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PRESS RELEASE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Republic of Mauritius hailed the Opinion handed down today by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as a historic moment in efforts to bring colonialism to an end, and to promote human rights, self-determination and the international rule of law.

Similar praise for the ICJ's opinion came from the 55-member African Union, comprising all African States, including Mauritius, and dozens of other States from around the world.

The Court ruled by a 13-1 vote that the decolonisation of Mauritius has not been lawfully completed, and that it must be completed forthwith. Its Advisory Opinion finds that the dismemberment of Mauritius in 1965, the retention of the Chagos Archipelago as a UK colony, and the forcible removal of the Chagossians, violated international law. The Court ruled that the United Kingdom is under a legal duty to restore the islands to Mauritius "as rapidly as possible".

Speaking after the Court delivered its Opinion, Mauritius' Prime Minister, H.E. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth said: "This is a historic moment for Mauritius and all its people, including the Chagossians who were unconscionably removed from their homeland and prevented from returning for the last half century. Our territorial integrity will now be made complete, and when that occurs, the Chagossians and their descendants will finally be able to return home."

"It is unthinkable that today, in the 21st century, there is a part of Africa that still remains subject to European colonial rule," said Ambassador Namira Negm, Legal Counsel of the African Union, which played an important role in the proceedings. "The full decolonisation of Mauritius, and of Africa, is long overdue. The ICJ has made it clear that this must be accomplished today and not tomorrow. Only then the Africans can be free and the continent can aspire to live free of colonialism."

The case was submitted to the Court by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in June 2017. The UNGA, in a resolution endorsed by 94 States, formally requested that the Court answer two legal questions based on the United Kingdom's detachment of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius prior to its independence, maintenance of colonial rule over the islands (a situation which continues to this day), and the forcible removal of the Chagossians:

(1) was the decolonisation of Mauritius lawfully completed? (2) if not, what are the legal consequences?

The United Kingdom had urged the Court not to answer the questions, and, if it did, to rule that decolonisation was lawfully completed.

The Court emphatically rejected the United Kingdom's arguments. It decided that the questions were properly submitted to it by the UNGA, and that it had a duty to answer them.

On the merits, the Court ruled that the United Kingdom's actions violated well-established rules of international law requiring colonial powers to respect the right to self-determination of the peoples living under their administration while maintaining in full the territorial integrity of those territories. It declared that the Chagos Archipelago should be returned to Mauritius "as rapidly as possible."

The ICJ is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. Its ruling was issued in the form of an "Advisory Opinion", which is not binding as such, but an authoritative determination of the rules of international law applicable to the United Kingdom's conduct. The Court's Advisory Opinion will greatly assist the UNGA in the fulfilment of its decolonisation mandate.

Prime Minister Jugnauth said: "Mauritius looks forward to the UK, as a State with which Mauritius has excellent relations, and one that has long professed its commitment to international law, to respect the Court's ruling and complete the decolonisation of Mauritius. We expect the UK to comply with the Advisory Opinion in a prompt and orderly manner. It is now time for the sun to set on the last British colony in Africa."

Prime Minister Jugnauth also extended his thanks to the African Union and all States that have supported, and continue to support, Mauritius in its struggle towards complete decolonisation.

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