THE CHAGOSSIAN PEOPLE
A TIMELINE OF THEIR EXILE AND STRUGGLE TO RETURN HOME

1783—First permanent settlement in the Chagos Archipelago, on its largest island, Diego Garcia.

1957—U.S. Navy examines Diego Garcia as a potential base site.

1960—U.S. Navy begins discussions on Diego Garcia with British naval counterparts.


1963—President Kennedy approves the base and orders McNamara to carry out the plan.

1964—Formal U.S./U.K. talks on Diego Garcia. U.S. indicates interest in gaining “exclusive control” of Diego Garcia “without local inhabitants.” Tentative agreement reached, with the U.K. to assume responsibility for setting up a new colony, including Diego Garcia, exclusively for military base sites, and to remove all inhabitants.

1965—UK pressures its colony Mauritius to cede Chagos and creates the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). McNamara authorizes secret $14 million transfer to U.K. to create the BIOT and remove its population.


1968—Chagossians traveling to Mauritius for vacations or medical treatment prevented from returning to Chagos and stranded in Mauritius. Supplies of food, medicines, and other necessities in Chagos running low. Others coerced into leaving. Population declines.

1970—Congress appropriates first construction funds for Diego Garcia base after years of Navy lobbying. Navy tells Congress the islands have no permanent population. State Department Legal Adviser writes internally that U.S. shares responsibility with U.K. for Chagos’s inhabitants and their welfare.


1972—Chagossians in Salomon deported to Peros Banhos, Mauritius, or Seychelles.

1973—Chagossians in Peros Banhos deported to Mauritius. The expulsion is complete. No Chagossians remain on their islands.

1975—Washington Post breaks the expulsion story for the first time in Western press, describes Chagossians living in “abject poverty” in Mauritius. Senators Culver and Kennedy force Ford Administration to report on the inhabitants; hearings held before interest fades.

1979—Chagossians receive £650,000 compensation paid by U.K. to Mauritian Government.

1982—After hunger strikes and protests, U.K. agrees to £4 million compensation, forces mostly
illiterate Chagossians to thumbprint English contract renouncing right of return. U.S. spends hundreds of millions of dollars to expand base on Diego Garcia.

1997—Chagos Refugees Group files suit against the British Crown.

2000—British High Court rules for Chagossians that expulsion was illegal under British law.

2001—Chagossians sue the U.S. Government and officials including McNamara and Rumsfeld.


2004—U.K. Government, in the name of the Queen, passes royal Orders in Council decreeing Chagossians barred from return to Chagos; effectively overrules 2000 victory.


2006—Chagossians win suit that rules Orders in Council unlawful; British government appeals.

2007—Chagossians win appeal over Orders in Council; British government appeals to the U.K.’s highest court, the House of Lords.

2008—Law Lords, by a 3-2 margin, overturn Chagossians’ lower court victories, upholding the exile. The ruling upholds colonial law and finds that the government’s financial and military interests trump the people’s right of abode in Chagos.

2009—European Parliament passes a resolution calling on the EU to support the Chagossians' resettlement of the Chagos Archipelago.

2010—U.K. creates a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Chagos Archipelago with an exemption for Diego Garcia. Later, Wikileaks releases a cable showing U.K. and U.S. officials agreed that creating the MPA was the best means of keeping the Chagossians from returning home.

2011—African Union Assembly condemns unlawful excision of the territory and illegality of the MPA.

2012—European Court of Human Rights dismisses Chagossians’ case claiming that acceptance of small amounts of compensation in 1980s by some Chagossians means the entire people have no grounds to sue.

2014—U.S./U.K. negotiations to renew the bilateral base agreement purportedly begin in December.

2015—UK releases study confirming the viability of Chagossians resettling their islands. In March, the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration rules the U.K. acted illegally in creating an MPA in the Chagos Archipelago, bolstering Chagossians’ movement to return. In June, Chagossians challenge the MPA and argue to re-open the case challenging their exile before the newly created U.K. Supreme Court. A ruling is expected soon.

2016—Chagossians are still in exile, awaiting a ruling from the U.K. Supreme Court.
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