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February 2008: Sailing to the Chagos Islands campaign

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In the 1960s, the British Government forced out the people of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean to make way for a US military base on the Chagossian island of Diego Garcia. Despite losing repeatedly in the British courts, the British government continues to resist their return home. Hence this campaign:

US out of Diego Garcia protest' Pete Bouquet, Jon Castle and Tom Keunen will be sailing to the Chagos Islands from Malaysia in Feb. 2008. We will be sailing on board a 40' cutter "Musichana" donated for the project, and will visit Peros Banhos and Salomon only. (About 120' from Diego Garcia). After the visit we will continue on to La Reunion and Mauritius. The purpose of the trip is bear witness to the crimes of the British and American Governments and to raise awareness of the issue of the Chagos Islands. In particular we want to highlight the injustice and mistreatment visited by the British Government on to the Chagossian people, and to assist them in their struggle to return home.'

'In the 1960's, maybe even earlier, the British and US Governments - not for the first or last time - colluded in a crime. The inhabitants of the Chagos Islands (in the Indian Ocean) were removed by force and trickery from their homes by the British and dumped in Mauritius. British Courts have ruled three times that this was illegal, and that the Chagossians must be allowed to return home. The British Government, by appealing the latest ruling to the House of Lords, continues to defy the courts and break the law and refuses to allow the islanders to go home.

The reason for this is because the islands have been handed over to the Americans who have built a bomber base on Diego Garcia (the main island of the Chagos Group). They don't want anyone else there. From this base the Americans commit the war crimes of bombing civilians and civilian infrastructure in Afghanistan, Iraq and who knows where else. It is also believed that Guantanamo style activities take place there.

We will be taking photographs and movies and making general observations of the state of the islands and surrounding waters (particularly illegal fishing activities) and the houses and associated infrastructure . We will also take note of any obvious neglect by the British Authorities of Chagossian property - and vandalism or damage which has occurred during the absence of the rightful owners.

This report will then be delivered direct to Olivier Bancoult, leader of the Chagossians in exile in Mauritius.