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37-39 rue de Vermont
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8 March 2010

Excellency,

I acknowledge with deepest gratitude receipt of your letter dated 23 February 2010, and wish to provide the following clarification regarding IUCN's position on the proposed Marine Protected Area ("MPA") in the Chagos Archipelago.

In the course of a brief consultation with the Hon. L. Bundhoo, Minister of Environment of the Republic of Mauritius during the recent UNEP Governing Council meeting in Bali, I was pleased to discuss the concern of the Government of Mauritius for the protection of the Chagos marine environment, as well as its willingness to seek to develop, with the Government of the United Kingdom, a joint proposal to that effect that would also address the position of Mauritius on the issues of sovereignty and of resettlement of the Chagossians.

IUCN acknowledges the dispute between Mauritius and the United Kingdom on the sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. As previously indicated, IUCN cannot and does not take any position on this issue, and expressly reiterates that its submission in support of the MPA is not intended and should not be understood to be either prejudicial to the position of Mauritius or supportive of the position of the UK.

It is IUCN's sincere hope that the two Governments' mutual, substantial concerns for the protection of the Chagos marine environment will be a catalyst towards the ultimate settlement of their differences over the issues of sovereignty and resettlement. As for IUCN's submission on the proposed MPA, while it may not advance the position of Mauritius on the sovereignty issue, it does not prejudice that position either and, most important, it promotes the strong shared interests of conservation by supporting the timely establishment of an MPA without prejudice to the position of Mauritius.

As for the issue of resettlement, IUCN reiterates that its submission in support of the MPA is premised upon the express understanding (based on the clear language of the Consultation Document issued by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, at p. 7 (under "Scope"), at pp. 12-13 (Annex A, under "Mauritius" and "Chagossian community"), and at p. 15 (Annex C, under "Joint Communiqué") that the design and the implementation of the MPA in and of itself would not prejudice the outcome of the Chagossians' case pending before the European Court of Human Rights and their right to resettle in the Archipelago.

IUCN is also aware that certain parts of the Archipelago may be excluded from the MPA due to military or political reasons. However, while this may render the outcome from the proposed MPA less than perfect, IUCN believes that it is not a sufficient ground for withholding its support from a proposal that would protect the remaining vast majority of the Chagos marine environment.

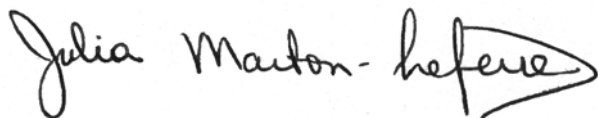
Ultimately, such protection would serve directly the interests of the Chagossians themselves at the time they would resettle in the Archipelago. On the other hand, it should be noted that if the return of the Chagossians to certain parts of the Archipelago (such as Diego Garcia) is going to be delayed or precluded, this will be a result not of the proposed MPA but rather of military and other international political issues, the resolution or persistence of which lies beyond the context and scope of the proposed MPA.

Regarding your request that your letter be circulated to all IUCN Members, I wish to inform you that the letter was promptly posted on IUCN's Members' portal for easy access by all our Members, and that this section of our website contains all the relevant documents and views received to date:

<http://www.iucn.org/about/union/members/?4792/Chagos-ArchipelagoBritish-Indian-Ocean-Territory-Exchange>

Trusting that the above will contribute to allay the concerns of the Government of Mauritius, I will be pleased to engage in further discussions on how IUCN might be able to advance the preservation of the marine environment in the Chagos Archipelago in the best interests of all concerned parties.

With the assurances of my highest consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Marton-Lefèvre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre
Director General

Cc: Hon. Minister Lormus Bundhoo
UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office