

**STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH, PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS, TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS**

**29 MARCH 2022**

Mr Speaker, Sir,

I would like to make a statement on the outcome of the first visit organised by Mauritius to the Chagos Archipelago from 08 to 22 February 2022.

As the House is aware, following the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 25 February 2019 which authoritatively determined that the Chagos Archipelago is, and has always been, an integral part of the territory of Mauritius, legal proceedings were initiated by Mauritius in June 2019 against Maldives under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea for the delimitation of the maritime boundary between the two States in the Chagos Archipelago region since Maldives refused our invitation to negotiate the boundary bilaterally.

In December 2019, Maldives raised preliminary objections to the jurisdiction of the Special Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, *inter alia*, on grounds that the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago had not been definitively settled, that the United Kingdom was an indispensable party to the case and, therefore, the Chamber should not take any decision in its absence. Following the exchange of written pleadings and the holding of an oral hearing, the Special Chamber gave, on 28 January 2021, a Judgment in which it rejected all the preliminary objections raised by Maldives. In so doing, the Special Chamber confirmed that Mauritius has undisputed sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. It further ruled that the United Kingdom has no claim to sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, and that its position amounts to nothing more than assertions that are not supported by international law.

The proceedings are still at pleadings stage. In the first round of written pleadings, Mauritius submitted its Memorial on 25 May 2021, and Maldives, its Counter-Memorial on 25 November 2021. During the second round of written pleadings, Mauritius will have to submit its Reply by 14 April 2022, while Maldives will have to file its Rejoinder by 15 August 2022. The Chamber will thereafter organise oral pleadings before giving its judgment probably sometime next year.

In the context of the preparation of its Reply, Mauritius considered it necessary to carry out a scientific survey of Blenheim Reef which is found in the north-east of the Chagos Archipelago, and which is likely to play a significant role in the delimitation of the maritime boundary between Mauritius and Maldives. Thus, a scientific survey was carried out from 08 to 22 February by a delegation led by Ambassador Koonjul, Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the United Nations in New York, and comprising technicians from Mauritius, two Swedish marine surveyors, three of our external lawyers, five representatives of the Chagossian community, a Medical Health Officer and a Nursing Officer from the Ministry of Health and Wellness, a photographer from the Government Information Service of my Office as well as journalists from the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Guardian, The Atlantic magazine of the United States, and the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation.

It was initially planned that the delegation would leave for the Chagos Archipelago from Maldives, and to that end, Mauritius requested the Maldives authorities to facilitate the visit. Regrettably, the Maldives imposed conditions that were not acceptable, including exclusion of lawyers, media representatives and other officials. Consideration was then given to the departure of the delegation from Rodrigues. However, the captain of the vessel advised that the journey would be very tough if the delegation would depart from Rodrigues. As a result, the delegation left for the Chagos Archipelago from Seychelles on 08 February 2022.

For this expedition, Government chartered the 'Bleu de Nîmes' which met all our requirements for this kind of survey because it is equipped with four high speed tenders

and a zodiac which allowed the scientists to traverse the shallow waters on and around Blenheim Reef.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

This was the first visit that Mauritius organised in the Chagos Archipelago since our independence and I am pleased to say that the visit has been highly successful as it has enabled us to achieve four key objectives:

- **First: Collection of crucial data**

Mauritius has been able to collect crucial data for the maritime delimitation case which it has brought against Maldives. This data will assist both Mauritius in preparing its Reply and the Special Chamber in delimiting the maritime boundary. The survey of Blenheim Reef and appurtenant areas was carried out over a period of 4 days from 13 to 16 February by the two foreign surveyors, Mr Ola Oskarsson and Mr Thomas Mennerdahl, with the help of high end equipment to measure the tidal movement and to observe drying reefs and corals. Their report will be used in our submission which is under preparation and will be submitted next month.

For their part, officers of the Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration of my Office observed the currents and waves on the outer edge of Blenheim Reef as well as other visible formations and took pictures of fishes and coral formations underneath the sea and on the seabed.

I must point out that there has never been any such survey in the past, and I express the hope that the survey might assist the ITLOS Special Chamber.

- **Second: Confirmation of our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago**

The visit has allowed Mauritius to confirm its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, particularly following the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the Judgment of the Special Chamber of ITLOS. In this regard, the following concrete actions were taken in the exercise of our sovereignty:

- (i) The flag of Mauritius was raised on the vessel to indicate the vessel's destination;
- (ii) On 11 February 2022, when the vessel entered the Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius around the Chagos Archipelago, the captain marked the event by making the siren of the 'Bleu de Nîmes' resound several times;
- (iii) As the vessel approached Peros Banhos, foreign nationals who participated in the visit were handed a permit which had already been prepared by the Passport and Immigration Officer for their admission to the Chagos Archipelago, a part of the territory of Mauritius;
- (iv) The flag of Mauritius was raised on Peros Banhos, Salomon Islands and Blenheim Reef. A commemorative plaque was also installed by the Mauritius delegation on Peros Banhos to commemorate its visit there;
- (v) Signs posted by the British authorities, purporting to establish regulations for visitors, were removed;
- (vi) An outward port clearance was given to the vessel 'Bleu de Nîmes' on its departure from the Chagos Archipelago by the Mauritian authorities; and

(vii) A health clearance certificate for COVID-19 in respect of the participants and the crew of the vessel was also issued by the Mauritian health authorities on their departure from the Chagos Archipelago.

- **Third: Visit of the Chagossians to their place of birth**

I am pleased that Government was able to keep its commitment to take some members of the Chagossian Community back to their birthplace.

The visit has provided the opportunity to representatives of the Chagossian community to return to their birthplace for the first time without any foreign escort or restrictions and without having to be told where they could or could not take photographs. It was with great joy and enormous satisfaction that the representatives of the Chagossian community set foot on Ile du Coin which was the first stop on Peros Banhos islands and which also was the island on which Mr Olivier Bancoult, Mrs Marie Liseby Elysé and Mr Marcel Humbert were born. The delegation was able to visit what is left of the church and the cemetery where some of the ancestors of the Chagossians are buried. Both of these places were in a deplorable state and the representatives of the Chagossian community were able to clean them and restore the dignity such places deserve. A similar exercise was carried out on Salomon islands, where Mrs Rosemonde Bertin was born, much to the satisfaction of the Chagossians who were able to pay their respect and homage to their ancestors buried there. Mrs Suzelle Baptiste, born on Diego Garcia, was also part of the delegation.

- **Fourth: Uncovering the untruths spread by former officials of the UK**

The visit has received a significant coverage in the international media. The journalists from the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Guardian sent out daily reports of what they saw on the islands which contradicted the narrative that the UK has maintained over the years, in particular that the Chagossians were in the Chagos Archipelago as contract workers, and that there was no permanent population. The

Atlantic magazine will in due course publish an article on the visit. The visit was widely reported in other international newspapers and media. This coverage has created greater awareness in the international community and in particular, British citizens about the violations of international law committed by the United Kingdom which illegally excised the Chagos Archipelago from the territory of Mauritius prior to its accession to independence and forcibly removed the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago as well as the United Kingdom's continued breaches of international law.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

I wish to also inform the House that as soon as the vessel reached the Mauritian Exclusive Economic Zone of the Chagos Archipelago, it was observed that two British vessels travelled from Diego Garcia in the direction of the 'Bleu de Nîmes' and one of them which was identified as the 'Grampian Frontier', a patrol fishing vessel hired by the so-called "British Indian Ocean Territory", in effect shadowed the movements of the Mauritian chartered vessel. It was clear that it was monitoring the activities of the Mauritian delegation, this despite the fact that following a Note Verbale which Mauritius had addressed to the United Kingdom asking for confirmation that it would not in any way interfere with the Mauritian expedition, it had assured Mauritius that as a country respectful of UNCLOS, it would not impede the expedition. These vessels entered the territorial sea of Mauritius in manifest violation of international law.

Government has protested against the presence of the United Kingdom vessels. The UK has sought to deny that its vessels were monitoring the activities of the Mauritius delegation.

After the return of the delegation, following a question in the United Kingdom Parliament, the Minister of State at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office replied that the flags which the Mauritian delegation planted on the islands had been removed and that the United Kingdom was disappointed that we had turned a scientific survey into, I quote, "a political stunt", Unquote. Let me say right away that far

from being a stunt, this expedition has brought to light the dishonesty, the untruths and disinformation which the United Kingdom has wanted the world to believe for so many years.

Government also unreservedly condemns the unlawful entry of the United Kingdom into the territory of Mauritius, and the removal of the Mauritian flags from the Chagos Archipelago. Such an act has been committed in blatant violation of international law. A note of protest has been sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to convey the strong objection of Mauritius to the removal of its flags from the Chagos Archipelago. At a time when the United Kingdom is protesting Russia's occupation of a part of the territory of Ukraine, it is a manifest hypocrisy for the United Kingdom to seek to continue to illegally occupy a part of the territory of Mauritius and the continent of Africa.

I need not point out that the scientific survey was carried out in a part of the territory of Mauritius, as authoritatively determined by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of 25 February 2019 and confirmed by UN General Assembly Resolution 73/295 and the Judgment of the Special Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea of 28 January 2021.

The actions taken by Mauritius during the scientific survey, including the raising of its flags in the Chagos Archipelago, are fully compatible with the exercise of its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

I would like to thank Seychelles and in particular, His Excellency President Wavel Ramkalawan for all the assistance they have extended to us and which facilitated the organisation of this visit to the Chagos Archipelago.

To conclude, may I say that Government intends to organise other visits to the Chagos Archipelago in the future, and I very much hope that I shall be able to participate in one of those visits. In addition, I reiterate that Government is fully committed to the implementation of a programme for resettlement in the Chagos Archipelago of our nationals, particularly those of Chagossian origin who were forcibly removed from their homes in manifest violation of international law. I once again call on the United Kingdom to get on the right side of history and to abide by the rule of law and the pronouncements of the International Court of Justice.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.