

## **THE AUTONOMY OF RODRIGUES: COMPARATIVE ELEMENTS WITH THE MOROCCAN INITIATIVE FOR THE SAHARA REGION**

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### Introduction

The 20th century has witnessed a growth in the number of countries which moved from a colonial status to become independent. Over a hundred countries gained their independence from 1900 to 2000. Independence brings forward various socio-economic and cultural changes in the life of a country. As countries become independent, they are able to take decisions which will work in their best interests. One example is Mauritius. After gaining its independence in 1968, Mauritius took a series of initiatives to promote education and health care for its citizens. In order to give everyone access to education and health care services, the Government established that these two public service sectors should be free for the citizens of the country. From an economic perspective, measures such as the transition from a mono-crop industry to the expansion of the tourism, textile and financial sectors created employment and contributed to the economic growth of Mauritius (Uppiah, 2015).

Along with independence, another action taken by some countries was to become autonomous. Political autonomy occurs when a territory within a particular state becomes self-governing. This means that the autonomous state has the capacity to take decisions which are tailor-made for its specific needs. Having an autonomous status also means that the territory is not under the full control of the main government (Foldvary, 2011). Worldwide, there are various countries which have claimed an autonomous status. Examples include: the Basque region in Spain, Hong Kong from China and Greenland from Denmark.

In the Indian Ocean, an example of an autonomous territory is Rodrigues Island. In 2002, Rodrigues gained its autonomy from Mauritius. This autonomous status allows Rodrigues to set up its own system of governance. Parallel to the three branches of government which exist in Mauritius, namely: legislative, executive and judiciary, Rodrigues has set up its own institutions which govern and regulate the administration of the country. These institutions are: the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (which is the legislative branch), the Commissions (which are equivalent to the executive) and the Courts of Rodrigues which forms part of the judiciary.

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of its autonomy this year, Rodrigues can be considered as a model of political autonomy in the African and Indian Ocean region. From a peaceful transition from being a district of Mauritius to become an autonomous territory, Rodrigues has adopted and

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implemented measures that address the specific needs of the country. For example, as Rodrigues relies heavily on its fishing industry, measures to empower local fishing communities are constantly being implemented. These measures can range from grants being given to local fishing communities to trainings offered. Other measures involve: encouraging the development of small and medium enterprises and working in collaboration with the government of Mauritius on national matters.

The aim of this research is to elaborate on the autonomous status of Rodrigues. The paper will be divided into three parts. Part I will examine some international law principles such as the principle of self-determination and the concept of autonomy to better understand why countries opt to become autonomous. Part II will investigate the steps taken by Rodrigues to become autonomous. The governance structure and administrative system of the island will be explored as well as the current state of affairs in the country 20 years after its autonomy. Part III will examine the Moroccan initiative and will elaborate on the importance of the devolution of legislative powers. Part IV will provide for lessons to be learnt from the Rodrigues experience and will conclude the paper.

## Part I: International Law Principles

### *The right to Self-Determination*

Public international law provides for a panoply of principles and regulations which help countries regulate their interactions with each other and also provides guidelines to assist them in shaping their internal policies and affairs. Self-determination is an example of an international law principle which guides countries in cases where they are seeking independence or political autonomy.

First referenced to in Article 1(2) of the United Nations Charter 1945, self-determination has been defined by Article 1(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966 and Article 1 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966 as:

*'All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'.*

The concept of self-determination emerged as a right during the decolonisation period post World War II (Saul, 2011). The United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples 1960 provides that peoples who have been subject to 'alien subjugation, domination and exploitation' (Article 1) have the right to self-determination.

Article 2 of the Declaration states that through self-determination, the people can ‘freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development’.

Through the definition of self-determination provided by the UN Charter 1945, the ICCPR 1966, the ICESCR 1966 and the United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples 1960, two important elements of international law can be identified. Firstly, that the people can freely choose their political status and secondly their liberty to determine their economic, social, and cultural development.

People freely choosing their political status involves two elements: (i) the people and the state having the ability to choose their status (either as an independent state or an autonomous territory) and (ii) their territorial integrity.

(i) The choice of status

Through national consultations or referendums, people can choose the status of their country. For example, the latest country to have gained independence is South Sudan. In 2011, after a referendum, the people of South Sudan voted to become an independent state, thus separating them from Sudan. In other cases, territories or regions may choose to become autonomous. For instance, in 2019 in Ethiopia, by a percentage of 98.5% of votes, the Sidama ethnic group through a referendum voted to have their own self-governing autonomous region. These examples illustrate the will of the people to freely chose the status of their country or region.

(ii) Territorial integrity

The second element to be considered for political status is territorial integrity. As regions or countries are seeking either independence or autonomy, it is important to ascertain their geographical morphology. The past decades have witnessed conflicts among several regions of the world when it came to defining their geographical boundaries and limits. One current example is the conflict between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region.

In order to avoid further territorial conflicts, one principle of international law which can be used is the principle of *uti possidetis juris*. This principle confers upon the people and the state rights and obligations as they gain independence or autonomy. Along with this, the boundaries of the state should be determined according to how the territory was prior to independence or autonomy (Castellino, 2008). Although this may bring controversy in some cases, the principle of *uti possidetis juris* provides a solution in determining the territory after independence or autonomy. Countries or regions have afterwards a moral obligation to determine, in a peaceful manner, the extent of their territory.

Along with choosing their political status, when abiding by the right to self-determination, there should be the respect of the liberty of the people to freely choose their economic, social, and cultural development. Link to this are two important branches of international law, namely: the right to development and human rights.

Article 1 (2) of the Declaration of the Right to Development reiterates the concept of self-determination. It emphasises the right of the people of a state to ‘exercise their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources’. The right to development, described as an inalienable human right in Article 1 (1), provides that every person is entitled to ‘participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development’. The right to development supports the self-determination of the people as it makes it a right for the people to participate and contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of their autonomous or independent state.

From a human rights perspective, the ICCPR 1966 and the ICESCR 1966, two main international human rights instruments, highlight the importance of self-determination. Both covenants reiterate the ability of the people to freely dispose of their wealth and resources without prejudice.

The economic, social, and cultural development aspect of self-determination is important when a country is becoming independent or autonomous. It allows the country, through a democratically elected government, to take measure that will work in the best economic, social, and cultural interests of the people.

The right to self-determination is an important element to take into consideration when seeking independence or autonomy. It allows the people to freely choose their political status and their economic, social, and cultural development. As the International Court of Justice mentioned in the East Timor Case, the principle of self-determination is an essential principle of international law (East Timor [Portugal v Australia] ICJ Reports 1995).

### *The Concept of Autonomy*

Political autonomy, being the capacity of a particular group to establish its own system of governance outside the power of a central government (Neufeld, 2019), is a phenomenon which is growing internationally. One example of political autonomy is regional autonomy.

Regional autonomy can be described as governance power vested to a minority group or inhabitants of a particular region. The minority group or inhabitants of this region have the power to administer and manage their internal affairs.

An important feature of regional autonomy is its constitutional entrenchment. For political autonomy to become a reality, many countries have amended their Constitution to include it. One example is the Constitution of Ethiopia. Ethiopia can be considered as an *avant-garde* from a constitutional law perspective. The country is one of the first African countries to grant minority group the constitutional right to self-government in their territory.

Article 39 (3) of the Ethiopian Constitution provides for the rights of Nation, Nationalities and People in Ethiopia to exercise a full measure of self-government and to establish institutions of government in their territory. Article 39 (3) reads as follow:

*Article 39. Rights of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples*

- 1. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.*
- 2. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history.*
- 3. Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments.*
- 4. The right to self-determination, including secession, of every Nation, Nationality and People shall come into effect:*
  - a. When a demand for secession has been approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Legislative Council of the Nation, Nationality or People concerned;*
  - b. When the Federal Government has organized a referendum which must take place within three years from the time it received the concerned council's decision for secession;*
  - c. When the demand for secession is supported by a majority vote in the referendum;*
  - d. When the Federal Government will have transferred its powers to the Council of the Nation, Nationality or People who has voted to secede; and*
  - e. When the division of assets is effected in a manner prescribed by law.*
- 5. A "Nation, Nationality or People" for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.*

Seeking autonomy represents various advantages for minority groups and inhabitants of a particular region. More than a mere representation in Parliament, political autonomy allows groups to make legislative, executive, judicial and even fiscal policies that would be applicable to them solely. For example, in many Canadian and United States autonomous Indian reserved territories, certain form of taxes are not applicable. These taxes are applicable in other areas of the provinces but not in the autonomous regions.

Political autonomy enhances the preservation of culture and traditions. Minority or indigenous groups have the ability to enact legislations or take the necessary measures to preserve their traditions and culture. Examples of regions where autonomy was granted based on cultural and linguistic specificities are the Basque and Catalan regions of Spain.

Another positive aspect of autonomy is its ability to be a compromise between the creation of a separate state and staying as an integral part of a unitary state. Autonomy allows groups to have their own identity and make rules and laws that will benefit their intrinsic characteristics.

Autonomy may face some challenges in its implementation. Some nationalists are of the view that autonomy can be a threat to national solidarity and territorial unity. As pointed out in *Autonomy as a Strategy for Diffusing Conflicts* (2000), some groups willing to dissociate themselves with the main population of a country might create division and disharmony in a society.

Those who are against autonomy also argue that autonomy is an additional economic cost for the central government. There is the duplication of institutions and administrative duties which the central government will have to sustain. Furthermore, there is also the assumption that autonomous states might not be willing to share natural resources and benefits with the central government.

Despite its challenges, seeking autonomous status has been a success story in many cases. Autonomy has allowed to ease tensions in many situations and has uphold the right of self-determination of the people. An example of how autonomy has been a success story in the Indian Ocean is the case of Rodrigues island.

## Part II: The Autonomy of Rodrigues

### *Background of Rodrigues*

Located in the Indian Ocean, Rodrigues is a volcanic island 650km off the east coast of Mauritius. The island has a surface area of 108 km<sup>2</sup> and is 8 km wide and 18 km long. According to Statistics

Mauritius 2019, the total population of the country is 43,538 divided between 21,349 males and 22,189 females. The main economic activities and sources of income in Rodrigues are fishing, tourism, and agriculture.

When Mauritius gained its independence in 1968, Rodrigues became part of Mauritius. Section 111 of the 1968 Constitution of Mauritius provides for the outer islands which forms part of the Republic of Mauritius. Section 111 reads as follow:

*“Mauritius” includes –*

*(a) the Islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, Tromelin, Cargados Carajos, and the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia and any other island comprised in the State of Mauritius;*

*(b) the territorial sea and the air space above the territorial sea and the islands specified in paragraph (a);*

*(c) the continental shelf; and (d) such places or areas as may be designated by regulations made by the Prime Minister, rights over which are or may become exercisable by Mauritius.*

Hence Rodrigues, forms part of the Republic of Mauritius.

#### *The movement towards autonomy*

Shortly after Mauritius gained its independence in 1968, the people of Rodrigues started to express their will to become autonomous. Consultations were done with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local groups and the general feedback received was that the people of Rodrigues were in favour of their autonomy. Moreover, Mauritius granting autonomy to Rodrigues would have been beneficial to both. This would allow for a more decentralized system whereby Rodrigues would have been able to make decisions tailored for the needs and specificities of the island (Toulouse and Vithilingem, 2007)

In 1976, a Ministry of Rodrigues was created in Mauritius to look after and manage the internal affairs and matters of Rodrigues. In 1982 Mr Serge Clair, a Rodriguan citizen, became the first Minister for Rodrigues. By 1991, the Parliament of Mauritius voted for the Rodrigues (Local Council) Act 1991. The Act established a local Council for Rodrigues whose purpose was to advice the Minister for Rodrigues and promote development in the island.

In view of accelerating the procedures towards the autonomy of Rodrigues, in 2002, a delegation from Mauritius and Rodrigues went to Trinidad and Tobago. The purpose of this trip was to examine how Tobago was able to self-rule and administer their local affairs. The aim of the trip

was mainly to learn from the Tobagonian experience and implement some of the steps undertaken by Tobago in the Rodriguan context.

In 2001, the Government of Mauritius took the necessary measures to make the autonomy of Rodrigues a reality. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly Bill was presented in Parliament in Mauritius. After a unanimous vote, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA) Act 2001 was enacted. Through the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001, Rodrigues was granted its autonomy.

The RRA Act 2001 states at its Section 3 the establishment of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, which shall be a body corporate and shall exercise its functions on behalf of the Government of Mauritius. Furthermore, section 26 of the Act provides for the responsibility of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. Section 26 states that the Assembly is responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies for Rodrigues. These policies can range from agriculture to youth and sports (Fourth Schedule of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA) Act 2001).

In line with granting Rodrigues its autonomy, the Constitution of Mauritius was also amended to recognize the existence of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. The Constitution provides for the powers of the Regional Assembly. Article 75B reads as follow:

*75B Powers of the Regional Assembly*

*(1) Subject to this Constitution, the Regional Assembly –*

*(a) shall have such powers and functions as may be prescribed and, in particular, the power to propose and adopt Bills in relation to the matters for which it shall be responsible, which Bills, when adopted by Parliament in such manner as may be prescribed, shall be known as Regional Assembly Laws and shall be so designated in the Short Title;*

*(b) may make regulations which shall be known as Regional Assembly Regulations and shall be so designated in the Heading.*

*(2) Regional Assembly Laws and Regional Assembly Regulations shall apply only to Rodrigues.*

On 29 September 2002, the first local elections were held in Rodrigues. The aim of the election was to set up the first Rodriguan local government. After the election, the first local government was made up of: 10 elected members from the ‘Organisation du Peuple Rodriguais’ (OPR) and 8 elected members from the ‘Mouvement Rodriguais’ party who formed the opposition. Mr Jean Danial Speville became the first elected Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues.



*How Rodrigues functions as an autonomous region of Mauritius?*

As an autonomous region, Rodrigues administers its local affairs through its three branches of local government. These branches are: (i) The Rodrigues Regional Assembly (legislative), (ii) the Commissions (executive) and (iii) the Court of Rodrigues (judiciary).

(i) The Rodrigues Regional Assembly (legislative)

The Rodrigues Regional Assembly is the equivalent to a Parliament for Rodrigues. The Regional Assembly which was enacted under the auspices of the RRA Act 2001, allows for the elected members to pass new laws and regulations for Rodrigues (Section 26 RRA Act 2001). It is to be noted that these laws and regulations are only applicable in Rodrigues.

Any citizen, whether Mauritius or from Rodrigues, is eligible to stand as candidate in a local election in Rodrigues. The conditions imposed however are the following: (i) the person should be 18 years old or above and (ii) the person should have resided in Rodrigues for at least two years prior to the elections. The last elections in Rodrigues were held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

The Regional Assembly shall consist of 18 members. At the head of the Regional Assembly is the Chief Commissioner who is also the Head of Government. The Head of State for the autonomous island of Rodrigues is the President of Mauritius.

It is to be noted that during the general elections in Mauritius, two candidates from Rodrigues are elected. These two candidates are not involved in the affairs of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. The two elected members from Rodrigues for the Mauritian general elections, become members of the Parliament of Mauritius. The role of these two elected members from Rodrigues is to join other elected members from Mauritius and act as legislators for the Republic of Mauritius. Their role is to participate in the law-making process for the Republic of Mauritius.

(ii) The Commissions (executive)

The executive branch for Rodrigues is under the aegis of the Chief Commissioner. There are seven commissions in Rodrigues, namely:

- Chief Commissioner's Office,
- Deputy Chief Commissioner's Office,
- Commission for Public Infrastructure, Housing, Transport and Water Resources,

- Commission for Social Security and Others,
- Commission for Health (Administration) and Sports,
- Commission for Environment, Forestry, Tourism, Marine parks and Fisheries and
- Commission for Youth, Community Development, Library Services, Archives and Museum.

The Commissioners at the head of these Commissions along with the Deputy Chief Commissioner and Chief Commissioner form the Executive Council of Rodrigues. The duties and powers of the Executive Council are mentioned at Section 35 of the RRA Act 2001. The section reads as follow:

*35. Duties and powers of the Executive Council:*

*(1) The Executive Council shall be responsible for the carrying out of the functions of the Regional Assembly and the Chairperson, acting on the advice of the Chief Commissioner, may, for that purpose assign to a Commissioner the responsibility for one or more Departments of the Regional Assembly.*

*(2) In the exercise of their powers, the Members of the Executive Council shall be individually and collectively responsible to the Regional Assembly.*

*(3) Subject to subsection (2), decisions of the Executive Council may be implemented without the prior approval of the Regional Assembly.*

*(4) The Executive Council shall continue to discharge its functions during any period that the Regional Assembly stands dissolved.*

The Chief Commissioner, as the chief executive for Rodrigues, is responsible for managing and administering the national affairs of Rodrigues. He is assisted in his duties by the Deputy Chief Commissioner.

The Chief Commissioner needs to submit an annual report for Rodrigues to the Prime Minister of Mauritius. The Prime Minister is the current Minister for Rodrigues. This annual report is the presented to the President of the Republic. The purpose of this exercise is to provide for an annual update on the status of affairs in Rodrigues.

(iii) The Court of Rodrigues (judiciary)

In Rodrigues, there is the Court of Rodrigues which is regulated by the Court of Rodrigues Jurisdiction Act 1913. The Court has the jurisdiction to hear civil and criminal cases in Rodrigues. The Court of Rodrigues is considered as a district court of Mauritius. Any appeal to a decision of

the Court of Rodrigues shall be made to the intermediate court in Mauritius (Section 11 Court of Rodrigues Jurisdiction Act 1913).

Mauritius has delegated legislative, executive, and even a degree of judicial power to Rodrigues. By doing so, Rodrigues has been able to take and implement decisions which were specific to the inherent needs of the country. Since 2002, there has been a smooth collaboration between the central government of Mauritius and the local government of Rodrigues concerning the administration of the island. An example of such collaboration can be found in the latest national budget of Mauritius. On 7 June 2022, the Minister of Finance announced that an amount of MRU 6.8 billion (ca USD 0.15 billion) has been allocated to Rodrigues and the outer islands for their development. The Prime Minister of Mauritius conducts frequent visits to Rodrigues to take note of the issues and progress made by the country.

The autonomy of Rodrigues shows the principle of self-determination and autonomy in action. Rodrigues having a fixed territory and permanent population has voiced out its will to become autonomous since Mauritius got its independence. The various governments heading Mauritius have always supported Rodrigues in its claim for autonomy. The wish of the people of Rodrigues was heard and prompt and responsive actions were taken by Mauritius to grant Rodrigues its autonomy.

### Part III: The Moroccan Initiative and the importance of the devolution of legislative powers

To find a solution to the situation in the Sahara region, on 11 April 2007, the kingdom of Morocco submitted to the United Nations its initiative for negotiating an autonomy statute for the region. This autonomy statute shall grant the people of the Sahara region the possibility to self-govern their internal affairs. Legislative, executive, and judicial powers will be granted to the different competent authorities to ensure the democratic governance of the region.

By having the power of managing their own internal affairs, citizens of the Sahara region will be able to: enact their own taxes, duties, and regional levies; exploit their natural resources; determine their local administration, police force and jurisdiction and take other economic, social and cultural decisions that will be beneficial for the region.

An important aspect of autonomy statute of the Sahara region is the devolution of legislative powers to the region. Devolution of legislative power means that the central government of Morocco will grant the autonomous region the right to set up their own Parliament. The newly established parliament will have the capacity to make laws, rules, and regulations applicable to the region.

The elected members of the Sahara region's Parliament shall be representatives of the various Sahrawi tribes and other members elected by universal suffrage. Furthermore, an adequate representation of women in Parliament is also encouraged.

The composition of the Parliament, with people from the different cultural and regional backgrounds, ensures representation and fairness in parliament. This diversity will promote objectivity, transparency, and inclusive decision-making. All these principles are essential to perform parliamentary duties in a democratic autonomous entity.

Devolution of legislative power allows Parliament to make laws and regulations which are adapted to the needs of the region. With the different tribes and ethnicities present in the Sahara region, and by ensuring the representation and participation of the different stakeholders in their Parliament, this will result in laws being enacted that will respect and uphold the needs and traditions of the different groups.

In cases of devolution of legislative powers, some conditions need to be respected. For example, laws made by the region's Parliament should be in line with the sovereign State or kingdom's Constitution. This is one important condition of constitutional supremacy. Moreover, the region's Parliament should abide by international law and principles. For instance, Parliament should abide by the principle of *jus cogens* and not make laws which are contrary to the State or contrary to international law.

Another condition of devolution of legislative powers relates to the duties and obligations of members of Parliament. The elected members of Parliament have a duty to work in the best interest of the population. Furthermore, they should not use their privilege as members of Parliament for their own self-interest and put at stake the interest of the country and the region.

One of the main features of autonomy is the ability for the autonomous region to make its own laws and regulations. Autonomy would not be fully granted if a region or territory was still under the legislative power of the main State. The Moroccan Initiative embraces this philosophy for granting the Sahara region the capacity to create its own system of governance through its legislative, executive, and judicial structures.

#### Part IV: Lessons to be learnt from the Rodrigues experience

Since 2007, Morocco has taken the necessary steps to provide a solution to the dispute over the Sahara Region. One appropriate solution is to grant autonomy to region. Granting autonomy represents various advantages both for Morocco and constituents of the Sahara Region.

As autonomy is granted to the Sahara Region, it will give the region greater power and capabilities to conduct its own internal affairs. As submitted by Morocco to the United Nations Security Council, the powers granted to the autonomous Sahara Region would include, *inter alia*, legislative, executive, and judicial powers, the three basic powers needed for the good governance and administration of any state.

The advantages for the region to have these powers is that it will enable them to make laws that would suit their own specificities and needs. For example, laws can be made to ensure the protection of the rights of the various indigenous tribes which live in the region. For an executive power perspective, institutions can be set up to ensure the smooth running and administrative of the internal affairs of the region. From a judicial perspective, autonomy would allow for the creation of courts that could take into consideration national laws as well as customary laws to ensure fairness and justice.

Autonomy also provides for a good compromise between becoming an independent state or to stay as a unitary state. Autonomy gives the possibility to the citizens of the autonomous state to compare the situation between being politically and administratively attached to a State and the capacity to make their own tailor-made decisions while having the support of a central government. The people of the autonomous Sahara Region would be able to assess the benefits of having the capacity to create their own system of governance while benefitting from the support of a central government.

The right to self-determination of the people is not realized only in cases of secession or independence. The right to self-determination is also realized in cases of autonomy. When a region or territory becomes autonomous, as it was the case for Rodrigues, it is able to create its own system of governance. Through frequent elections and national consultations, citizens of the autonomous region are able to make their voice heard and express what they want for their country. In order to ensure the right to self-determination and the right to the people to participate in the affairs of the state, consultations and national debates should be carried out in the region.

The model of autonomy proposed by the Government of Morocco for the Sahara Region is similar to that of Mauritius and Rodrigues. The Sahara Region will be given the power to govern its legislative, executive, and judicial institutions. Some recommendations will be made, based on the Rodrigues and Mauritian experience, to ensure a smooth and effective administration of the autonomy of the Sahara Region.

- i. On-going collaboration between the two governments

In the case of Mauritius and Rodrigues, there is an on-going communication and collaboration between the Mauritian central government and the Regional Assembly of Rodrigues. The purpose of the on-going collaboration and communication is to ensure that both countries are working

together towards realizing their respective socio-economic and development rights and to avoid tensions and conflicts.

ii. Representation of the elected members for Rodrigues in Parliament

The two elected members from Rodrigues, who are present in the Mauritian Parliament, illustrate the importance that Rodrigues plays in the legislative duties of Mauritius. Along with their fellow Mauritian citizens, they contribute to the law-making process in the Republic of Mauritius. This creates more visibility for Rodrigues and a sense of belonging to the Republic of Mauritius.

iii. Support culture and traditions

Just like there is a variety of culture and tradition among the people of Morocco and the Sahara Region, there are cultural differences between Mauritius and Rodrigues. In order to sustain and promote the Rodriguan culture, the government of Mauritius has assisted Rodrigues in inscribing the Rodrigues' 'sega tambour' on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. By recognizing the culture and traditions of the autonomous territory and helping the region or territory to preserve this culture, the central government is assisting the people in realizing their right to self-determination. As the Sahara region becomes autonomous, it should be confident in having the support of the government of Morocco in protecting the cultures and rights of its tribes and indigenous people.

### Conclusion

This research illustrates the different features and steps to be taken when a territory or region is seeking autonomy. Around the world and throughout history, many countries have either become independent or autonomous regions. To ensure autonomy and to uphold the principles of international law, it is important to ensure that the right to self-determination of the people is respected. Through the principle of self-determination, the people are able to voice out whether they want to be in an independent state or become autonomous.

In the Indian Ocean, the island of Rodrigues represents a good example of autonomy. Being autonomous since 2002, Rodrigues has over been able to grow economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally. As an autonomous region, Rodrigues has its own system of governance through its Regional Assembly, Commissions and Court. The island can be said to be a model of autonomy in the Indian Ocean.

As the Moroccan government is taking the steps to make the Sahara region autonomous, it can inspire itself from the Rodriguan experience. The mode of governance in the Sahara region is similar to that of Rodrigues. Lessons to be learnt from Rodrigues are that: there should be continuous communication between the central government and the local government in order to

avoid conflict, there should be the representation of the people of the autonomous territory in Parliament and finally there should be the respect of culture and traditions.

The autonomy of Rodrigues can be used as an example of a peaceful transition from a dependent region of Mauritius to an autonomous one. The system of governance is transparent, allows for the participation of the people and ensure constant collaboration with the government of Mauritius. As the steps are being taken to make the Sahara region an autonomous one, the case of Rodrigues can be used as an example to showcase how an autonomous region can enjoy democratic participation of its people and the welfare of the state.

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