



2022 United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

Protecting the Chagos Archipelago: Towards SDG-14, Sustainability and Self-Determination Through a New Marine Protected Area

Friday 1st July 2022, 11:30 – 12:45 hrs, Altice Arena Committee Room

Organized by the Government of the Republic of Mauritius

Background on the event

The Government of the Republic of Mauritius made a presentation of the multi-purpose Marine Protected Area (MPA) which it proposes to create around the Chagos Archipelago which forms an integral part of the territory of the Republic of Mauritius, as authoritatively determined by the International Court of Justice and confirmed by the UN General Assembly and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

Key Issues discussed

- As the coastal State in relation to the Chagos Archipelago, Mauritius has sovereignty and sovereign rights over the maritime zones of the Archipelago. The MPA which Mauritius proposes to create around the Chagos Archipelago and which is work in progress will be fully consistent with its obligations under UNCLOS and respectful of the rule of law, the commitment of Mauritius to environmental protection, as well as the right to self-determination and the right of return of Mauritian nationals of Chagossian origin (Chagossians). The ‘MPA’ purportedly created by the UK around the Chagos Archipelago in 2010 was held by an UNCLOS Annex VII Arbitral Tribunal to have been established in breach of UNCLOS. Once the Special Chamber of ITLOS has given its Judgment on the merits in the maritime delimitation case between Mauritius and Maldives, the coordinates of the MPA will be set.
- The creation of the MPA aims at protecting the pristine marine environment of the Chagos Archipelago and its rich biodiversity. The Chagos Archipelago is a treasure of ocean biodiversity: it contains 25%-50% of the Indian Ocean coral reefs which are still in excellent condition, the coral reef fish are six times more abundant than any other reefs surveyed elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, its nesting areas for the green turtle and hawksbill turtle are the largest in the South-Western Indian Ocean and it has 18 breeding bird species.
- The MPA will be consistent with the SDGs, in particular SDG 14 and contribute towards the Aichi Targets. It will ensure the protection of coral reefs, other vulnerable ecosystems and

wildlife populations. It will also allow new knowledge to be gathered for the management of the Western Indian Ocean.

- The MPA will be created in accordance with a well-elaborated scientific approach involving a thorough data mining exercise and the delimitation of the Chagos Archipelago region into conservation units on the basis of a multi-use zoning plan. Five major zones which are in line with the IUCN method of classification are being envisaged. A buffer limit around Diego Garcia will be maintained in view of the security installations there.
- The MPA will allow resettlement of Mauritian nationals, in particular those of Chagossian origin, on some of the islands of the Chagos Archipelago. It will also ensure conservation and dissemination of cultural values, traditional knowledge and traditional management of resources as well as cultural heritage.
- The Chagossians, who are being closely consulted in the process of the creation of the MPA, support this project. They will have a key role to play as the future custodians of the MPA. Their return to the Chagos Archipelago will enable their direct involvement in the preservation and conservation of the pristine environment of the Archipelago through numerous activities such as patrolling and enforcement of the various MPA zones, fish surveys and prevention of IUU fishing.
- The Government of Mauritius attaches great importance to the cooperation of the international community in this ambitious endeavour. It accordingly invites partners from across the world, including the environmental and scientific community, NGOs and research institutions, to support Mauritius in the creation and management of the MPA and help in making it a model of ocean governance.

Key recommendations for action

- The initiative taken by the Government of Mauritius to create a MPA around the Chagos Archipelago is laudable and should be pursued.
- The mitigation of human presence on the reefs is essential and measures such as the use of renewable energy, highest levels of sustainable infrastructure and regulation of damaging activities should be envisaged.
- There is a need to ensure that fisheries are sustainable and that vulnerable high trophic level species (sharks) are protected.
- Support of States, NGOs, IGOs and the scientific community should be enlisted for this ambitious project

Voluntary Commitments

With the support of the international community, Mauritius will create a large scale multi-purpose MPA around the Chagos Archipelago which will be consistent with international law, including UNCLOS, support the implementation of SDG 14, and provide for the resettlement of the former displaced inhabitants.