# Chagos Islands deal sparks fresh legal battle amid colonial legacy and community grief



The recent legal developments surrounding the Chagos Islands have sparked deep emotions and intensified debates over British colonial history and the future of its expatriate communities. Bertice Pompe, a British citizen born on the Chagos Islands, expressed profound sadness as an injunction that temporarily blocked a pivotal deal involving the territory was lifted. She described the day as "very, very sad," lamenting that the rights of her people have been overlooked by a government that claims to represent them. This deal was set to shift sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control over the strategically vital military base at Diego Garcia through a long-term lease.

Earlier this week, a High Court judge initially granted an injunction against the signing of the deal, following a legal challenge led by Pompe and another Chagossian, Bernadette Dugasse. However, the injunction was lifted shortly after, allowing the UK and Mauritius to proceed with the agreement. Pompe’s legal team has argued against the exclusion of the Chagossian voices from the negotiations, suggesting that such oversight perpetuates a pattern of neglect towards their community that dates back to the forced eviction of nearly 2,000 residents in the 1960s.

Critics of the deal, including members of the Chagossian community and various political figures, have voiced significant concerns. Michael Polak, the barrister representing Pompe and Dugasse, noted that the current government seems to have disregarded the well-being and opinions of Chagossians in its haste to conclude this agreement. He characterised the treatment of these individuals as "shameful," reflecting a broader historical injustice that needs recognition and redress.

The multi-billion-pound agreement, while celebrated by some for its potential to boost national security, particularly through joint military operations from Diego Garcia, remains contentious. Critics argue that it compromises the UK's position and fails to adequately address the rights of those displaced or their descendants. Misley Mandarin, a member of the BIOT Citizens group, articulated a common sentiment among Chagossians when he stated, "We will fight to the end… we will not let our island, a British island, go to Mauritius."

According to the terms of the agreement, the UK is expected to pay Mauritius approximately £101 million annually and retain control of Diego Garcia for at least 99 years. This site has played a pivotal role in numerous military operations and is regarded as crucial against rising global threats, particularly from the likes of China. The deal was defended by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who emphasised its significance in ensuring ongoing military preparedness in a rapidly changing world.

However, the backlash is palpable, especially given historical perspectives. The United Nations and the International Court of Justice previously ruled that the UK’s detachment of the islands from Mauritius in the 1960s was unlawful, highlighting international concerns surrounding the legitimacy of Britain's actions regarding the territory. This legal backdrop adds layers of complexity to the current situation, marking the Chagos Islands as not just a strategic asset but also a symbol of colonial legacy and its lingering effects on local populations.

While plans to engage in further legal challenges are imminent as Pompe and Dugasse prepare to take their case to the highest judicial levels, the broader political implications of the deal loom large. It poses critical questions for British citizens and their representatives in Parliament: How should the historical injustices faced by the Chagossian people be reconciled with contemporary political and strategic interests?

As the negotiations unfold, it remains crucial to consider not only the geopolitical stakes but also the human dimensions of this deeply contested narrative. The voices of the Chagossians serve as an urgent reminder that behind legal agreements lie real lives and histories, demanding recognition, respect, and, ultimately, justice.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
2. Paragraphs 2, 6, 7.
3. Paragraphs 2, 5, 6.
4. Paragraphs 2, 5, 6.
5. Paragraphs 2, 5, 6.
6. Paragraphs 6, 7.
7. Paragraphs 6, 7.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/very-sad-day-as-judge-paves-way-for-chagos-deal-says-briton-born-on-island-SV7XAKJKKFI6FKJKFLKW7FXGTI/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-set-sign-deal-ceding-sovereignty-chagos-islands-mauritius-2025-05-22/> - On May 22, 2025, the UK signed a landmark agreement transferring sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, while retaining control over the critical U.S.-UK air base on Diego Garcia through a 99-year lease. The multibillion-pound deal ends decades of legal and diplomatic disputes and is intended to bolster national and regional security. The agreement faced a last-minute legal challenge by a British Chagossian, Bertrice Pompe, who criticized the exclusion of Chagossians, but a High Court judge lifted the injunction, citing national interest concerns. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer defended the deal as vital to counter terrorism and foreign influence, particularly from China. Critics, including the opposition Conservative Party, condemned the deal as expensive and a strategic misstep. Under the agreement, the UK will pay Mauritius £3 billion over the lease term, with an option for a 50-year extension. Mauritius' Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam hailed the deal as a historic step toward full decolonization. The U.S., represented by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, welcomed the accord, which ensures continued joint military operations from Diego Garcia, a base that has supported missions in Yemen, Gaza, Iraq, and Afghanistan.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/2402978e-cf62-4a1e-8a0c-8bb85af85d8c> - The UK has signed a treaty with Mauritius transferring sovereignty of the Chagos Islands in exchange for securing long-term use of the Diego Garcia military base. Under the deal, Britain will pay Mauritius an average of £101 million annually, with an initial payment of £165 million per year, later reducing and adjusted for inflation, totaling a net present value of £3.4 billion. The agreement ensures continued US-UK military operations on Diego Garcia for at least the next century. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer emphasized the base's critical role in regional security and claimed the pact prevents international legal challenges. The deal includes provisions to block foreign military access, particularly targeting China. The Conservative Party criticized the treaty's terms and costs, accusing the Labour government of undermining national sovereignty. The agreement gained support from the US and other Five Eyes allies, while China, Russia, and Iran opposed it. A UK High Court injunction briefly delayed the signing following a last-minute legal challenge by Chagossian citizens, which was ultimately dismissed. Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam celebrated the deal as a milestone in decolonization.
4. <https://www.apnews.com/article/81d046b333b0af81489ed75543f9534b> - The United Kingdom and Mauritius have finalized a historic deal to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, excluding Diego Garcia, which will remain under British control due to its crucial U.S. military base. The archipelago, located in the Indian Ocean, has been under British rule since 1814. The deal faced delays due to legal and political obstacles, including a change in Mauritius' government and U.S. concerns over security implications. While former President Biden supported the deal, former President Trump later approved a renegotiated version in principle. The final agreement includes the U.K. paying Mauritius £101 million ($136 million) annually to lease back Diego Garcia for at least 99 years and must be ratified by the British Parliament. The deal acknowledges long-standing international criticism of Britain's eviction of around 2,000 Chagossians in the 1960s-70s to enable the U.S. military presence. Human rights groups have labeled the removals as crimes against humanity. However, many of the displaced and their descendants remain uncertain about their right to return, and a resettlement fund has been proposed, yet its implementation remains unclear. Legal challenges from Chagossian representatives continue as concerns grow over their exclusion from negotiations and potential barriers to resettlement post-transfer.
5. <https://www.apnews.com/article/b6f02636c9bc858a06926090d1a8cb5c> - On May 22, 2025, the United Kingdom signed an agreement to transfer sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, while retaining long-term access to the critical U.S.-U.K. military base on Diego Garcia. Under the deal, the U.K. will pay Mauritius £101 million ($136 million) annually to lease the base for at least 99 years. Prime Minister Keir Starmer defended the agreement as crucial for British national security, citing the base’s importance in counterterrorism and intelligence operations. The deal includes provisions maintaining a 24-mile exclusion zone around Diego Garcia, a U.K. veto over development on the islands, and a ban on foreign military presence. While the United Nations and International Court of Justice previously urged the U.K. to return the islands, domestic critics including displaced Chagossians and some British politicians condemned the move. The deal's signing was briefly delayed by a legal injunction but eventually proceeded. Critics argue the transfer undermines British interests and fails to guarantee resettlement rights for evicted islanders. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio welcomed the agreement, emphasizing its role in sustaining Diego Garcia’s strategic operations.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-facts-about-chagos-islands-deal-be-signed-by-uk-mauritius-2025-05-22/> - The UK is set to sign a multi-billion dollar agreement with Mauritius regarding the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands, following the overturning of a last-minute legal injunction. The Chagos Archipelago, comprising over 600 islands in the Indian Ocean, has been a source of contention since Britain forcibly displaced nearly 2,000 Chagossians in the 1960s and 70s to establish a U.S.-UK military base on Diego Garcia. The new deal, initially agreed in October, involves Britain transferring sovereignty to Mauritius in exchange for a $4 billion payment, while retaining control of Diego Garcia through a 99-year lease. The base holds strategic military importance for both the UK and the U.S., hosting operations from the War in Afghanistan to recent deployments in Yemen and Gaza. The UN’s International Court of Justice declared Britain’s 1965 detachment of the islands from Mauritius unlawful, increasing international pressure. However, the agreement has drawn criticism from displaced Chagossians, UK opposition leaders, and the new Mauritian Prime Minister for lack of consultation and national interest concerns. The deal proceeds with U.S. support, despite warnings from Secretary of State Marco Rubio about regional security threats, especially from China’s influence.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55848126> - The maritime law tribunal of the United Nations has ruled that Britain has no sovereignty over the Chagos Islands. It criticized London for its failure to hand the territory back to Mauritius. The judges' decision confirms a ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and a vote in the UN General Assembly. The Indian Ocean archipelago includes a US military base. The UK has said it will hand the islands back when they're no longer needed for defence purposes. In response to the ruling, a spokesperson for the British Foreign Office said: "The UK has no doubt as to our sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), which has been under continuous British sovereignty since 1814. Mauritius has never held sovereignty over the BIOT and the UK does not recognise its claim."