

An international arbitration panel has rejected Rwanda's multimillion-pound claims against the United Kingdom over a collapsed asylum relocation agreement, ruling that Britain is not required to make payments linked to the scrapped deal.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration said in a 76-page ruling released Monday that Rwanda's claims — worth more than £100 million (\$134 million) — were not valid under the terms of the agreement. The ruling was dated May 15.

The case stemmed from a 2022 agreement under Britain's Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak, building on an earlier proposal announced by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The policy aimed to send some asylum seekers who arrived in the United Kingdom through irregular routes, including small boats across the English Channel, to Rwanda, where their claims would be processed.

Under the deal, the United Kingdom agreed to make payments to support Rwanda's role in receiving and processing migrants.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer scrapped the policy after taking office in 2024, describing it as "dead and buried," following sustained legal and political opposition.

Rwanda later brought claims seeking more than £100 million, arguing that Britain had breached the agreement and failed to honor payment obligations, including scheduled installments due in 2025 and 2026.

However, the tribunal found that diplomatic exchanges between the two governments after the cancellation amounted to an understanding that the United Kingdom would not be required to make the payments.

The panel also accepted arguments from British lawyers that it was "common sense" financial obligations tied to the policy would fall away once the scheme was abandoned.

A UK government spokesperson said the country had "robustly defended its position" and was focused on broader efforts to "restore order and control" at its borders and reduce irregular migration.

Rwanda's Justice Minister Emmanuel Ugirashebuja told the tribunal the country had incurred significant costs preparing for the partnership and was left without advance notice of the cancellation, learning of it through media reports.

The asylum relocation plan faced repeated legal challenges. The UK Supreme Court ruled it unlawful on the grounds that Rwanda could not be considered a safe third country for asylum seekers. The first planned deportation flight in 2022 was halted minutes before departure after intervention by the European Court of Human Rights.

Refugee organizations criticized the policy, saying it created delays and uncertainty in the asylum system and arguing that reforms should instead focus on faster processing within the United Kingdom.

In a statement posted on X, government spokesperson Maklolo Yolanda said Rwanda respects the tribunal's ruling and considers the matter closed. She pointed to a dissenting and separate opinion by Professor Mohamed Abdel Wahab, saying it showed the issues were complex and open to different legal interpretations, including that the November 2024 exchanges relied on by the UK did not validly change the financial arrangements between the two countries. She added that Rwanda would continue to work constructively with international partners, "guided by international norms and mutually beneficial cooperation."