

**DÉRASINÉ:
THE EXPULSION AND IMPOVERISHMENT
OF THE CHAGOSSIAN PEOPLE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than 30 years the Chagossian people have lived in exile in what they call *mizer*—miserable, abject poverty. The Chagossians' poverty has not been accidental. It is the result of the Chagossians' expulsion from their homelands by the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. It is the result of the Chagossians having been *dérasiné*—forcibly uprooted and torn from their native lands.

Between 1967 and 1973, the U.S. and U.K. governments forcibly expelled the people of the Indian Ocean's Chagos Archipelago from their homelands as part of the construction of a U.S. military base on Diego Garcia. This report documents the damage the expulsion has done to these people, who are known as Chagossians or Ilois. A forthcoming study to be integrated into this report will estimate the monetary value of the damage Chagossians have suffered, including the value of lost household land, property, income, and social welfare benefits.

Based on over three years of research, we conclude that as a result of their expulsion, Chagossians have, as a group, suffered severe, chronic impoverishment. Their impoverishment has extended beyond economic poverty to include material, physical, psychological, social, and cultural forms of impoverishment. The Chagossians' expulsion and impoverishment also appear to constitute continuing violations of internationally recognized human rights norms.

Ten Major Dimensions of Impoverishment

There are ten major dimensions of Chagossians' impoverishment. Each dimension has meant a different kind of poverty for Chagossians, a different kind of diminished well-being, and the loss of different kinds of capital—economic, natural, physical, human, social, and cultural.

1. Traumatic Expulsion
2. Joblessness
3. Economic and Social-Psychological Marginalization
4. Homelessness
5. Landlessness and Lost Common Property
6. Food Insecurity and Malnutrition
7. Increased Morbidity and Mortality
8. Sociocultural Fragmentation
9. Educational Deprivation
10. Ethnic Discrimination

Human Rights Norms

The expulsion and subsequent impoverishment of the Chagossian people arguably violate a variety of human rights norms. These include:

1. The Right Not to Be Exiled or Forcibly Removed from One's Homeland
2. The Right to Self-Determination and Self-Government

3. The Right to Maintain, Protect, and Develop One's Own Culture
4. The Right Not to Be Subjected to Ethnocide or Cultural Genocide
5. The Right to Own, Develop, and Control One's Homeland and Its Natural Resources
6. The Right to Control and Direct One's Own Political, Economic, and Social Development
7. The Right to a Nationality
8. The Right to Education
9. The Right to Health Care
10. The Right to Work
11. The Right to Social Security and an Adequate Standard of Living
12. The Right to Be Free of Invidious Discrimination, Including on the Basis of One's Indigenous Identity
13. The Right to an Effective Remedy for Violations of these Rights, Including the Restoration of Wrongfully Taken Lands

Background

The Chagossians are the people of the Chagos Archipelago. Beginning in the late 18th century, enslaved people from Africa and, later, indentured laborers from India created a unique society in Chagos, becoming a distinct people who numbered around 1,500 by the mid-20th century.

In 1965, Britain separated Chagos from colonial Mauritius to create a new colony for military use, called the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Between 1967 and 1973, the U.S. and U.K. governments forcibly removed the Chagossians from Chagos to make way for construction of a U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, Chagos's largest island. Chagossians were deported to the western Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Seychelles 2,000 kilometers away. Upon arrival, most Chagossians received no resettlement assistance. According to numerous published accounts, most experienced severe difficulties in exile and quickly grew impoverished. Observers report that conditions for the Chagossians, who remain exiled and now number approximately 4,700, have improved little since the expulsion.

The Research

Numerous accounts have previously described the damaging effects of the expulsion. Until now however, there has been no systematic research documenting all the ways in which the expulsion has harmed the group. Since August 2001, at the request of lawyers representing the Chagossians in lawsuits in the United States and the United Kingdom, the authors have conducted research to provide this documentation.

The authors are an anthropologist Ph.D. candidate at the City University of New York (USA) with considerable ethnographic research experience, a sociologist specializing in quantitative survey research at Johns Hopkins University (USA), and a law and economics professor at Rutgers University (USA) with expertise in economic and social human rights.

To understand and document the effects of the expulsion on the Chagossians, we conducted more than three years of original quantitative and ethnographic research. Our study included

four trips to Mauritius and England, three to Seychelles, and documentary research in the U.S. The lead author spent more than seven months living and conducting research with Chagossians.

The major components of the study were a 91-question, random sample quantitative survey of 328 Chagossians conducted by non-Chagossian interviewers; ethnographic participant observation in Chagossian communities; numerous qualitative interviews and informal conversations; documentary and archival research; and local research oversight. We believe our study is the largest, most comprehensive body of academic research on the Chagossians to date.

The Effects of Involuntary Displacement: Building on Scholarly Findings

The Chagossians are one of many peoples and groups who have been displaced against their will as a result of military action and war, development projects, famine, natural disasters, and other causes. Our study builds on a significant body of research examining how populations around the world have been affected by what is termed *involuntary displacement*. Most significantly, scholars have shown that the forced uprooting of people has remarkably similar effects no matter the source of displacement: Without proper preventative measures, involuntary displacement causes impoverishment.

Major Findings: Impoverishment and its Component Forms

Based on our research and scholarship on involuntary displacement, we found that as a result of their expulsion from Chagos, Chagossians have, as a group, suffered severe, chronic impoverishment.

First, Chagossians have been impoverished relative to the living standards they enjoyed prior to their expulsion from Chagos. Although they lacked monetary wealth, Chagossians enjoyed lives of considerable resource wealth, security, and overall well-being, with all housing, food, health care, employment, recreational, and other needs secured on islands described by many as idyllic prior to the creation of the BIOT.

Second, Chagossians have been impoverished relative to the living standards of other U.K. Overseas Territory citizens. Because Chagos became the BIOT, most Chagossians are citizens of a U.K. Overseas Territory – like citizens of Bermuda, Gibraltar, and the Falkland Islands. As citizens of the United Kingdom, had they not been expelled from Chagos, Chagossians could have expected progressively rising living standards from their already secure livelihoods to a level similar to that enjoyed in the other Overseas Territories. (The Falkland Islands enjoys full employment and a €20,128 per capita GDP; Bermuda has a per capita GDP of €42,233; even relatively poor Saint Helena has a 2% illiteracy rate and contributions from the U.K. Government accounting for two-thirds of its annual budget).

Third, Chagossians have been impoverished relative to the living standards enjoyed by most citizens in Mauritius and Seychelles. Although Chagossians' impoverishment is primarily found in comparison to their lives in Chagos and to other U.K. Overseas Territory citizens, Chagossians have often felt their impoverishment in comparison to the living standards of Mauritians and Seychellois, which have consistently dwarfed their own. In Chagos, Chagossians formed the vast majority of society and did not feel poor. In Mauritius and

Seychelles, Chagossians have become a marginalized underclass at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchies. This has created impoverishment both in their resource poverty and in Chagossians' awareness of their impoverished underclass status.

Fourth, Chagossians have been impoverished relative to other populations living in the vicinity of U.S. military bases. If Chagossians had been permitted to remain in their homes, their residence in the vicinity of a U.S. military facility would have afforded them abundant employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. As it is, they have been categorically denied the right to work in Chagos, while thousands of civilian employees have been brought from other countries to work on the U.S. base. Chagossians have been impoverished relative to the value of these lost opportunities, which we estimate through comparison with local populations living near similarly isolated U.S. military facilities in Guam and Kwajalein, Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Fifth, Chagossians have been impoverished relative to evolving human rights norms. The populations identified above, in Guam and Kwajalein, have experienced their own human rights violations that have depressed their standards of living and which make them inadequate reference groups against which to fully measure Chagossians' impoverishment. Although no country guarantees all its residents the full measure of economic and social rights recognized in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Chagossians' impoverishment is most fully measured by comparing their conditions to that ideal standard. We project this standard by statistically adjusting the living standards in Guam and Kwajalein to account for the full enjoyment of these rights.

Ten Major Dimensions of Impoverishment

Below we summarize the ten major dimensions of Chagossians' impoverishment. We explore and document each of the ten in depth in the chapters of our full report.

1. Traumatic Expulsion

- Deterioration of living conditions in Chagos after the creation of the BIOT;
- Stranding in Mauritius as Chagossians were prevented from returning to Chagos;
- Coercion, verbal and otherwise, to leave Chagos;
- Extermination of pet dogs on Diego Garcia, as Chagossians awaited deportation;
- Forced deportation on overcrowded cargo ships;
- Depositing of Chagossians on the docks in Mauritius and Seychelles with no resettlement assistance except for 30 families who refused to disembark in Mauritius.

2. Joblessness

- 100% initial job loss from employment in Chagos;

- 45% and 40% current unemployment rates for the 1st and 2nd generations respectively (all figures: 16 and older), as part of chronic high joblessness and underemployment in exile;
- €59.97 and €81.13 current average monthly incomes for the 1st and 2nd generations respectively, in line with chronic low incomes since the expulsion;
- Transformation from universal employment in Chagos to structural barriers to employment in Mauritius and Seychelles and exclusion from national economic success.

3. Economic and Social-Psychological Marginalization

- Economic deprivation first in Chagos with creation of the BIOT and continuing in exile;
- Obsolescence in exile of coconut-processing and other human capital skills from Chagos;
- Downward socioeconomic mobility from structurally secure lives in Chagos to structurally insecure lives as a marginalized underclass in Mauritius and Seychelles;
- Chronic social and psychological damage, typical of groups with high unemployment, but including feelings of impotence, injustice, and vulnerability from being displaced;
- Non-enjoyment of specific human capabilities for personal development and fulfillment identified by some scholars as essential to human dignity.

4. Homelessness

- Loss of all homes in Chagos and initial homelessness in Mauritius and Seychelles;
- Initial and ongoing poor housing conditions characterized by corrugated metal and wood construction, overcrowding, the absence of basic sanitary services, and located in the poorest and least healthy neighborhoods of Mauritius and Seychelles;
- 40% of households now lack a toilet and plumbing in the home, 26% lack running water, 8% lack electricity, despite some overall housing improvements;
- 34% of households live in homes of some mixture of metal, wood, concrete, and brick;
- Feelings of homelessness in exile and of not being at home in Mauritius and Seychelles.

5. Landlessness and Lost Common Property

- Loss of personal and household land in Chagos, estimated at 700 meters² per household;
- Lost access to common property including fishing and seafood harvesting territories, coconut palms and other flora, beaches and other open space, and cemeteries;

- Lost autonomy and control over life as a result of these land and property losses.

6. Food Insecurity and Malnutrition

- Food shortages and malnutrition in Chagos as food supplies were restricted and food production was interrupted during the expulsion;
- Lost access in exile to freely available food resources as in Chagos;
- Continuing bouts of hunger and undernourishment in exile;
- Significantly altered diets in exile.

7. Increased Morbidity and Mortality

- Declining health in Chagos after creation of the BIOT and continuing in exile;
- Deaths by suicide, miscarriage, and disease during or shortly after the removals;
- Elevated levels in exile of respiratory diseases, anemia, chronic colds, transmissible diseases like Tuberculosis; cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension, work accidents; domestic and sexual violence against women, as found by a WHO study;
- 85% report the need for more health care, providing new evidence of their limited access;
- 20% and likely even higher levels of substance abuse among those 16 and older;
- Feelings of profound loss and sadness in exile damaging physical and mental health.

8. Sociocultural Fragmentation

- Community division and dispersal because of the expulsion;
- Family dissension and conflict;
- Separation from ancestors' graves, damaging important ancestral ties;
- Diminished cultural identity and disappearance of some sociocultural phenomena, including e.g., a spirit of sharing and weekly communal dance gatherings.

9. Educational Deprivation

- Declining educational quality and school closings in Chagos after creation of the BIOT;
- Interruption of schooling by the expulsion and barriers to re-enrollment in exile;

- Discrimination and verbal abuse at school in exile;
- 36% illiteracy rate for the generation born and raised in exile;
- 47% of this 2nd generation not completing primary school and an additional 35.1% not completing secondary school;
- Systematic educational disadvantage because of Chagossians' poverty, schooling interruption, parents' illiteracy, and poor early schooling, and in Mauritius especially with its education system systematically discriminating against the poor.

10. Ethnic Discrimination

- 50% of 1st generation report job and other discrimination in exile;
- 66% of 1st generation report verbal abuse from host populations;
- Compounding discrimination for most Chagossians as people of African descent;
- Exclusion from employment on the military base at Diego Garcia, while Mauritians, Filipinos, and others work as civilian contractors.

Summary

Other cases of involuntary displacement, including cases at other U.S. military bases, show that without proper preventative steps, involuntary displacement causes impoverishment. No preventative steps were taken to prevent the Chagossians from being impoverished. Given accumulated scholarly findings, it is not surprising that the Chagossians' expulsion—being dérasiné—resulted in their chronic impoverishment. More than three years of original research documented in this report confirms that the major consequence of the Chagossians' expulsion has been the severe, ongoing impoverishment of Chagossians' economic, material, physical, psychological, social, and cultural lives. This multi-faceted impoverishment also appears to constitute a continuing violation of Chagossians' human rights.

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