

Struggling for Our Fundamental Rights: The Exiled People of the Chagos Islands

Background

- The Chagossian people, who were exiled during the creation of the US military base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, are at a critical and unprecedented moment in their decades-long struggle to return home. With the future of the Chagos islands set to be decided by year's end, the US Government can help rectify an historic injustice exactly 50 years after the final deportations.
- A long-ignored part of the African diaspora, the Chagossians are the descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured Indians who lived on British-controlled Diego Garcia and the surrounding Chagos Archipelago since the time of the American Revolution.
- From 1968 to 1973, the US and UK deported the Chagossians to create a US base on Diego Garcia.
- US officials developed the idea for the base and secretly transferred \$14 million to the UK to forcibly remove the Chagossians 1,200 miles away to slums on the islands of Mauritius and the Seychelles.
- During the deportations, Anglo-American agents razed Chagossian homes and killed their pet dogs.
- Chagossians received almost no resettlement assistance and soon were living in abject poverty. Ever since, Chagossians have been barred from returning home and have remained deeply impoverished.
- The US Government has repeatedly covered up its role in their exile. Congress held only a single hearing in 50 years on the issue, in 1975.
- Chagossians have been demanding the right to go home in a powerful social movement largely led by women. Support for a return has been building worldwide.
- A 2015 UK Government study and a 2016 UK Supreme Court ruling found Chagossians could resettle their islands in peaceful coexistence with the military base. Civilians live next to US bases worldwide. Military experts agree resettlement would pose no security risk to Diego Garcia.
- The International Court of Justice and the UN General Assembly determined in 2019 that Mauritius—not the UK—has sovereignty over Diego Garcia and the rest of the Chagos Archipelago.
- Human Rights Watch has determined that the forced displacement of the Chagossians by the US and UK is a **crime against humanity** and that both governments owe full reparations for harms caused.

Our Aims

- The UK and Mauritius are now negotiating over the future of Chagos, with the US listed as an "interested party." The US Government must end its silence about its role in exiling the Chagossians and ensure that a final deal respects Chagossians' fundamental right, including the right to live in their homeland, full reparations, and resettlement assistance.
- Chagossians are *not* calling for the removal of the Diego Garcia base or challenging its existence. They are simply asking the US Government for a long-overdue public apology and public support for Chagossians' right to return home with equal rights to work on the base.
- Chagossians are asking for Congressional hearings to tell the full story of the US role in their exile.

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