



Eighteenth session

INFORMATION FROM NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES

POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION ON AFRICAN AND  
ADJACENT TERRITORIES UNDER UNITED KINGDOM ADMINISTRATION

Note by the Secretary-General

MAURITIUS

In accordance with the statement of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 27 September 1961, the Government of the United Kingdom has transmitted to the Secretary-General the following political and constitutional information on the Territory of Mauritius.

This information, which was received on 13 March 1963, is herewith submitted to the General Assembly at its eighteenth session.<sup>1/</sup>

<sup>1/</sup> In accordance with General Assembly resolution 1700 (XVI) of 19 December 1961, this information is also submitted to the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories.

MAURITIUS

POPULATION

1. Mauritius is a small, densely populated Territory in the Indian Ocean inhabited by people of mixed origin. The estimated population of Mauritius at 31 December 1960 was 648,850. It was uninhabited as late as the early nineteenth century. The proportion of the various racial groups is roughly as follows:

	(per cent)
Indian descent . . . . .	67
Chinese descent . . . . .	4
"General" population (European and African descent) . . . . .	29

There are fewer than 1,000 persons of British origin in Mauritius.

STATUS AND PREVIOUS HISTORY

2. Mauritius is a Territory with a considerable measure of internal self-government. Its present Constitution is based on the result of discussions which took place in July 1961 between the British Government and representatives of the major political parties in Mauritius, including Dr. Ramgoolam, the present Chief Minister. At that time, the Territory already had a majority of elected members in the Legislative and Executive Councils; the former had forty elected members, up to twelve nominated members and three ex officio members, while the latter consisted of the Governor, who presided, seven elected and two nominated members and three ex officio members. The elected members of the Executive Council, like the nominated and ex officio members, each had responsibility over one or more departments of government, and thus had a considerable share in the supervision of the administration of the Territory, as well as a full share in policy making.

3. As a result of the 1961 Constitutional Conference, it was agreed inter alia that the leader of the majority party in the Legislature would be given the title of Chief Minister, and that the Governor would consult the Chief Minister on such matters as the appointment and removal of ministers, the allocation of portfolios and the summoning, proroguing and dissolution of the Legislature.

## CONSTITUTION

### Governor

4. The Governor (at present Sir John Rennie) is the Queen's representative and the formal head of the Government. As head of the executive he normally acts on the advice of the Executive Council, special procedure including a report to the British Government, being required in any case where he does not. His assent is required for laws passed by the Legislative Council and is normally given.

### Executive Council

5. The Constitution which is now in force provides for an Executive Council consisting of a Chief Minister and twelve other ministers, under the chairmanship of the Governor. This Council is collectively responsible for the direction and control of the Government of the Territory. The Government appoints as Chief Minister that member of the Legislative Council who is able to command a majority.

6. The present composition of the Executive Council, under the chairmanship of the Governor, is as follows:

Dr. S. Ramgoolam <sup>a/</sup>	... Chief Minister and Minister of Finance
Mr. A. Peejadhur <sup>a/</sup>	... Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs
Mr. S. Boolell <sup>a/</sup>	..... Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Mr. J.G. Forget <sup>a/</sup>	..... Minister of Health and Reform Institutions
Mr. F. Laventure <sup>b/</sup>	... Minister of Local Government and Co-operative Development
Mr. A.R. Mohamed <sup>c/</sup>	... Minister of Housing, Lands and Town and Country Planning
Mr. J.M. Patura <sup>b/</sup>	.... Minister of Industry, Commerce and External Communications
Mr. V. Ringadoo <sup>a/</sup>	.... Minister of Labour and Social Security
Mr. H.E. Walter <sup>a/</sup>	.... Minister of Works and Internal Communications
Mr. A.M. Osman <sup>c/</sup>	..... Minister of Information, Posts, Telegraph and Telecommunications
Mr. M. Lavoipierre	... Attorney-General
Mr. T.D. Vickers	..... Chief Secretary
Mr. A.F. Bates	..... Financial Secretary

All ministers except the last two named are Mauritians.

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<sup>a/</sup> Member of Labour Party.

<sup>b/</sup> Nominated member.

<sup>c/</sup> Member of Muslim Committee of Action.

Legislature

7. The Mauritius Legislature is uni-cameral and consists of a Legislative Council of fifty-five members, of whom forty are elected, twelve are nominated and three are officials. It has power to legislate for all aspects of the internal affairs of the Territory and controls its budget and taxation. The Council may be prorogued at any time by the Governor acting on ministerial advice. The Governor's powers to dissolve the Legislature are the same as the conventions applying to the exercise of the power of dissolution by the Queen in the United Kingdom. The Legislative Council may deal with any type of legislation. All members of the Legislature are Mauritians except for two of the official members.

ELECTORAL SYSTEM

8. The electoral system is based on universal adult suffrage. Forty of the members of the Legislative Council are elected in single-member constituencies, the candidate polling the largest number of votes winning the seat. Elections are held every five years.

9. The last elections were held in March 1959 and yielded the following results:

<u>Parties</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Percentage of votes</u>
Labour Party (leader: Dr. S. Ramgoolam) .....	32	23	46.7
Muslim Committee of Action (leader: Mr. A.R. Mohamed) .....	7	5	8.6
Independent Forward Bloc (leader: Mr. S. Bissoondoyal) ....	29	6	18.7
Parti Mauricien (leader: Mr. J. Koenig) .....	22	3	15.0
Trade Unionist .....	2	2	
Independent Labour Party .....	7	-	1.5
Independents .....	<u>61</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>9.5</u>
Total	160	40	100.0

10. In terms of communities the result was the election of twenty-four Hindus, five Muslims, eleven Europeans and others, which corresponds roughly to the proportions of the electorate into which the population is commonly divided.

## JUDICIARY

11. The laws of Mauritius are mainly based on old French codes (Civil Code, the Penal Code, the Code of Commerce and the Code of Civil Procedure). However, a number of more recent laws are based on English precedents, such as the Bankruptcy Law, the Company Law, the Law of Evidence, the Law of Criminal Procedure and the Labour Laws. The highest judicial authority is the Supreme Court, which has similar powers, authority and jurisdiction to the High Court of Justice in England. It consists of a Chief Justice and three puisne judges. Appeals lie to the Court of Criminal Appeal (which is constituted by three of the judges of the Supreme Court) and in certain cases to the Privy Council in England.
12. There is an Intermediate Criminal Court consisting of three senior magistrates, which has jurisdiction to try criminal cases and power to impose sentence of up to five years of penal servitude. In addition, there are eleven magistrates who preside over the several district courts which deal with less serious offences.
13. All the judges and all the magistrates are of local origin.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

14. There is a well-established system of local government in Mauritius. The capital (Port Louis) is a municipality; its membership of sixteen is wholly elected. There are town councils in Curepipe, Beau Bassin/Rose Hill and Quatre Bornes; the majority of the members of these councils are elected. The franchise for municipal and town council elections is on the basis of universal adult suffrage, and certain taxpayers' qualifications. Rural local government is based on village councils of which there are more than 100. They consist of not less than seven and not more than nine members elected on a liberal franchise with three members appointed by the Governor, and they exercise the normal local government functions of road repairs, bridge construction, supervision of markets, water supplies etc. In addition, there are district councils which co-ordinate and supervise the work of village councils in their area. These consist of fifteen members, including ten chairmen of village councils elected by and from village councils in the district, and five persons appointed by the Governor.