

**Speech of the Minister Mentor, Minister of Defence and Minister for Rodrigues at the arrival of Air Mauritius Airbus A330 Neo named ‘Chagos Archipelago’**

SSR Airport – Friday 21 June 2019 – 10 h 00

- The CEO of Air Mauritius, Mr Somas Appavou,
- Representatives of different government departments and private sector organisations,
- The Chairperson of the Chagos Welfare Fund Board, Mr. Olivier Bancoult,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Good morning to all of you.**

It is a matter of pride for Mauritius to welcome the Air Mauritius Airbus A330 Neo aircraft named ‘Chagos Archipelago’.

Yes, we are proud and that for three reasons.

Firstly, because naming the new plane ‘Chagos Archipelago’ follows historic landmarks in our struggle to complete the decolonisation of our country and effectively exercise our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

Secondly, because Air Mauritius, the most prominent flagship of our country, is modernising its fleet of aircrafts.

And thirdly, because we are united as a nation as far as our territorial integrity is concerned. The presence of our brothers and sisters of chagossian origin at this function is testimony to that.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This new Air Mauritius A330 Neo aircraft, will convey, wherever it flies to, our strong message that the Chagos Archipelago is proudly Mauritian.

I am pleased to note that by naming this Airbus A330 Neo the ‘Chagos Archipelago’, Air Mauritius is committedly supporting the cause of Mauritius and of our citizens of chagossian origin.

I also wish to commend Air Mauritius for having named one Airbus A350-900 ‘Le Morne Brabant’ and the first A330 Neo that joined the fleet in May 2019 – the ‘Aapravasi Ghat’.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this year has witnessed two historic milestones in the relentless struggle of Mauritius to complete its decolonization process.

On 25 February 2019, the International Court of Justice gave a historic Advisory Opinion which affirmed unequivocally that the Chagos Archipelago is and has always formed an integral part of the territory of Mauritius. The Court found that the decolonization process of Mauritius was not lawfully completed when it gained independence in 1968, in view of the unlawful excision of the Chagos Archipelago by the United Kingdom from Mauritius.

The Court therefore concluded that the United Kingdom is under an obligation to end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible and that all Member States must cooperate with the United Nations in order to complete the decolonization of Mauritius.

On 22 May 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted by an overwhelming majority of 116 votes a resolution to give effect to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. In that resolution, the General Assembly has, *inter alia*, demanded that the United Kingdom withdraws its unlawful administration from the Chagos Archipelago within six months.

I need not recall the human tragedy which occurred in the wake of the illegal excision of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius. The United Kingdom forcibly removed all the inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago, in blatant violation of their fundamental human rights.

Decades after this wrongful act, our citizens of chagossian origin still aspire to return to their birthplace, but have been unable to do so because of the continued unlawful administration of the Chagos Archipelago by the United Kingdom. Their hope to return to the Chagos Archipelago has been rekindled by the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the resolution recently adopted by the UN General Assembly.

Government has pledged to implement a programme of resettlement in the Chagos Archipelago. In this regard, a special provision of Rs 50 million has been made in the 2019-2020 Budget for meeting, *inter alia*, expenses relating to resettlement in the Chagos Archipelago.

Government will continue to spare no efforts for the completion of the decolonization of Mauritius, thereby enabling Mauritius to effectively exercise its sovereignty over the entirety of its territory, including the Chagos Archipelago, and Mauritian citizens, particularly those of chagossian origin, to resettle in the Chagos Archipelago if they so wish.

Ladies and Gentlemen, air connectivity has been instrumental for our country's social and economic development. The national airline was created in 1967 and embarked on a rapid growth trajectory and became a global player when it acquired the 1<sup>st</sup> Boeing 747 in 1984. The government I led at that time encouraged and supported Air Mauritius to be bold and to expand. The company's network grew rapidly while reinforcing its operations in the region, in Africa and in India. Non-stop operations became the trade mark of the company.

Carried by this momentum, Air Mauritius acquired two Boeing 767 in 1988. It continued its expansion in Asia and Europe. Another key milestone in the development of the national airline was the conclusion of our contract with Airbus to acquire four brand new Airbus A340. The first was delivered in 1994, making Air Mauritius the first operator of the A340 in the southern hemisphere. The foundation was laid down for the modern Air Mauritius that we have known thereon.

We understand that the airline operating environment has changed drastically. But Mauritius has new ambitions and has embarked on a new phase of its development. It will need a connectivity and air access policy that match these ambitions. The national airline of Mauritius has therefore a key part to play in this plan.

Government is supporting Air Mauritius in the crucial transformation program on which it has embarked. We trust that the national airline will be put back on track to better face the volatile operating environment and tough competition.

On this note, I wish the ‘Chagos Archipelago’ aircraft safe flights and long service within the Air Mauritius fleet.

I thank you for your kind attention.