



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

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12 August 2010

Our references: 84748 & 87451

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Thank you for your letter of 21 May to the Prime Minister requesting a review of Government policy towards the Chagos Islanders. Thank you also for your letter of 16 June to the Foreign Secretary. I am replying as Minister responsible for the Overseas Territories.

The UK Government will continue to contest the case brought by the Chagos Islanders to the European Court of Human Rights. This is because we believe that the arguments against allowing resettlement on the grounds of defence security and feasibility are clear and compelling. We do not see the case for paying further compensation as this has already been paid in full and final settlement of all claims. As you are aware, both of these issues have already been decided by the UK courts.

The Government also believes that a Marine Protected Area (MPA) is the right way ahead for furthering the environmental protection of the Territory and encouraging others to do the same in important and vulnerable areas under their sovereign control. As has previously been made clear, the decision to establish an MPA is without prejudice to the current pending proceedings at the European Court of Human Rights. This means that should circumstances change, a number of issues, including fishing rights may need to be reconsidered. We welcome further Chagossian views on how an MPA is implemented.

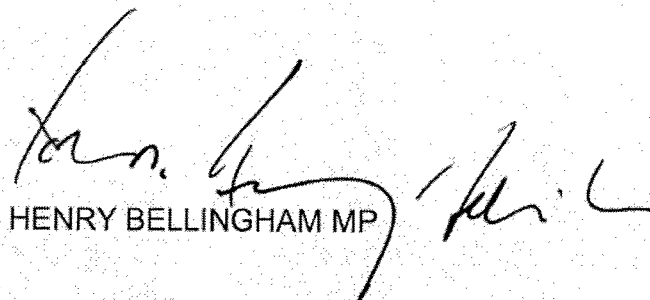
You mention in your letter that the Development Commissioner of the European Union has written to Baroness Whitaker confirming that European Development Funding could be available for co-funding resettlement if the Government decided in favour of resettlement. We are aware that some funding support from the EU could potentially be available if resettlement were permitted. But the bulk of the costs and all the contingent liability would remain with the UK taxpayer.

I should also respond to the suggestion in your letter that the Feasibility Study was "doctored" by officials in the FCO. We reject this allegation. The FCO does not have any doubt about the validity of the 2002 Phase 2B Feasibility study which was conducted by a number of independent outside experts who won the open tender for the project. The report was drafted by the Project Team, checked by the Project Manager and approved by the Project Director. While the report concluded that short-

term resettlement for limited numbers on a subsistence basis was possible, it also emphasised that any long term resettlement would be precarious and costly.

The Government will continue to look at the issues involved and will want to engage with all those with an interest. While we clearly hold different positions on a number of issues, I believe that dialogue with your, and other, Chagossian groups could be valuable, including on how to implement an MPA. Subject to finding appropriate funding, we would also hope to involve the Chagossians themselves in environmental projects taking place in the Territory; as we would hope to facilitate visits to the Territory, including for further repairs to the graveyards. I would therefore be happy to meet with you the next time you are in the United Kingdom.

Dear Giden.

  
HENRY BELLINGHAM MP