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General debate

Letter dated 28 September 2021 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with the published instructions for the right of reply, the United Kingdom would like to exercise the right of reply in response to the statement of the distinguished representative of Mauritius.

On 24 September 2021, during agenda item 8 of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly – General debate – the representative of Mauritius made reference to the United Kingdom's sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory, further to which the United Kingdom wishes to place the following statement in the official record of proceedings:

The United Kingdom has no doubt about its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, which has been under continuous British sovereignty since 1814. Mauritius has never held sovereignty over the Archipelago and we do not recognize its claim. However, we have a long-standing commitment, first made in 1965, to cede sovereignty of the territory to Mauritius when it is no longer required for defence purposes. We stand by that commitment.

This is a bilateral dispute, not a decolonization issue. The United Kingdom was disappointed that this matter was referred to the International Court of Justice, contrary to the principle that the Court should not consider bilateral disputes without the consent of both States concerned. The 2019 advisory opinion was advice provided to the General Assembly at its request; it is not a legally binding judgment.

The joint United Kingdom-United States defence facility on the British Indian Ocean Territory helps to keep people in Britain and around the world safe, and combat some of the most challenging threats to international peace and security. The facility also remains ready for a rapid response in times of humanitarian crisis in the region. These functions are only possible under the sovereignty of the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom is aware of the judgment delivered on 28 January by the Special Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea formed



to deal with the dispute concerning delimitation of a maritime boundary claimed by Mauritius to exist between Mauritius and Maldives in the Indian Ocean. The United Kingdom is not a party to these proceedings, which can have no effect for the United Kingdom or for maritime delimitation between the United Kingdom (in respect of the British Indian Ocean Territory) and the Republic of the Maldives.

Like successive Governments before it, the United Kingdom Government has expressed its sincere regret about the manner in which Chagossians were removed from the British Indian Ocean Territory in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Substantial compensation (around £15.5 million in current prices) has been paid to Chagossians since that time in full and final settlement. Furthermore, on a voluntary basis, the United Kingdom announced in 2016 an approximately £40 million discretionary support package to improve Chagossian livelihoods in the communities where they now live.

The United Kingdom's full position in respect to its continued sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory is set out in the United Kingdom's submission to the report of the Secretary-General dated 18 May 2020 ([A/74/834](#)).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter as an official document of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 8.

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
