



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

16 March 2016

Our ref: MIN/94605/2016

Rt Hon George Howarth MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 03 March to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituents about the resettlement of the Chagossians, and the Exchange of Notes with the US, in regards to their presence on Diego Garcia. I am replying as the Minister for the Overseas Territories.

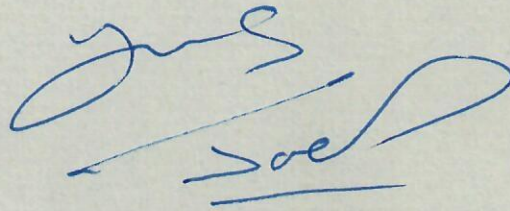
Your constituents express their hope that a potential resettlement by the former islanders should take place. Successive Governments have expressed their sincere regret about the manner in which Chagossians were removed from the British Indian Ocean Territory in the late 1960s and early 1970s. We do not seek to justify those actions or excuse the conduct of an earlier generation. What happened was clearly wrong, which is why compensation (nearly £21m in 2014 prices) was rightly paid. Both the British courts and the European Court of Human Rights have confirmed that compensation has been paid in full and final settlement.

However, as I said during the debate on this subject in Westminster Hall on 28 October 2015, decisions about the future of the British Indian Ocean Territory are more difficult. This is evident in the fact that successive Governments have opposed resettlement on the grounds of feasibility and defence. We must be honest about these fundamental difficulties, but we continue to be as positive as we can in our engagement with Chagossian groups and all interested parties.

The most recent step in this engagement was a twelve week public consultation, which concluded on the 27 October 2015, and whose results (which your constituents quote) were published on 21 January. 832 Chagossians responded to this, and officials met several hundred in their own communities in Mauritius, Seychelles and the UK. This is the latest in a number of steps the Government has taken to try to respond to Chagossian aspirations since the former Foreign Secretary William Hague announced a review of our policy about resettlement in 2012. We recognise that many Chagossians have urged us to make a decision soon, and we hope to do so.



On the issue of the UK-US facility on Diego Garcia, the Government welcomes US presence, and we have said that we want to see that continue. UK and US use of Diego Garcia for defence purposes contributes significantly towards global security, and is central to efforts at countering regional threats, including those from terrorism and piracy. No decision has yet been made about whether to seek to revise the terms of the agreement, which will 'roll over' for a further 20 years if neither side decides to terminate the agreement before December this year.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Duddridge', with a horizontal line underneath.

James Duddridge MP  
Minister for Africa, the Overseas Territories, and Caribbean