

UK-Mauritius treaty on Chagos Archipelago

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The UK has agreed to return the **Chagos Islands** to **Mauritius**, bringing an end to a long-standing dispute over Britain's last African colony.

Background:

- The agreement will allow the **Chagossians**, who were forcibly expelled from their homes by the UK in the **1960s and 1970s**, to return. This displacement has been condemned as a crime against humanity and one of the most shameful acts of postwar colonialism.

Key takeaways:

- The **Chagos Archipelago, or Chagos Islands**, consists of over **60 islands** across seven atolls in the Indian Ocean, about 500 kilometers south of the **Maldives**.
- The islands form the southernmost part of the **Chagos-Laccadive Ridge**, a large submarine mountain range in the Indian Ocean.
- To the north are the **Salomon Islands, Nelsons Island, and Peros Banhos**; to the southwest are the Three Brothers, Eagle Islands, Egmont Islands, and Danger Island; southeast lies Diego Garcia, the largest island.
- The **Chagos Archipelago** contains the world's largest coral atoll, the Great Chagos Bank, home to half of the Indian Ocean's high-quality coral reefs.

Timeline:

- **1783:** The Chagos Islands' first inhabitants, enslaved Africans, are brought to work on French-run coconut plantations. Later, emancipated slaves are joined by indentured Indian laborers.
- **1814:** Britain formally takes control of the Chagos Islands and nearby **Mauritius from France**.
- **1965:** The **Chagos Islands** are designated as the **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)**. The UK agrees with the US to establish a military base on Diego Garcia.
- **1968:** Mauritius gains independence, but the **UK retains control of the BIOT**.
- **1967-1973:** The entire Chagos population is forcibly displaced, with many resettling in Mauritius or Seychelles. Human Rights Watch condemns this as a "colonial crime" and a crime against humanity.
- **2019:** The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** rules the **UK's occupation of the Chagos Islands illegal** and calls for their return to **Mauritius**. The UN General Assembly passes a resolution demanding **British withdrawal within six months**, which the UK does not fulfill.

- **2021:** The UN's maritime court rejects the UK's claim to sovereignty over the Chagos Islands.
- **2024:** The UK agrees to transfer the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control of the military base on Diego Garcia, which it operates with the US.

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