

Comments on IUCN “Questions and Answers: Chagos Archipelago” (February 2010)

1. IUCN simply cannot close its eyes to the human rights aspects of this case. To say that the Chagos islanders were “relocated” is the same unbearable new-speak which the US Navy has used in proudly reporting, with regard to the Diego Garcia atoll, that “much of its coral was relocated as part of the dredging effort” in the lagoon and in the reef flats (see US Naval Facility Engineering Command/Pacific Division, *Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan Diego Garcia*, 2005, pp 3-4; in fact, a total of 5 million cubic yards of “coral fill” was “harvested” – i.e., dynamited and dredged – to build the world’s longest slipform-paved bomber runway built on crushed coral). By the same token, the Chagos islanders were not “relocated”; they were forcibly expelled, under conditions which even in the view of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) “do not, to say the least, constitute the finest hour of UK foreign policy” (*House of Commons Hansard* vol 423, col 289WH, 7 July 2004).
2. By officially participating in the FCO consultation (against the express request of IUCN state member Mauritius, communicated in no uncertain terms in the *Note Verbale* of 28 January 2010), IUCN has already taken sides in the sovereignty issue, since the declared sole purpose of this consultation is the unilateral establishment of a British marine protected area in the Chagos Archipelago.
3. The claim that the 2006 scientific expedition in which IUCN participated “found no invasive alien species” is only part of the truth, because the IUCN zoologists only surveyed marine species. By contrast, two surveys by US Navy consultants on the island of Diego Garcia in 1996 and 2004 demonstrated a 31% observed increase in unintentionally introduced plant species, as a result of massive imports of military construction aggregate material and naval operations (including several species listed by IUCN among the “world’s 100 worst invasive species”; see *INRMP Diego Garcia* 2005, above, pp E2-5). There were no botanists among the participants in the 2006 expedition; however, the next expedition now planned for February-March 2010 will finally include an expert from Kew Gardens.
4. Perhaps the most important question not addressed by the IUCN response (or the *Questions and Answers* on this website) is the suggestion by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office to exempt the entire 3-mile zone of the US military base on Diego Garcia from any environmental restrictions to be imposed on the rest of the proposed marine reserve, in order “not to have any impact on the operational

capability of the base on Diego Garcia” (*FCO Chagos Consultation Document*, p 12).
Yet, for the past 30 years now,

- (a) nuclear-powered US submarines and surface vessels have transited and docked in the Diego Garcia lagoon (which the UK declared a *Ramsar Convention* site in 2001), but no radionuclide pollution monitoring results were ever disclosed (according to a US Navy press release of 3 December 2009, the new SSN and SSGN nuclear submarines to be permanently stationed in Diego Garcia will from 2010 onwards be serviced by the submarine tender *USS Emory S. Land*, which had to leave its previous homeport in Sardinia/Italy after public protests over alleged radioactive pollution of Italian territorial waters near the base);
- (b) more than 10,000 landmines and cluster-bombs prohibited under the Ottawa and Dublin Conventions are reported to have been stocked on US ordnance supply vessels in the Diego Garcia lagoon, but according to the FCO “are not on UK territory provided they remain on the ships” (as quoted in CW Jacobs, *Military Law Review* 180/2004, p 67) – a view contested by the International Committee for the Red Cross (see *Landmine Monitor Report 1999: Toward a Mine-Free World*, Annex p 1005);
- (c) the US Navy is known to have conducted low-to-medium frequency sonar programmes for underwater sound propagation at Diego Garcia (which happens to be situated in the middle of the IWC *Indian Ocean Sanctuary* established in 1979), without ever preparing environmental assessments as required under applicable US regulations with regard to potential impacts on cetaceans and other marine life.

Regrettably, the IUCN *Questions and Answers* (on this website) fail to list among the various relevant resolutions of the IUCN World Conservation Congress

- Resolution 3.068 on Undersea Noise Pollution (Bangkok 2004); and
- Resolution 4.100 on Military Activities Detrimental to the Environment (Barcelona 2008).