



March 29th - April 1st 2012

Four issues in Mauritius

I. The Diego Garcia issue

- I.1 In 1965, before Mauritius gained independence, its territorial boundaries were modified to benefit the then colonial power, the United Kingdom. The Chagos archipelago comprising 65 islands, an integral part of the state of Mauritius, was excised by the British government on the pretext that it would be used as a satellite tracking station. The archipelago was detached contrary to UN resolutions on decolonisation and proclaimed as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) recognised by the USA only. The inhabitants were driven out by force to nearby Seychelles, then a British colony, but by 1972 most of the islanders were sent to Mauritius without any reparations. This was when the first batch of American soldiers came to establish a major naval military base on Diego Garcia, stock-piling nuclear weapons there. This base has repeatedly been used in the Gulf wars and elsewhere, and represents a great threat to peace in the region.
- I.2 As an NGO, we have campaigned peacefully for reparations from the UK and Mauritian governments and also for the return of the islanders to their homeland. We have been less successful in the second part (the return). Today, the Chagossians themselves are fighting for their rights and have appealed for redress to the European Court of Justice. So far they have not been successful; their appeal is still under consideration. Various Mauritian governments since independence in 1967 have only paid lip service to this crucial issue. Now the UK government is planning to create a marine park and eventually to apply to UNESCO for the site to be World Heritage listed. In reality, the British government wants to keep it forever because the seas offshore from the archipelago may prove to be rich in natural resources, especially oil. The Maldives, which Argentina is claiming from the UK, share a similar plight, the difference being that their inhabitants have not been uprooted like the Chagossians.
- I.3 We want the help of the Greens on this issue through a resolution to end the occupation of part of the state of Mauritius, which itself is very small.

2. Past injustices

- 2.1 Since 1989, in line with the policy of Chief Moshood Abolaja of Nigeria, president elected and assassinated in custody, we in Mauritius have campaigned on the issue of past injustices. In 2000, we entered an alliance with two other parties to set up a commission on slavery and indentured labour. However, we left the government because of broken promises. In 2005, we had another alliance with the now ruling Labour Party. The setting up of a Truth and Justice Commission was part of the electoral manifesto. Unfortunately, we did not get elected. However in 2008 the Truth and Justice Commission was set up.
- 2.2 In November 2011, the Truth and Justice Commission released its report on slavery and indentured labour after some 30 months of work. The report constitutes a major step forward with a database on the situation of descendants of slaves of African and Malagasy origins and descendants of indentured labourers, mainly of Indian origin. The report recommends major changes to be implemented to improve their poor living conditions, eradicate poverty, and address rampant discrimination in employment and various other injustices.
- 2.3 However, it fails to recommend proper reparations, and leaves everything in the hands of the government, whose policies are responsible for the sufferings of the descendants of slaves and indentured labourers. Above all, the Truth and Justice Commission recommended that the Mauritian government seek reparations from Holland, France and Great Britain, the three former colonial powers that introduced slavery and indentured labour to Mauritius. This would finance all the Commission's recommendations. For us, this is a stumbling block because no government in Mauritius would ever dare to take this step.
- 2.4 In 'Les Verts Fraternelles, we believe that we need to go to court in Mauritius as well as in Holland, France and UK to seek redress.
- 2.5 We want the Global Greens to send a strong signal to former colonial powers about the issue of past injustices. This applies not only to Mauritius but to all countries in Africa and to the African diaspora around the world following the failure of the Durban I & II anti-racism conferences organised by the UN and the collapse of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) put in place by leaders such as Wade of Senegal, Obasanjo of Nigeria, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Bouteflika of Algeria. Our presence near "l'île de Goree" in Senegal should make us understand the problem even symbolically.

3. Burning sugar cane fields

Briefly, in Mauritius the sugar industry extensively resorts to burning large sugar cane fields as a means of harvesting instead of cutting the canes. This new practice, authorised by special law, is done to reduce cost by any means but is causing visible changes in the climate. We have prolonged dry seasons, leaving the reservoirs half-full or empty. Mere common sense should have prevailed to make the industry aware of the dangers ahead, but unfortunately, such is not the case. We have done everything possible but to no avail. We need help from the Global Greens.

4. Experiments on monkeys

Mauritius exports around 10,000 long-tailed monkeys each year to laboratories in Europe and the USA for drug experiments. Five local companies profit from shipping monkeys caught in the forests. The animals suffer inhumane treatment during capture and shipment and once in the labs suffer cruelly. We have reached a point where the monkeys are threatened with extinction. We have worked in close partnership with a British NGO but still the exporters have no intention of working to norms.