

02.07.2019

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

B/499

The Honourable Third Member for Piton and Riviere du Rempart (**Mr Rutnah**)

To ask the Honourable Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit, Minister of Finance and Economic Development –

Whether he will state the diplomatic strategy envisaged to achieve the full decolonisation of the Republic of Mauritius following the recent advisory opinion given by the International Court of Justice on the Chagos Archipelago?

REPLY

Madam Speaker,

I request that the House bears with me as the reply which I will give is a lengthy one since the subject matter of this Question is an issue of not only national, but also international importance.

Since Government came to power in December 2014, it has left no stone unturned in its endeavour to secure the full decolonisation of the Republic of Mauritius, in line with the Government Programme 2015-2019.

Prior to our accession to independence, the United Kingdom excised the Chagos Archipelago from the territory of Mauritius, in violation of international law and United Nations General Assembly resolutions, including Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960. The decolonisation of Mauritius therefore remains incomplete.

Madam Speaker,

At the request of Mauritius, the UN General Assembly decided by consensus in September 2016 to include on its agenda an item relating to the request for an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965. Subsequently, on 22 June 2017, the General Assembly adopted by 94 votes to 15, with 65 abstentions, a draft resolution, which was tabled by the Republic of the Congo on behalf of States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of African States, to request an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Following the adoption of that resolution, the International Court of Justice held two rounds of written submissions and public hearings. A number of countries, including Mauritius, as well as the African Union made written and oral submissions to the International Court of Justice. Most of these submissions were very supportive of the completion of the decolonisation process of Mauritius.

On 25 February 2019, the International Court of Justice gave a historic Advisory Opinion, in which it found that the decolonisation process of Mauritius was not lawfully completed when it acceded to independence in 1968, in view of the unlawful excision of the Chagos Archipelago from the territory of Mauritius. The Court also concluded that the United Kingdom is under an obligation to bring an end to its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible and that all Member States are under an obligation to cooperate with the United Nations in order to complete the decolonisation process of Mauritius.

A draft resolution aimed at giving effect to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice was tabled on 7 May 2019 by Senegal on behalf of States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of African States. As I had informed the House on 13 June 2019, the draft resolution was adopted on 22 May 2019 by an overwhelming vote of 116 to 6, with 56 abstentions.

Madam Speaker,

On 20 May 2019, I had a meeting in London with the Rt Hon Jeremy Corbyn, UK Leader of the Opposition. The latter, who had addressed on 1 May 2019 a letter to the UK Prime Minister to condemn the UK Government's rejection of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, reiterated his support for the implementation of the Advisory Opinion. He subsequently expressed his support for the resolution which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 22 May 2019.

Madam Speaker,

It is a matter of great disappointment that the United Kingdom has yet to make a commitment to the immediate implementation of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and to the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly. Instead, hardly a few days after the adoption of the resolution, the UK Government called for expressions of interest for visits purported to be held to the Chagos Archipelago later this year and early next year in the context of a supposed £40 million package said to be aimed at improving the livelihoods of Mauritian citizens of Chagossian origin. Mauritius sent a note of protest to the United Kingdom, in which it

requested that an end be put immediately to the purported programme of visits.

Government will continue to take appropriate steps to encourage the United Kingdom to change its stance, and to do so expeditiously, in order to bring to an early end to its continuing colonial foothold in Africa.

I would like to reaffirm that Mauritius has no objection to the military base at Diego Garcia continuing to be in operation in accordance with international law. In this regard, Mauritius stands ready to enter into a long-term arrangement with the United States, or with the United States and the United Kingdom.

Madam Speaker,

Government is committed to implementing a resettlement programme in the Chagos Archipelago. In this regard, a special provision of Rs 50 million has been made in the Budget for this financial year to meet expenses relating to, inter-alia, preparations for eventual resettlement in the Chagos Archipelago. Moreover, I will shortly move in this House a motion for the inclusion of the Chagos Archipelago in such one of the constituencies of Mauritius as the Electoral Boundaries Commission may determine.

Government also proposes to organise later this year a visit to the Chagos Archipelago.

Madam Speaker,

I wish to commend the Minister Mentor, Minister of Defence, Minister for Rodrigues who has been at the forefront of our struggle to complete the decolonisation of Mauritius. Thanks to his firm initiatives, significant milestones have been achieved in this relentless struggle such as the overwhelming vote of the UN General Assembly to request an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the landmark Advisory Opinion given by the Court on 25 February 2019.

I will continue to lead this struggle with unflinching determination so that the decolonisation process of Mauritius can be rapidly completed, thereby enabling Mauritius to effectively exercise its sovereignty over the entirety of its territory, including the Chagos Archipelago, and our citizens, particularly those of Chagossian origin, to return to the Chagos Archipelago, if they so wish.