

LET US RETURN USA! Condemns Collusion Between U.S. and U.K. Governments to Prevent the Chagossian People from Returning to their Homeland

Let Us Return USA! is a U.S.-based group of citizens supporting the Chagossian people's struggle to return to their home in the Chagos Archipelago. The Chagossians were removed from their homeland in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the U.S. and U.K. governments during construction of a U.S. military base on the Chagossians' largest island, Diego Garcia. Let Us Return USA! supports the Chagossians' cause and demands that the U.S. government allow the Chagossians to return home.

Washington, DC, December 6, 2016 -- Let Us Return USA! (LURUSA) expresses its profound disappointment in the recent decision of the U.K. Government not to allow the forcibly-exiled Chagossian people to return to their homeland in the Chagos Archipelago. This is an ongoing violation of the human rights of all Chagossians, for which both the U.S. and U.K. Governments are responsible. As U.S. citizens, we are ashamed that our Government requested and paid Britain for the Chagossians' removal. We are calling on our Government and the U.K. Government to right this historical wrong.

Inspired by the Chagossians' determination to continue their struggle to return home, LURUSA renews its commitment to support that struggle and vows to continue demanding that our Government allows the Chagossians to exercise their inalienable human right to live in the land of their ancestors. Sabrina Jean, a leader of the Chagos Refugees Group UK, rightly asks, "Everyone has the right to live on their island, but why not us?"

We remain hopeful that our national leaders will recognize the U.S. role in the Chagossians' suffering and assist with the resettlement of members of the community wishing to return home. Importantly, the Chagossians are not asking for the closure or alteration of the base. They simply want to return home; some want to work on base.

We call on outgoing President Barack Obama to direct the Pentagon to drop any opposition to the return of Chagossians who wish to live on Diego Garcia, as well as on their other islands, more than 150 miles from the base. It is the right thing to do, and LURUSA urges President Obama to redress this violation of fundamental human rights before he leaves office.

While the U.K. Government's commitment of £40 million over 10 years is a small step in acknowledging historical wrongs, it is a weak and inappropriate "solution" that does little to guarantee an improvement of Chagossian lives or the restoration of their full rights. Spending of, on average, £4 million per year is not enough to properly assist a population of close to 10,000 people, and it does not approach the proper compensation Chagossians are due for their exile and the suffering it has caused. The U.K. and U.S. Governments would better use this money and additional funds to help resettle Chagossians who have declared their desire to return to their islands. But first, they need the simple permission to return.

We applaud the words of Chagos Refugees Group chair Olivier Bancoult who said, "We will not give up. Our dignity is not for sale."

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For more about the UK decision and additional background, visit www.LetUsReturnUSA.org