

FALKLAND ISLANDS



United Nations General Assembly

Special Committee of 24 on Decolonisation

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Statement by
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Member of the Legislative Assembly

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates and Representatives.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to present the case of the Falkland Islands to the Committee of 24, in New York.

The Falkland Islands are a group of nearly 800 islands in the South West Atlantic. We cover an area of 12,173 Km², with a population of 2,478.

The Falkland Islands enjoys a healthy democracy; a new Constitution came into force on the 1st January 2009, enhancing local democracy, establishing a greater degree of internal self-government and providing greater transparency and accountability by introducing a Public Accounts Committee and Public Complaints Commissioner. On the 5th November 2009, eight new members of the Legislative Assembly were elected. The members of the Legislative Assembly elect a Speaker of the House and each member is responsible for a number of portfolios. The role of the United Kingdom's appointed Governor has diminished over recent years, to one where he mostly undertakes an advisory role on issues such as good governance, foreign affairs and defence of the Islands.

The Government of the Falkland Islands has full control over the legislation and fiscal regime. We enjoy a healthy economy based on deep sea fishing, tourism and agriculture. In the last financial year the Islands, through licensing of fishing vessels, and various taxes received a revenue of £42 million.

The Falkland Islands have never been a grant in aid colony, depending on the UK for aid. We have relied on the UK for defence and after the 1982 conflict with Argentina, the UK assisted the Islands in the rebuilding of parts of the infrastructure. We have no national debt. Although the world recession has affected us our investments, they are starting to recover.

All money raised by the Falkland Islands Government is invested in the good of the Islands. No money is sent to the United Kingdom and nor do they request any. The fishing, tourism, agricultural and the oil exploration currently being undertaking in Falkland Island waters, has been driven by the people and government of the Falkland Islands, not the United Kingdom.

The offshore a hydrocarbon industry has been developing since 1995. Six wells were drill in 1998. Currently the Islands have a rig drilling at least an additional eight exploratory wells. The Falkland Island Government has robust environmental legislation in place. The wells are engineered to the same high standard as those in the North Sea, which have a very good safety record. Any revenues from this industry will go to the people of the Falkland Islands. Not to the United Kingdom, as Argentina seems to be suggesting in the world press. Nor would the Falkland Islands wish to exclude Argentina from oil exploration opportunities. If Argentina would co-operate on the issue of Hydrocarbons, then the whole of the Southern Region of South America could benefit.

The statements Argentina have made on the Hydrocarbon Exploration being the United Kingdom exploiting the Islands resources, are wrong. The resources are those

of the people of the Falkland Islands and the words being spoken by the Argentine Government strike me of a colonial suitor eyeing up their neighbours resources.

Currently, Argentina is trying to hinder the development of the Islands economy. Charter flights for tourism were stopped by Argentina, a number of years ago. Argentina has recently introduced a new Presidential decree 256, restricting the movements of ships between Argentina and the Falkland Islands, which is against international law of the sea. When our scientists go overseas to present papers or our men and women go overseas to play sport, Argentina protests and they are prevented from contributing.

The Falkland Islands do not wish to exclude Argentina from oil exploration opportunities. We would welcome Argentina to come and talk to the Government of the Falkland Islands to find areas of mutual benefit for the exploitation of resources in the South West Atlantic.

It is time for Argentina to recognise the agreements that we have signed with them in the past. All too often the Falkland Islands gives ground on issues in agreements, only to find Argentina reneges on their side of the deal. A joint statement recognising the sharing of information on the fisheries in the South West Atlantic, although still adhered to by the Falkland Islands is not being complied with by Argentina. The Agreement covering the joint area of hydrocarbon exploration to the South West of the islands has been torn up. The people of the Falkland Islands are willing to discuss important issues with Argentina, but we are not prepared to talk about sovereignty.

History is a funny thing and often open to interpretation. I do not intend to go back over 400 years of records to argue over the sovereignty the Islands. The Falkland Islands has one interpretation and Argentina another. I would encourage everyone to read the historical accounts of my Island home from the views of Argentina, Britain and independent historians. However, the history is well repeated and it has never seemed to resolve the differences in views. We need to accept that the historical accounts differ and understand that we need to look at the present and move towards a better future for the people of the Falkland Islands.

With this in mind there are some key questions that I would like to ask.

What is more important to the Decolonisation Committee – people or the land?

Why was this committee originally set up by the United Nations – to protect the rights of people or the rights of nations to argue over the sovereignty of land?

Does the Decolonisation Committee really consider that the Falkland Islands are simply a group of rocks to be traded between two large sovereign world powers – regardless of the wishes of the people who live on those rocks?

When I read the General Assembly Resolution 1514, I believe it was written to help people just like me and my fellow Falkland Islanders. The original intentions and spirit of the Decolonisation Committee was to help small colonised territories to stand up for their rights, to allow them to determine their own futures. It was about supporting people and not supporting empire building. It was about supporting self

determination as a basic, but fundamental Human Right. We hope that this is still the intention and spirit of the current Decolonisation Committee.

Why then are the Falkland Islands considered a “special and particular colonial situation” by the Decolonisation Committee? The answer in one word is – politics. We have two, rather than one large country involved in the question of our sovereignty. It would seem logical that this would provide even more reason for the Decolonisation Committee to stand up for and defend the rights of the people of a small Island community. So why then, when we come before you, telling you what we want for our people, expressing our right to determine our future, this does not happen? The answer is politics.

Before the 1982 conflict the Government of the United Kingdom was willing to discuss Falkland Islands sovereignty with Argentina. Not because the United Kingdom considered its sovereignty position weak, or because Argentina’s position was strong, but because the Islands’ economic vulnerability at the time suggested all options should be considered. The original 1965 UN Resolution on the Falkland Islands was influenced by Argentina, and faced little resistance from the United Kingdom. It was certainly against the wishes of the Falkland Islanders at the time, who made protests to the United Kingdom and resisted the changes imposed on the Islands by Argentina. A lot though has changed since the 1960’s, not least Argentina’s invasion in 1982, but also the UN’s strengthening of their Human Rights principles, such as self determination, for which the people of the Falkland Islands are grateful. However, although we listen to these changes and welcome them, the question of the Falkland Islands within the Decolonisation Committee, still works to an outdated, 45 year old resolution; due to politics.

This committee needs to make a decision, which one of these is more important to the modern United Nations in the 21st Century? Politics or Human Rights.

Argentina talks a good game on the international stage. They talk of human rights: liberty, equality and self determination of their own people. In the words of Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, at Venezuela’s bicentenary celebrations on the 19th April 2010 – “That is why I say that in reality nothing new has been invented when we talk of liberty and equality...one of these values is the necessity for self-determination of people so that each society can built it's own history, it's own present and it's own future.”

But why does Argentina not afford the Falkland Islanders these same rights? Why do so many of the countries represented at this committee not listen to the wishes of the Falkland Islanders when they express their right to self determination? The answer is politics.

The population of the Falkland Islands is small, we speak a different language to the rest of our region, we are culturally different, we are vulnerable, we feel our rights are ignored or side-lined, when it comes to wider geo-political issues in the region. Argentina’s policy is clear – it wishes to claim a piece of real estate against the wishes of the people who have lived there for almost 200 years and because of politics so many of this committee will support Argentine empire building. How can you support this when it goes against what the United Nations Decolonisation Committee

stands for? Listening to the voice of small vulnerable nations, listening to people's right to self-determination and going above the major world powers opinions to help small nations grow and flourish.

Self-determination is a basic human right. It is a moral argument. It is the right thing to do. You have the power to influence which argument wins within the United Nations – Politics or Human Rights. The United Nations recognises the principles of self-determination as a fundamental human right of all peoples – that is universally accepted, even by Argentina, President Kirchner herself confirmed this on the 19th April this year. So why then does Argentina not recognise the people of the Falkland Islands when we say loud and clear in this committee, we do not want to be part of Argentina?

Argentina will argue that Falkland Islanders should not be considered a people to which self-determination can apply. That we have been planted by the United Kingdom on the Islands, that we displaced the Argentine people from the Islands. Well, most Falkland Islanders arrived on the Islands by a very natural route, they were born there, some families have been born there for nine generations and with 62 different nations represented in the Falklands population, we celebrate a diverse and mixed heritage.

So the question this committee must answer is simple – should Falkland Islanders be considered a people? My Honourable fellow Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Falkland Islands, Gavin Short, will answer this question for this committee.

The people of the Falkland Islands have repeatedly expressed our firm views on our position to the Special Committee in the United Nations: The people of the Falkland Islands do not want to become part of Argentina. By pursuing its sovereignty claim Argentina is seeking to colonise the people of the Falkland Islands. To support the current resolution with no reference to respect for our right to self determine our future, this Committee is going against the purpose, spirit and principles of General Assembly Resolution 1514.

I believe this Committee should be looking to safeguard the rights of small territories and continue to fight for these peoples' rights to self-determination. The Falkland Islands are currently not ready for independence, but we do express our right of self-determination. With almost all of the people of the Falkland Islands wishing to remain and enjoy our British Overseas Territory status it is quite clear where we stand on this issue.

Thank you for your time today.