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The Permanent Mission of the Republic
of Mauritius to the United Nations and
other International Organizations in
Geneva
37-39 Rue de Vermont
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11 February 2010

Excellency,

I acknowledge receipt of your Note Verbale dated 28 January 2010 with respect to IUCN's position on the possible creation of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Chagos Archipelago, and I would like to provide the following comments to the points raised therein.

We commend the firm commitment of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius to achieving the highest international standards for conservation of the marine environment and ecosystems, including specifically in the Chagos Archipelago as stated in the context of the talks between Mauritius and the United Kingdom.

We sincerely hope that the next round of talks will confirm the interest of both parties in the establishment of the highest protection measures in the Chagos Archipelago, regardless of the outcomes of the discussion on sovereignty over the area.

There is some experience internationally that the establishment of conservation areas over territories in dispute between countries has paved the way for fruitful solutions of the controversies, as conservation objectives are placed above the particular interests of the parties. This is particularly applicable to the Chagos Archipelago, given its exceptional global value. In this sense, we are hopeful that a key agreement from the next round of talks between Mauritius and the UK will be a joint decision by both parties to establish a marine protected area as currently proposed.

In the case of IUCN's position on the consultation undertaken by the UK government, our Marine Global Programme and World Commission on Protected Areas have widely consulted with our Members, partners and networks of experts. We have given special attention to the position of the Government of Mauritius. Our interest in the consultation is to offer expert advice on the best available options for conserving the extraordinary values of the Chagos Archipelago, independently of the current process to address sovereignty over the area. After careful consideration of all the inputs, we have come to the conclusion that awarding full protection to the entire archipelago and surrounding waters is preferable to protecting only some areas or features of the archipelago or restricting only certain extractive uses, as it will realize greater global conservation benefits today as well as in the future. The alternatives, including continued exploitation, would gradually erode many of the values that make Chagos unique.

It is based on the indicated consultations and analysis that we have drafted an IUCN submission to the UK government consultation (in attachment). We fully recognize the importance of involving all parties concerned, including certainly the Mauritius Government and the former inhabitants of Chagos in any process aiming to define the future conservation status and measures, and this has been reiterated in our draft submission. I would like to re-emphasize that IUCN's support for protection of the marine environment of the Chagos archipelago in no way indicates that it takes any position on the dispute between the UK and Mauritius concerning sovereignty over the area. Indeed we don't see any incompatibility between the establishment of a marine protected area and any outcome of the sovereignty negotiations. IUCN's position is taken with the aim to securing the greatest environmental benefit, irrespective of what changes to governance arrangement or habitation may come to pass. It would be a great irony if decisions today would result in degradation of essential habitats on which future social values may increasingly have to depend.

Regarding your request to make the contents of your Note Verbale known to IUCN Members, I have requested our Constituency Support Group to post it, together with relevant documents, on the IUCN Members webpage (<http://www.iucn.org/about/union/members/>).

I trust this adequately covers the concerns expressed in your letter. I would be pleased to further exchange ideas with you and experts of the Government of Mauritius on the best possible scenarios for the conservation of the remarkable values of the Chagos Archipelago.

With the assurances of my highest consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia Marton-Lefèvre', written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre
Director General

Attached: IUCN Response to the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office Consultation on whether to establish a Marine Protected Area in the Chagos Archipelago