



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DEFENCE COMMITTEE

Summary note of virtual roundtable with Chagossian representatives

On Wednesday 11 December at 10am, the Committee held a virtual roundtable with:

- Representatives of **Chagossian Voices** (UK-based)
- Representatives of **Chagos Asylum People** (Mauritius-based)
- An independent advocate (UK/Portugal-based)
- An independent advocate (UK-based)

While not designed to be representative of the views of all Chagossians, the event allowed us to speak directly with a range of representatives of the Chagossian community to understand their perspectives. Discussions focused on the consultation process and the implications of the proposed agreement between the UK and Mauritius to hand over sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, and key issues such as resettlement, heritage visits and financial support.

Key takeaways

Consultation process

1. All participants expressed deep frustration at being excluded from the direct negotiations between the UK and Mauritius and demanded transparency, regular updates, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.
2. Participants expressed unanimous dissatisfaction with the consultation processes conducted by both the UK Government and the government of Mauritius. Information-sharing was deemed particularly poor—referencing the confidential nature of the negotiations, only very limited information has been forthcoming. While some Chagossian groups have been involved in online meetings with the UK Government, it was felt that these sessions were tokenistic. Neither the Foreign Secretary nor the relevant ministers had attended these sessions, and those who participated in them perceived the interactions as superficial, lacking genuine transparency or meaningful engagement and follow-up.

Sovereignty over the Chagos Islands

3. Participants had a strong preference for the Islands to remain under UK sovereignty and expressed unanimous mistrust of the Mauritian authorities. Poverty and discrimination faced by Chagossians in Mauritius were cited as the main reason for this view.



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4. One participant highlighted a lack of trust in both the UK and Mauritian authorities, adding that any decision on sovereignty should include meaningful input from the Chagossian community. There was a strong consensus among participants in favour of a referendum to determine Chagossians' future. Although the electorate would be dispersed, almost all Chagossians and descendants could be traced for this purpose.

Wish to resettle

5. When asked about the community's desire to resettle on the islands, we heard that the global dispersion of the Chagossian community had made achieving a true consensus challenging. Participants re-stressed the importance of a referendum to help provide a definitive answer. One participant noted that some Chagossians have high expectations, anticipating life to be the same as before Chagossians' forcible removal from the Islands, and suggested that a referendum on self-determination could help clarify the community's wishes and expectations. The establishment of an international hub or umbrella organisation to unite the diaspora was also suggested.
6. Participants agreed that while many Chagossians would like to return to the Islands, there are concerns about the readiness of the infrastructure to support resettlement. They emphasised the importance of ensuring that people have a clear understanding of the local conditions and what to expect before making any decisions about returning.
7. Given that many native born Chagossians are now elderly, one participant argued that the lengthy process of developing the necessary infrastructure would likely mean many would not live to see the benefits. It was emphasised that Diego Garcia, as the only island with existing infrastructure and the birthplace of many Chagossians, ought to be included in any meaningful resettlement plan.

Opinions on proposed resettlement and visits programmes

8. All participants expressed reservations about the resettlement process being managed by the government of Mauritius. They also expressed suspicion that resettlement will not be restricted to people of Chagossian origin. Referring specifically to the Chagossian community in Crawley, one participant noted that while the vast majority are resolute in their desire to return, the prospect of the Islands being governed by Mauritius was bittersweet for many.
9. There was particular concern that the resettlement scheme would not be administered for the benefit of all Chagossians, i.e. including those living outside Mauritius.
10. Concerns were raised about the vague language used in government statements and, in particular, the phrase "Mauritius will be free to implement a resettlement



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programme". One participant interpreted this as granting Mauritius the option, rather than an obligation, to act. This level of ambiguity was worrying, particularly given how Mauritius had acted on Chagossian issues in the past. It was argued that Mauritius would use the resettlement programme as a pretext to develop hotels and promote tourism rather than genuinely focusing on the needs of the Chagossian community. Participants feared that Chagossians would once again be sidelined in favour of profit-driven initiatives. Mauritius's own environmental record was described as poor and referenced. To ensure accountability, it was suggested that a team from the UK, in regular consultation with the Chagossian community, should work closely with Mauritian authorities to monitor and enforce commitments

11. The exclusion of Diego Garcia from the resettlement programme was raised as a significant issue. Not only is it the island that is the most suitable for resettlement due to pre-existing infrastructure, but it also holds the most significant ancestral ties for Chagossians. One participant went as far as to suggest that "It's Diego Garcia or nothing". There was also a strong view that it was unrealistic to expect resettlement on islands other than Diego Garcia owing to a lack of infrastructure.
12. The notion that cohabitation with the existing US military base on Diego Garcia would not be possible was questioned, with participants noting that Chagossians should not be seen as a threat.
13. On heritage visits, two participants raised concerns about the short duration and poor organisation of previous heritage visits, citing issues such as inadequate communication, logistical challenges, and rushed timelines. Earlier visits organised by local authorities in 2002 had been less effective compared to those arranged by external partners after 2014. There was a shared call for guarantees and clarity on future visit programmes to ensure they provide tangible benefits for the community rather than serving as mere symbolic gestures.

Employment opportunities on the US base

14. The possibility of Chagossians working on the US military base on Diego Garcia was also discussed. One participant welcomed the idea, stating that it could provide meaningful opportunities for Chagossians. Another explained that while some employment opportunities already exist through KBR, a US-based recruitment company, the requirements for these roles often make them inaccessible to many Chagossians.
15. One attendee emphasised that Diego Garcia operates as a joint UK-US base, and that therefore the UK shares responsibility to ensure fair employment opportunities for Chagossians. The participant explained that during a previous visit to the Islands, they inquired with an officer at the base about the lack of Chagossian employees. The officer highlighted concerns about misconduct, noting that while contractors from other countries, such as the Philippines, can be repatriated in cases of serious



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misconduct, there is uncertainty regarding where to relocate a Chagossian worker under similar circumstances. Concerns were also raised over recent statements from UK Government ministers, which appeared to prioritise “securing the base” over addressing the rights and needs of the Chagossian people. Additionally, one participant criticised the wording of the International Court of Justice ruling, voicing particular disappointment that the term 'Chagossian' was mentioned only once.

Financial and other support

16. Concerns were raised about the absence of information on how the proposed trust fund for Chagossians would be managed, with participants citing examples of previous financial support failing to benefit the Chagossian community. One participant noted that in 2016, the UK provided £40 million to improve the lives of Chagossians, but only £1.3 million of that amount had been disbursed, and the funds came with conditions. Reference was also made to a court decision from 2000 when some Islanders were given a limited right to return, but this permission was later withdrawn.
17. In particular, there was a sense of cynicism, stemming from past experiences, that the trust fund would primarily benefit Mauritians rather than individuals of Chagossian origin. To guarantee robust oversight, fair distribution of funds and accountability, it was suggested that the trust fund be managed by an independent body based in the UK or under the supervision of an international organisation such as the UN. It was also argued that the Chagossian diaspora should have oversight and influence, with calls for fairness, inclusivity, transparency, and independent auditing to ensure the funds are properly managed.
18. One group called for the inclusion of integration programmes and compensation packages to address the long-standing challenges faced by Chagossians. One participant also cautioned that placing substantial funds in Mauritius could have unintended consequences, such as driving up local house prices, which is already a significant issue for Chagossians living there.

Future forms of support

19. The need to rebuild trust between the UK Government and the Chagossian community was emphasised, with acknowledgement that while a recent apology has been issued for past treatment, significant barriers remain that prevent Chagossians from returning to their homeland. In discussions on financial support, it was stressed that priority should be given to native Chagossians, who have experienced the greatest hardships. Housing support was identified as a critical issue, with the argument made that providing people with a “home to go to, a roof to be under” must be the top priority.



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20. Representatives from a UK-based group suggested the establishment of a community centre for Chagossians in Crawley, where a significant population resides. They pointed out that the community has repeatedly requested such a centre from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office without success.