

## NGO - Chagor Support Group on Item V

Thank you very much madam Chairman, I am Glen Ford representing the Chagos Support Group and I really want to talk a little bit about the overlap between sustainability and work because what we have is a situation where arguments for sustainability are being used cynically to undermine the rights of minorities of the Chagos Islands. The Chagos islanders inhabited a series of 17 islands that were part of the colony of Mauritius until independence and were then separated off by the British government. These islands on the South of Mauritius were inhabited for almost two centuries by descendants of the African slave community initially transported to the islands by British colonial officials for the benefit of the plantation owners. Once on the islands they lived on the basis of their earnings of plantation work and from fishing in the [..] waters. Almost 40 years ago the whole of the islands were evacuated by the British government and the islanders were abandoned on the docks of Mauritius and the Seychelles in order to provide a military base for the United States on the island of Diego Garcia.

The Chagosians who were abandoned in Mauritius and the Seychelles became [not clear] in poverty, engaged in prostitution, and became drug addicts. Over the last 40 years they have been campaigning to return to cut a very long story short, they are now close to winning their case with the judgement in the European Court of Justice scheduled later this year. Even on the argument of security grounds it is difficult to imagine that you cannot be within 200 kilometres of a US base without endangering it. So there is a prospect that they will be allowed to return to the outer islands. The point I want to make however is that the British government, the colonial power has recently introduced marine protection zones around the islands in order to save the fish stocks. We have now seen from Wikileaks that this was cynical manoeuvre deliberately arranged so that the islanders are no longer capable of going back because even if they get the right to return then they are no longer capable of fishing and therefore sustaining their way of life. This is an area where I hope the UN Committee on De-Colonisation will look at this matter and investigate it. I have to say it seems to me that this is the classic example of British racism looking at the different treatment of Falkland islands where they had white colonists as opposed to the Chagos islanders who were African slaves.