

Mauritius: Open Letter to Greenpeace not to Fall into UK Trap

Wednesday 24 February 2010, by [Lalit de klas](#), [SEEGOBIN Ram](#) (Date first published: 8 February 2010).

Dear Leaders of Greenpeace,

We understand that your organization has taken a position in favour of the British Government's outrageous plan to create a "Marine Park" on territory which is not its own, thus tricking ill-informed people into supporting the British State on rather vague grounds of "the environment", while they are in fact banishing the people who lived there and flaunting the Charter of the UN.

We write in order to request you to re-think your position on what would in fact be the British Government's perfidious imposition of a planned Marine Protected Area on part of Mauritius in order to mask the fact that it colonizes the land illegally. Britain colonizes the Chagos under the name of "British Indian Ocean Territory". This colony is, as far as we know, recognized by no government in the world, except the USA, which has a huge military base on it. The Seychelles Government took the British to task, and took those of its islands in BIOT back, so blatant was the theft. The Mauritian Government has so far unfortunately been much more servile to its ex-colonizer.

The British government's plan for a Marine Protected Area is a very weak, grotesquely transparent ruse designed to perpetuate the banning of the people of Mauritius and Chagos from part of their own country. And the UK has the cheek to do this, while at one and the same time, perpetuating a polluting nuclear base on Diego Garcia, part of this same stolen territory. The timing of their plan is also very humiliating for all those who have fallen into the trap: there is a European Human Rights Court which may soon hand down a judgment in favour of the right to return for Chagossians. Clearly the British Government is preparing a fall-back plan; if they lose the case, then there will be another "reason" for denying the banished people their right of return; another reason for keeping Mauritius from staking its claim under international law.

Surely the point is for environmentalists to get this nuclear base on Diego Garcia, at the very heart of the Chagos, closed down? Not to ignore its existence. Surely the point is for all concerned people to help complete the decolonization of Mauritius and the Chagos? Not to help in a British cover-up its crimes? After decolonization, the people whose land and sea it is can decide on how to protect and nurture it best, how to affect a clean-up of the base once it was closed down, and how to re-generate it into the beautiful atoll it once was. And we would hope for ideas and support from Greenpeace, amongst other environmentalists, as to how best to do this.

The British State and the USA not only collaborated in the forcible removal of all the people of the entire Chagos, tricking them first, denying them passage back after medical visits to Mauritius main island, gassing their dogs as a warning, then finally starving them off the islands; the British State and the USA not only illegally plotted so as to dismember a country and hide this from the United Nations Decolonization Committee, as has been amply made public in the Judgments in the Court Case brought by the Chagossians, but have also set up a huge immensely polluting military base, one of the biggest in the world, a nuclearized base, right there in the same place that the UK now pretends to want to turn into a Marine Protected Area. The USA has even carried out illegal renditions for torture on and around Diego Garcia; after denying this for years, the Mr. Jack Straw

finally admitted it in the British Parliament. So, Greenpeace should perhaps bear in mind that these illegal acts do, in time, get exposed and condemned by people.

Greenpeace should dissociate itself from this entire international plot. It is an old plot whose first shady days have gradually been exposed to the public by years and years of active struggle on the part of Mauritian political parties, associations, trade unions and the people displaced from Chagos, with their women at the helm of the demonstrations. Our women members were amongst those arrested by the Police in 1981 at peaceful demonstration in Port Louis. And though the illegal colonization and the nuclear base have both continued, the conspiracy to remove all the people, and for the UK to steal the islands, and for the US to become receiver of stolen goods, have been exposed in public in the British Courts and in international meetings against US military bases. So, being part of the tail-end of this long-term conspiracy will bring shame on organizations like Greenpeace. That individuals fall into this trap is understandable. But for organizations, we are afraid it will be very damaging to your reputation.

In the past, Greenpeace has known about Diego Garcia. We would very much like to remind you that in October, 1998, LALIT sent one of our members to have a formal meeting with your organization at your headquarters in Amsterdam. The Rann nu Diego Committee, a common front of some 10 organizations in Mauritius including one of the two main Chagossian groups, the Chagos Refugees Group, endorsed LALIT's request for a Greenpeace action on Diego Garcia to oppose the nuclear base there. One of our members, Ms. Lindsey Collen, thus had a formal meeting at your headquarters with Ms. Stephanie Mills, who she found to be a very capable, dedicated Australian campaign worker for your organization. Following this meeting, and following the dossier which we submitted formally at the same time, Greenpeace informed us by e-mail that you had organized for one of your vessels (in a window of opportunity) to take a group of people for an action on Diego Garcia in or around March, 1999, in protest against the military base, its nuclearization, the forcible removals, and the continued colonization of part of Mauritius. We were already discussing how many people, preparing for a campaign to get support from peace and environment organizations world-wide, and thinking up the kind of media plan necessary. LALIT immediately set in motion a very broad campaign for "background support", which we got from a series of organizations literally all over the world in order to back up the planned action as soon as it would be able to become public. Response from all over the world was very good. The issue was coming up at the right moment. The only thing that prevented the vessel from actually doing this visit, which would have been truly historic, and which would have been one of Greenpeace's greatest sources of pride as you looked back on your history, was thwarted, we were informed, when the vessel to be used got "iced in" during a trip to the Antarctica in early 1999, and would, by the time it got out of the ice, be too late, as it was already booked for another action afterwards.

Later, in January, 2004, in the outskirts of the WSF meeting in Mumbai, there was a second attempt, this time to ask Greenpeace if you could lead a planned Flotilla to Chagos and Diego Garcia, given that the Chagossians had won a Court Case for the right to return (since overturned - in part by Decree in the UK, and in part by a Privy Council appeal judgment last year). This time it was a joint request from the Chagos Refugees Group and LALIT. Greenpeace were unable to do this, but your leaders at the time were aware of the issues involved.

We mention your past links with the Diego Garcia issue because we believe that your position on the Marine Protected Area which the UK is planning is erroneous. The UK is clearly trying to use the "environment issue" as a desperate attempt to continue its continued colonization of part of Mauritius. Greenpeace should not allow itself to be used this way.

At present our organization is spearheading a campaign to call on the Mauritian Government to do two things:

- Request the UN General Assembly to pass a motion for the ICJ at the Hague to give an opinion as to whose territory the Chagos is (the UK accepted compulsory arbitration except from cases put in by Commonwealth Countries, and when the Mauritian Government some 7 years ago threatened to leave the Commonwealth in order to put a binding case, Tony Blair just sent new instructions to his UN ambassador to change the exception to include ex-Commonwealth members. This shows the kind of lengths the UK State will go to.

- Request the UN International Atomic Energy Agency to do inspections of Diego Garcia for nuclear materials, given the coming into operation in 2009 of the Pelindaba Treaty for a Nuclear Weapons Free Africa.

We would very much appreciate it if Greenpeace could consider supporting these two demands. Both would certainly help the environment of the Chagos, as they both involve exposing then closing the nuclear military base. Just as the UK Government is now being exposed for entering illegally into the Iraq War, and Bush and Blair risk charges as war criminals, so in the future, the UK and USA may be publicly exposed as illegal occupiers, as war mongers on Chagos, and as polluters of the Indian Ocean with truly filthy military base. Because that is what they are.

Yours sincerely,

Ram Seegobin, for LALIT, Mauritius, 8 February, 2010.

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