

I write this foreword with pride and humility. “Pride,” because I was present when David Vine first had the inspiration to take on the task of research and writing that led to the book you are holding. The year was 2001. I was part of a team of lawyers from Great Britain, Mauritius and the United States who were seeking justice for the Ilois people. I had just returned from visiting the camps in which they are housed in Mauritius. It seemed to me that if we were to explain the Ilois story of betrayal, struggle and hope, it would be essential to understand their history, culture and present condition. A series of telephone conversations led me to Dr. Shirley Lindenbaum, a cultural anthropologist of international renown. She suggested that David Vine would be a perfect candidate for this job. David, Dr. Lindenbaum and two of my colleagues met in New York, and David launched the work that was to consume him for five years. From this minor role in the beginning, I take pride.

As for humility: this book and the work it represents have succeeded beyond my greatest hopes. David Vine is one of those rare scholars who combines all the qualities that one must have to write in this field. We are witnessing, on a global scale, the subordination and forced disappearance of hundreds of indigenous populations. We read of the more sensational and violent episodes of these conflicts, but so many others escape our notice. An indigenous population is not “entitled,” under what passes for international law, to automatic protection from dislocation. Its status as a cohesive group must first be established. When it is proposed to impose upon it, one must ask what aspects of its cultural and history are to be seen as essential or important.

In this process of determining what is just and what is not, the people about whom one is speaking need a voice. They need the help of someone who will understand their lives as deeply as possible and portray their situation honestly and in terms that will withstand debate. David Vine has, in this book, shown us that he combines the scholar’s rigor with the student’s sympathetic understanding.

I have been a lawyer and law teacher for more than forty years. Given the nature of complex litigation, and particularly human rights litigation, we need to call upon experts in various fields to help us present claims for justice. We know that our adversaries will bring their own experts and each expert’s conclusions will be subject to testing in the crucible of cross-examination. From the beginning, David Vine has identified and followed all the principles of academic rigor that make this study credible as well as persuasive.

David Vine’s scholarship is also informed by his systematic and disciplined world view. He sees the Ilois people in the context of global struggle. He provides us with a context that makes their story compelling – and relevant. Choices about people’s fates and futures are not simply matters of preference, as to which one view is as good as another. Today, we understand that verifiable arguments about the human condition can, and must, be based on close observation of the social forces that people confront as they seek the basic rights that the international community has now defined as essential. David Vine has made an indispensable contribution to this process.