

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 July 1980

Dear Rodric,

CALL BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF MAURITIUS

The Prime Minister of Mauritius, Sir S. Ramgoolam, called on the Prime Minister yesterday. He was accompanied by the Mauritian Foreign Minister, Sir Harold Walter, and by the Mauritian High Commissioner. Mr. Luce and Mr. Day were also present. After an exchange of courtesies, the Prime Minister said that she had been surprised to learn about the Resolution passed at the OAU Summit in Freetown on 4 July. The terms of the Resolution did not seem to be accurate, particularly the reference to the fact that Diego Garcia had not been ceded to Britain for military purposes. It had always been intended that Diego Garcia would be available for the construction of defence facilities. This had been made clear in a statement made to the British House of Commons in November 1965. The statement had been repeated in Mauritius on the same day. She was also distressed to see that the Resolution referred to the militarisation of Diego Garcia as being a threat to Africa and to the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. The threat to peace in that part of the world did not come from Diego Garcia. Britain had entered into an arrangement with Mauritius in good faith in 1965. The OAU Resolution was bound to cause trouble in the future.

In response to the Prime Minister, both Sir S. Ramgoolam and Sir Harold Walter said that, while they did not question Britain's good faith, they had been told originally that Diego Garcia was going to be used as a communications centre. Sir S. Ramgoolam said that the statement to which the Prime Minister had referred had been made in haste and when he was not in Mauritius. He did not think it represented the true nature of the agreement between Mauritius and the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister should ask to see the minutes of the discussions between the two sides at the time. As regards the OAU Resolution, Sir Harold Walter said that the Government in Mauritius was not asking either the United Kingdom or the United States to leave Diego Garcia, but the status of the island had become a live issue in Mauritian politics. Mr. Luce said that Sir Harold Walter had told him earlier in the day that the Mauritian Government would find it helpful if HMG were to

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reaffirm their position that Diego Garcia would revert to Mauritius if and when it was no longer required for defence purposes. The Prime Minister said that HMG stood by that statement. This could be reaffirmed publicly if that would help the Mauritian Government. However, she was anxious that the Mauritian Government should keep in the closest possible touch with HMG in dealing with any future developments relating to Diego Garcia.

Sir Harold Walter said that there would be no future developments (!). The Prime Minister had no need to be concerned about the OAU statement. The Mauritian Government was determined that neither Mauritius nor Diego Garcia would ever "be painted red". The Prime Minister welcomed Sir Harold Walter's words, but said that, nonetheless, she was concerned about the effect of the OAU Resolution on the position of Diego Garcia.

In the subsequent discussion, Sir Harold Walter said that Mauritius was in great economic difficulties as a result of having been hit by three cyclones in recent months. He thought that Mauritius was entitled to help from those whose interests she shared. He referred to the establishment of an IMF Consortium in which France was taking the lead. The European Development Fund had been slow in releasing money. The practical difficulties of reconstruction had been accentuated by the loss of a new roll on/roll off vessel which had sunk in the Mozambique Channel when loaded with a cargo of corrugated iron for the island.

Reverting to Diego Garcia, Sir Harold Walter claimed that the economic aspects of the 1965 agreement on Diego Garcia were not being observed. It had always been envisaged that labour would be recruited from Mauritius to work on Diego Garcia: in fact, the navvies on Diego Garcia were now all Filipinos. It had also been envisaged that purchases for Diego Garcia would be channelled through Mauritius. This had never happened.

Sir Harold Walter spent some time giving a graphic account of the situation in the Seychelles and in the OAU. However, little of the substance was new. His theme was that the Seychelles had become a one-party state with increasingly close links with extreme left-wing regimes in Africa and that it had designs on Mauritius which the Mauritian Government was determined to resist.

Two miscellaneous points made by Sir Harold Walter might also be worth recording. He made a plea that the British Council office in Mauritius should not be closed down. He expressed the hope that the BBC External Services would be maintained. The Prime Minister asked whether the External Services were received in the Seychelles and was assured that they were.

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I should be grateful to receive in due course an account of the exact nature of the discussions between HMG and the Mauritian Government in 1965 and whether there is any substance in Sir S. Ramgoolam's assertion that the public statements made at the time do not reflect the discussions between the two Governments.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever*

*Richard Alexander*

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.