# Controversy intensifies as UK-Mauritius Chagos deal sidelines displaced islanders



The recent agreement between the UK and Mauritius concerning the Chagos Islands has resurfaced contentious debates surrounding colonial injustices and the fate of the displaced Chagossian people. This deal, signed last month, entails the UK transferring sovereignty of the Chagos archipelago to Mauritius while retaining a 99-year lease on Diego Garcia, home to a critical military base used by both the UK and the US. The financial terms reportedly involve the UK paying £101 million annually, drawing significant scrutiny from both local campaigners and international observers.

Critics of the deal, including Chagossian campaigners, have expressed alarm over the UK’s seeming disregard for the indigenous population's plight. Notably, a formal legal communication has been submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, aiming to contest the legitimacy of the agreement. The Chagossians, who were forcibly displaced from their homeland between 1965 and 1973 during the establishment of the military base, have cited that their exclusion from the negotiations further entrenches historic injustices.

The UK established a £40 million ‘Future Fund’ touting it as a financial mechanism aimed at helping resettle the Chagossians and fostering economic opportunities for future generations. However, emerging reports indicate that the Mauritian government plans to allocate funds derived from the Chagos deal primarily towards servicing its debts in the initial years of the agreement, rather than towards resettlement efforts. The budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year explicitly states that revenues from the islands will be redirected to debt repayment for the first three years, which has left many Chagossians and their supporters feeling sidelined.

Jean Francois-Nellan of the campaign group Chagossian Voices expressed disappointment at this development, stating, “Chagossians are being erased from both the history and future of Mauritius." His comments underscore wider discontent regarding the Mauritian government's focus on balancing financial commitments rather than addressing the fundamental needs of the Chagossian community.

Compounding the issue is Mauritius’ ongoing struggle with its historical narrative and relationship with the UK. Despite both governments asserting a commitment to acknowledge past wrongs, concerns about the Chagossians' rights to return and participate in future decisions remain unresolved. The UN's forthcoming decision on the matter, while not legally binding, could offer significant moral weight that challenges the legitimacy of the agreement, especially if it rules in favour of the claims made by the Chagossians.

Furthermore, the geopolitical ramifications of the deal cannot be dismissed. The agreement is also perceived as a strategic asset amidst growing fears of increased Chinese influence in the region, as some observers warn that Mauritius could alter its lease agreements to favour relations with China over those with the UK and the US. This has added another layer of complexity to an already fraught situation, prompting urgent discussions about the nature of international alliances and military strategy in the Indian Ocean.

As Sir Keir Starmer asserts his government’s national security rationale behind the deal, he finds himself navigating a political maelstrom of historic injustices, human rights concerns, and international security dilemmas. The backlash from both domestic and international fronts highlights the multifaceted challenges of addressing colonial legacies while maintaining strategic military partnerships. As campaigners like Bernadette Dugasse and Bertrice Pompe continue their advocacy for the rights of Chagossians, it remains to be seen whether their efforts will alter the course of this controversial agreement.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chagos-deal-mauritius-starmer-b2764642.html), [[4]](https://theweek.com/politics/the-chagos-agreement-explained)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chagos-deal-mauritius-starmer-b2764642.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/2f6032c4-4c53-4b7c-97bc-46a93a3c0bd5), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy9441lrjzo)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chagos-deal-mauritius-starmer-b2764642.html), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/31/starmer-urgest-mauritius-to-make-deal-that-protects-chagos-islands-from-malign-influence)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chagos-deal-mauritius-starmer-b2764642.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy9441lrjzo), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/mauritius-pm-queries-duration-lease-deal-chagos-military-base-2025-01-18/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/2f6032c4-4c53-4b7c-97bc-46a93a3c0bd5), [[4]](https://theweek.com/politics/the-chagos-agreement-explained)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chagos-deal-mauritius-starmer-b2764642.html), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/31/starmer-urgest-mauritius-to-make-deal-that-protects-chagos-islands-from-malign-influence), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/starmer-chagos-islands-deal-kemi-badenoch-pmqs-b1209277.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chagos-deal-mauritius-starmer-b2764642.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/2f6032c4-4c53-4b7c-97bc-46a93a3c0bd5> - The UK's Labour government is facing backlash over its plan to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, following international pressure and a UN advisory ruling. Critics warn this move could jeopardize the UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, potentially facilitating Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean. A delay in finalizing the deal aims to secure approval from the UK's key allies and fix some issues. Historically, the Chagos Islands' inhabitants were forcibly displaced in the 1960s without proper compensation. Mauritius has challenged the UK's sovereignty over the islands since its independence, leading to the recent agreement to grant Mauritius sovereignty while allowing Chagossians the right of return. Nonetheless, concerns persist over Mauritius potentially terminating the Diego Garcia lease in favor of China. The Labour government likely rushed the deal before the potential US administration change, with a new pause providing an opportunity to address critical lease and consultation issues.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/mauritius-pm-queries-duration-lease-deal-chagos-military-base-2025-01-18/> - Mauritius Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam has raised concerns about the duration and terms of a lease on a U.S.-British military base on Diego Garcia, part of the Chagos Islands. The UK agreed in October to cede the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control of the base under a 99-year lease, pending ratification. Ramgoolam, who won a recent election, criticized this agreement negotiated by the previous government, calling it a 'sell out' and suggesting the lease should account for inflation and exchange rates. He emphasized the importance of recognizing Mauritius' sovereignty over the islands, which may impact the UK's ability to unilaterally renew the lease. Ramgoolam also highlighted U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's urgency to finalize the agreement before Donald Trump's inauguration and addressed concerns raised by Marco Rubio, Trump's Secretary of State pick, regarding potential security threats. Additionally, some Chagossians have opposed the deal as they were not included in the negotiations and plan to protest.
4. <https://theweek.com/politics/the-chagos-agreement-explained> - The Chagos Deal is a controversial agreement through which Britain will transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while securing a long-term lease on Diego Garcia for continued US-UK military use. The Chagos archipelago, ceded to Britain by France in 1814, was separated from Mauritius in 1965 and leased to the US, leading to the forced removal of over 2,000 Chagossians. Mauritius has long contested Britain's control, with UN rulings and General Assembly votes supporting its claim. The deal, reportedly worth £90 million annually for 99 years, aims to rectify colonial injustices and maintain strategic military assets. However, it has sparked political backlash in the UK due to its high cost and perceived betrayal of British Chagossians, many of whom oppose Mauritian governance due to historical mistreatment. Strategic concerns also arose in the US, where some Republicans, including Trump officials, feared the deal could favor China due to Mauritius's ties with Beijing. Despite these concerns, the deal has been endorsed by allies like the US and India. Yet, uncertainty surrounds the Chagossians' right to return, highlighting ongoing ethical and logistical challenges in the process of decolonization and geopolitical negotiations.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy9441lrjzo> - Mauritius' new prime minister said he has asked for an independent review of a deal with the United Kingdom over the future of the Chagos Islands. Under the agreement, which has still to be signed, the UK would relinquish sovereignty over the archipelago but maintain a 99-year lease over Diego Garcia, home to a major UK-US military airbase. A spokesperson for UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Thursday that Navin Ramgoolam had 'indicated he was open' to the historic deal. Ramgoolam, who was elected prime minister of Mauritius two weeks ago, told the Mauritian parliament he had asked for a review and that the findings will be considered by the cabinet. When the deal was signed, after years of talks, Sir Keir and his then-Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth called it a 'seminal moment in our relationship and a demonstration of our enduring commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes and the rule of law'.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/31/starmer-urgest-mauritius-to-make-deal-that-protects-chagos-islands-from-malign-influence> - Keir Starmer has urged Mauritius to ensure the deal for the Chagos Islands keeps them free from 'malign influence', amid concern in Mauritius and the US about the terms of the deal. The prime minister spoke to his counterpart, Navin Ramgoolam, for the first time on Friday afternoon to discuss the agreement to hand over control of the islands, which was signed last year but has attracted criticism from people close to the new US president, Donald Trump. Starmer told Ramgoolam he wanted 'strong protections' for the UK-US military base on the island chain. The deal would see the UK cede its final African colony while keeping control of the military base on the island of Diego Garcia for at least 99 years. British officials say it was signed with the support of the US government but allies of Trump have since criticised it, warning that Mauritius’ alliance with China posed a risk to US national security. Downing Street said on Friday: 'The prime minister spoke to the prime minister of Mauritius, Navin Ramgoolam, this afternoon. The leaders began by reflecting on their first months in office and discussed the strong relationship between the UK and Mauritius, which they looked forward to expanding.' A spokesperson added: 'The prime minister underlined the need for a deal to secure the military base on Diego Garcia that ensures strong protections, including from malign influence, and that will allow the base to continue to operate. Both leaders reiterated their commitment to a deal, and they looked forward to speaking again soon.' Starmer agreed the deal to hand over the islands last year with Ramgoolam’s predecessor Pravind Jugnauth and with the backing of the Biden administration.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/starmer-chagos-islands-deal-kemi-badenoch-pmqs-b1209277.html> - Sir Keir Starmer has defended the controversial Chagos Islands deal after the Conservative leader branded it an 'immoral surrender'. The Government has denied the deal to hand the Chagos Islands back to Mauritius will cost £18 billion. Kemi Badenoch began Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday by telling the Commons: 'When Labour negotiates, our country loses.' She added: 'We heard the Government offered £18 billion for Mauritius to take our territory in the Chagos Islands. This is money that belongs to our children and their children. This is an immoral surrender so north London lawyers can boast at their dinner parties.' An interim deal on returning sovereignty of the islands while maintaining the key military base was agreed last year. But Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam demanded to renegotiate the plans after he was elected in November. Concessions offered to Mauritius by the UK are reported to include doubling the initial £9 billion for the 99-year lease of the Diego Garcia military base. But the alleged mounting costs are said to have left some senior Labour MPs alarmed with one branding it a 'gift' to political rivals. Prime Minister Sir Keir said: 'This is a military base that is vital to our national security.' He added: 'If the Leader of the Opposition is properly briefed on the national security implications when she's asking these questions, which she's perfectly entitled to do, then she knows exactly what I'm talking about in terms of national security and legal certainty.