

## Solemn appeal to eight American directors

Seven Nobel Peace Prize winners did not succeed in convincing another Nobel Peace Prize winner, President Barack Obama, as to the validity and urgency of this cause; but it is to be hoped that eight American filmmakers will be able to challenge American opinion by jointly directing and participating in a campaign to raise awareness among the American people and Commonwealth nations. This is the *raison d'être* of this singular appeal to the well-known directors Spike Lee, Michael Moore, Oliver Stone, George Clooney, Lee Daniels, Ava DuVernay, Ryan Coogler and Steven Spielberg.

On January 6, 2017, two weeks before Barack Obama left the White House, seven Nobel Prize winners urged the American president to ensure that the Chagossian people receive a long-overdue redress by helping them return to their native country, the Chagos Archipelago, the largest island of which, Diego Garcia, is occupied by 4000 American soldiers. Barack Obama, the president of a *more perfect union*, did not, sadly, act on this appeal.

Our times have taught us that we can no longer believe the word of politicians who are guided solely by groups of influential networks, nor rely solely on intellectuals who only listened to their own voice. In the end, we can only follow the dreams that have always been at the root of all human triumphs (*including the dream of that extraordinary individual who called upon us all follow his path in the 1960s, Martin Luther King*).

From September 3 to 6, 2018, the International Court of Justice of the United Nations will hold "public hearings on the request for an Opinion on the Legal Effects of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965." 22 states, as well as the African Union, have expressed their intention to take part in the oral proceedings before the Court. In this way, the Chagossians hope to give the greatest possible visibility to their cause, which is undoubtedly the most important since the first wave of decolonization of the post-war

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period, and which upholds the implicit condemnation of any attempt to colonize, occupy and deport a people.

It all began in 1965, when the Chagos archipelago still belonged to Mauritius. Great Britain, the then colonial power, knowingly committed the “error” - and this will be officially proven – of breaking apart a territory on the eve of its emancipation. The UN had been very clear on this subject, and condemned it repeatedly. The goal of the former colonial power was to retain this territory by unlawful means, because of its ideal strategic location in the Indian Ocean, to rent it to the US States. The US in turn demanded, as a precondition, that the 2000 inhabitants of the archipelago, descendants of slaves under French colonization, be removed from the territory. This was done methodically and brutally between 1967 and 1973. Most of the Chagossians were exiled to Mauritius, others found themselves in the Seychelles, and yet others in the vicinity of London, mainly in the town of Crawley. The majority, still alive, are waiting to return home; to no longer be the deported.

Despite the unceasing activism of the Chagossians, Great Britain and the United States of America signed in 2016 the renewal of the lease for another 20 years. This means that the vast majority of Chagossians, who have been fighting for 50 years to have the right to go back to their native land, will have no chance of fulfilling their ultimate dream of going back home. Yet, many Chagossians said they were not necessarily against the existence of this military base, where they might find work like the Filipinos and Mauritians. They would even agree to reside on another island of the archipelago, Peros Banhos, which is still part of their home. But so far, the two great powers have stubbornly refused this request.

This means that the decolonization of Mauritius is still not complete. The right of the Chagossians to reside on their land must be recognized not only by 94 countries, but by the overwhelming majority of nations, including Great Britain, the United States of America and France, the country of Human Rights which stipulate that every human being, regardless of skin color, religion or history, has the right to their land. To drive a people out of their land is

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a crime against humanity, as J-M.G Le Clézio, the Nobel Prize for literature, stated in 2013. The Chagos archipelago must be returned to the Chagossians, who developed a unique Creole culture there.

Spike Lee, Michael Moore, Oliver Stone, George Clooney, Daniels Lee, Ava DuVernay, Ryan Coogler and Steven Spielberg, we beg you to help make sure that this immense hope of the Chagossian people touches the heart of people worldwide in order for both powers to recognize their mistake and finally show some humanity<sup>1</sup>. Any error, however inhuman, can be redeemed. This will help put an end to the traumatic history of slavery and Indian indentureship in the Indian Ocean. A history that began over 300 years ago and that is now in its last throes, with this conflict that pits 10,000 proud souls against two Goliaths.

Patrick Singaïny, writer and intellectual from Réunion & Olivier Bancoult, Chagossian leader with:

Pascal Blanchard (French historian specializing in the French colonial empire), Ananda Devi (Mauritian writer), François Durpaire (specialist of the United States), Achille Mbembé (philosopher of Cameroonian origin, postcolonialism specialist), Edgar Morin (French sociologist and philosopher), J-Luc Raharimanana (French-language Malagasy writer), Souef Elbadawi (Comorian author).

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