or a small plot of land but many simply paid off their debts and carried on living in squalor as before. As a condition of receiving the money, they were obliged to sign highly detailed legalistic forms written in English renouncing all rights against the UK Government including the claim to return to their islands. These forms were not explained or translated and when the money was disbursed, the Chagossians were required merely to put their thumb print to a piece of paper which they thought was a mere form of receipt.(5) The FCO had simply been unable to resist the temptation to stitch up the islanders once more. The intention was, of course, to get rid of the problem without ever enquiring what Chagossians wanted, what might alleviate their grinding poverty or restore the wrecking of their lives.(4) That same year the government spent 2 billion pounds defending the rights of the Falkland Islanders, who are white.(2)

On 30 September 1998 Olivier Bancoult, applied for judicial review of the Immigration Ordinance 1971 and a declaration that it was void because it purported to authorise the banishment of British Dependent Territory citizens from the Territory and a declaration that the policy which prevented him from returning to and residing in the Territory was unlawful.(1) In November 2000 [the High Court] agreed with the people of the Chagos and handed down a shaming rebuke to the British government. The court ruled that the expulsion of the islanders was illegal. [However] within hours of the High Court judgement [the

I fear that I may die before my wish is fulfilled. I will never forget all the pain and miseries that have been forced upon me and my family.

I'd rather continue looking for food out of dustbins. But never would I renounce my rights. I would never wish the same to my worst enemy.

This is all I wanted to tell you. I hope this letter touches your heart. I also wish you never go through what I and my people have been through these past years. This is the worst curse that a person and a nation can sustain.

Marie Rita Elysée Bancoult, Cite Zilois, Pointe aux Sables
Monday December 10th 2010

Notes on the history of the Chagos Islands
and the experiences of the Chagossians

These notes are compiled from a selection of sources and edited for legibility. Much important information has been edited out in an effort to be concise. To be clear: I did not write any of this, it is a series of quotes stitched together.

The British Indian Ocean Territory ("BIOT") is situated south of the equator, about 2200 miles east of the coast of Africa and 1000 miles south-west of the southern tip of India. It consists of a group of coral atolls known as the Chagos Archipelago of which the largest is Diego Garcia. Some distance to the north lie Peros Banhos and the Salomon Islands.(1) While the British Government has been one of the great drafters of international law - maritime law, human rights law, law of armed conflict and so on - it tends to be selective about the international law that it applies to itself. And Chagos is a case in point.(3) This relic of the Cold War [is] one of the worst violations of human rights perpetrated by the UK in the 20th century.(3) Britain removed the 1500 indigenous inhabitants of the Chagos islands.(6) Today it is one of America's biggest military bases in the world. There are more than 2000 troops, two bomber runways, thirty warships, and a satellite spy station. From [Diego Garcia] the United States has attacked Afghanistan and Iraq. (2)

The population was settled on the Chagos Islands long before the UK acquired them by conquest during the Napoleonic Wars in 1810.(4) They were formally ceded to UK with the colony of Mauritius of which they formed part by the Treaty of Paris in 1814. Until the UK and the US set their sights on the Chagos Islands as a defence base, [anyone concerned] was well aware that they had been successfully settled and exploited as coconut plantations for over 200 years since the 1770s. Most of the workers were slaves who came from Madagascar and Mozambique and it is their descendants who have become the Chagossians.(5) For [about] 150 years the Chagos Islands, part of Mauritius, were a British Colony [meaning] in turn that the British were responsible for civil society there.(5) [According to Richard Gifford's research] Between 1895 and 1965 there were 2,970 births on the islands and so there would have been at least 2,000 native adults up to the age of 70 living there [in 1971].(5) In the 1950s Governor Scott of Mauritius took a great interest in the Chagos Islands. He set up schools for children and also made a film

of life on the islands in which the islanders are described by the commentator as having been settled there for generations.(5) Unknown to the islanders all this was about to end. A conspiracy was underway between the governments of Britain and the United States. [In] 1961, Rear Admiral Grantham of the US Navy visited Diego Garcia. [This] marked the beginning of a top secret Anglo-American survey of the island for a military base so vast that it would cost over a billion dollars.(2) In February 1964 there were meetings between the defence departments of the UK and the US. In August 1964 there was a joint US/UK military visit, to survey the islands. They were very impressed with the depth of the lagoon at Diego Garcia, with its sheltered deep water anchorage which was ideal for aircraft carriers. They loved the length and flatness of the island which offered 20 miles of natural air strip. But there was a snag - there were villages, graves, churches, hospitals, schools and worst of all there were hundreds if not thousands of natives working fishing, dancing and generally living all over the place.(5)

The conspiracy [began] with the creation of a fake colony called the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT).(2) In November 1965 the Queen passed an Order in Council detaching the Chagos Islands from Mauritius and constituting [the] new colony.(5) The sole purpose of creating this colony was to kick the people out and to do it the Foreign Office invented a fiction. They said the islanders did not really belong to the Chagos but were merely temporary contract workers.(2) A Foreign Office minute from 1965 recognises policy as "to certify [the Chagossians], more or less fraudulently, as belonging somewhere else".(6) [Another] Foreign Office memo from November 1965 [states]: "There is a civilian population. In practice however I would advise a policy of 'quiet disregard' - in other words, let's forget about this one until the United Nations challenge us on it." [...] in that same month the British representative at the United Nations, F. W. D. Brown, was instructed to lie to the General Assembly that the Chagos Islands were uninhabited when the United Kingdom first acquired them.(2) The [Foreign Office] documents show that this was decided at the highest level by the Prime Minister, most particularly Harold Wilson.(2) When the wrongful detachment of the Chagos Islands was suspected, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in December 1965, Resolution 2066, whereby: "... noting deep concern over actions taken by the UK to detach certain islands from the territory of Mauritius for the purpose of establishing a military base, in contravention of the declaration by the GA 1514 on territorial integrity, the GA directed the UK to take no action which would dismember the territory of Mauritius and violate its territorial integrity."(4)

In December 1966 the Wilson government signed a military agreement with the US leasing the BIOT to it for military purposes for fifty years with the option of a further twenty years. Britain thus ignored UN Resolution 2066.(6) When Mauritius got its independence from Britain in 1968 it was on condition that it would lay no claim to the Chagos Islands. Hidden from Parliament and the US Congress; the deal was this: the Americans wanted the island, in their words, "swept and sanitised". An entire population was

declared expendable, all of them were to be deported.(2) It appears that after 1968 food ships did not sail to the islands.(6)

Then Labour Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart wrote to Prime Minister Harold Wilson in a secret note in 1969 that "we could continue to refer to the inhabitants generally as essentially migrant contract labourers and their families". It would be helpful "if we can present any move as a change of employment for contract workers... rather than as a population resettlement". The purpose of the Foreign Secretary's memo was to secure Wilson's approval to clear the whole of the Chagos Islands of their inhabitants. This, the prime minister did, five days later on 26 April. By the time of this formal decision, however, the removal had already effectively started - Britain had in 1968 started refusing to return Chagossians who were visiting Mauritius or the Seychelles. Detailed guidance notes were issued to Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence press officers telling them to mislead the media if asked.(6) On May the 6th 1969 [Dennis] Healey's private secretary wrote [a] letter to 10 Downing Street. It confirmed that the Defence Secretary had read [Michael] Stewart's plan and 'agrees with its recommendations'. In Washington a parallel conspiracy was taking place also in high secrecy. The object was to keep the expulsion of the islanders from Congress [and] so payment for the lease of the islands was disguised as a 14 million dollar discount on a Polaris nuclear missile about to be supplied to the Royal Navy.(2)

The BIOT Immigration Ordinance 1971 was passed in secret by the Commissioner, following approval by Harold Wilson, Dennis Healey and other ministers, so as to provide cover for the deportation of the population, and to initiate their exile 1,000 miles away in Mauritius and Seychelles.(4) In January 1971 they were told they would be removed from Diego Garcia.(4) The Americans had secured Congressional approval and the first US navy personnel arrived with their ships and helicopters.(5) In the spring of [that year] Sir Bruce Greatbatch, Governor of the Seychelles, gave the order that all of the dogs on Diego Garcia were to be killed. These were much loved pets and the horror of their killing was taken as a warning by the islanders.(2) They were also told their islands might be bombed.(2) The plantation administrator, Marcel Moulinie was told to shut up shop and he was obliged to remove the population from Diego Garcia where most of them lived. For a short while he maintained the plantations on other islands; Peros Banhos and the Salomon Group but by September 1973 he was told to close down, and the final evacuations took place. These dreadful journeys are written deep in Chagossian folk law. They do not forget the appalling journeys in which they suffered, in boats that were overladen with people, which they were obliged to share with horses in the hold and where bad weather made people vomit, women miscarry and some to jump overboard and commit suicide. On arrival in Seychelles they were housed in the local prison because there was no accommodation, before making the onward journey to Mauritius where they were summarily dumped on the dockside. By now there was a pool of around 2,000 displaced islanders roaming around Mauritius, jobless, homeless and destitute.(5)

To purchase the silence of Mauritius, the UK paid £3