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The Rt. Hon. Lord David Cameron  
Secretary of State for Foreign,  
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King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH  
*Via email*



HRW.org

January 24, 2024

Dear Foreign Secretary,

## Re: Ongoing Negotiations between the UK and Mauritian Governments on the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago

We write regarding the continuing negotiations between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of Mauritius over the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands. As Human Rights Watch [has made clear](#), it is critical that the rights of the Indigenous Chagossian people are centred, including their meaningful participation in the outcome of these negotiations and future governance of the islands, and that the UK Government immediately ends the ongoing crimes against humanity which it continues to commit against the Chagossian people, namely the displacement from their homeland and the continued denial of their right to return.

Any agreement with Mauritius must specifically provide for full reparations, including the right of return for all Chagossians to live in their homeland, including Diego Garcia, and full compensation, all based on meaningful consultations with the Chagossian people.

## Ongoing Colonial Crimes

As established in our [recent report](#), Human Rights Watch found three ongoing crimes against humanity which have been committed against the Chagossian people:

1. The forced displacement of the entire Chagossian people from every island of the archipelago by the UK and US.

2. The prevention of the Chagossians from returning to live in their homeland, including the island of Diego Garcia.
3. Persecution of the Chagossians on the grounds of race and ethnicity – shown in part by the different standards applied to other islanders living near military bases, such as in Cyprus and the Falkland Islands and the attempts to deny the application of international human rights law and criminal law in the Chagos Islands.

Accordingly, states and individuals who have and continue to contribute to these crimes, including those who contribute to preventing the return of Chagossians to live in their homeland, including on Diego Garcia, will share responsibility for crimes against humanity. This responsibility will include those who order, assist or instigate the crimes, including in or after any agreement reached between the UK and Mauritius. Responsibility will also include those who currently have, or obtain in the future, legal or factual control over the Chagos Islands or part of them and help prevent the return of the Chagossians.

We took note of your evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee on January 9, 2024, and were extremely concerned that you failed to even mention the rights of the Chagossians when discussing the future of the Chagos Islands, suggesting that return to any island was ‘not possible’, instead claiming that the overriding question must be the safety, security and useability of the base on Diego Garcia. We note that your predecessor [acknowledged](#) that resettlement of the Chagossians in their homeland was part of the negotiations with Mauritius.

It should be noted that Chagossian groups are not advocating for the closure of the military base on Diego Garcia but wish to return to live on the unoccupied islands and the unoccupied part of Diego Garcia.

In addition, continuing to deny the Chagossians the protection of international human rights law and international criminal law by denying its application to the territory of Chagos may contribute to the crime against humanity of persecution on the grounds of race.

## **Reparations**

The UK and US inflicted harm on the Chagossian people and they owe them reparations under international law. These standards (as set out, for example, in the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation), include three key elements.

First, ensuring that every Chagossian, of every generation and citizenship, may return to live, in dignity, in all the Chagos Islands, including Diego Garcia. This means the UK

should immediately lift every legal barrier, and the US should publicly declare its supports for the return of Chagossians, including to Diego Garcia. Mauritius, should they gain sovereignty over some or all of the islands, should also publicly guarantee this right for every Chagossian, regardless of citizenship. As part of restitution, the UK and US should restore the Chagos Islands, so that the Chagossians can return to live permanently in dignity and prosperity, at a minimum standard equivalent to how they would live today had they not been expelled over 50 years ago.

The second element of reparations is full and adequate financial compensation to all Chagossians for all the harms caused to them since 1965.

The third element of reparations is satisfaction and guarantees that such crimes will not happen again. This includes, as Chagossians have requested, meaningful apologies, including from King Charles and the UK Government. The UK and US Governments have 'regretted' the manner of the Chagossians' removal. This is not enough. There should be an explicit apology, and this should be coupled with accountability for these crimes against humanity, like other crimes.

Like all reparations, all the above needs to be agreed and implemented by all the governments concerned through meaningful consultations with the Chagossians. The Chagossians are the Indigenous people of the Chagos Islands and should be recognised as such. Their right to return, the restoration of their islands and the financial compensation need to be agreed and implemented with them.

**We ask for an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this issue at your earliest convenience.**

Yours sincerely,



Yasmine Ahmed  
UK Director  
Human Rights Watch

***Copying to Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth, and David Rutley MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Overseas Territories.***