



PRESS RELEASE

ADDRESS AT THE CARIBBEAN REGIONAL SEMINAR OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF 24

On Friday 3rd May 2019

by the Honourable Roger Edwards
Member of Legislative Assembly

Mr Chairman, honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee.

The Falkland Islands are an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom and the United Kingdom supports the wishes of the Falkland Islanders to remain a part of the United Kingdom and to exercise their right to self-determination. The United Kingdom has no doubt about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands nor about the principle and the right of Falkland Islanders to self-determination as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and in Article one of the two United Nations Covenants on human rights.

The Falkland Islanders desire to retain the status quo was amply demonstrated in the March 2013 referendum when 99.8% of those who voted in a turnout of 92% wanted to remain as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom.

There can be no dialogue on sovereignty unless the Falkland Islanders so wish and unless they are directly involved in any such dialogue.

Under the United Nations Charter, the United Kingdom, as the administering power, ensures the political, economic and social advancement of Falkland Islanders while encouraging the development of self-government towards autonomy. The Falkland Islands Constitution of 1985, and, as amended by the Constitution Order 2008 means the Islands are internally self-governing, making their own laws, raising their own taxes and developing their own natural resources. This has led to the Islands enjoying economic self-sufficiency as they have been since the late 1980's.

The relationship between the Falkland Islands and the United Kingdom is very much a modern one, based on partnership, shared values and the right of the people to determine their own future.

It is at this stage, Mr Chairman, that I wish to remind this Committee that it is not charged by the Secretary General nor by the General Assembly with discussing or resolving sovereignty disputes nor to advance, or support, claims to the Falkland Islands, or any other territory – to do so is an abuse of this committee's purpose. I trust, Mr Chairman that you will enforce strict ruling to keep to the agenda and to the mandate of this committee.

The mandate of the C24 is based on the principles that the result of the decolonisation process would be:

Free association

Integration

Independence

Or, fourthly, as adopted by declaration in which it is stated that “in addition to these three options, the emergence into any other political status, as long as it is freely determined by a people”.

I believe that in 186 years of peaceful settlement and development Falkland Islanders have evolved into “a people” with their own traditions, lifestyle and freedoms: freedom and lifestyle that would be the envy of many.

Contrary to the views of some of this committee, Falkland Islanders do not consider themselves to be part of a colony nor one of an implanted population put there to further Britain’s colonial aspirations but they do regard themselves as a people from more than 60 ethnic background groups living and working peacefully together for the common good.

We can now claim an A to Z of status holders, from Argentina to Zimbabwe, who have settled and integrated peacefully into our Islands and our society. Our population has grown and evolved in much the same way as in our neighbouring countries: immigrants who left their native homelands to seek favour and fortune in foreign countries.

Our parents, grandparents and great grandparents have forged a lifestyle for us to enjoy in a beautiful and unique environment, one for which we retain stewardship until, we in turn, pass it on to our children and grandchildren. We have families that can trace their ancestry back to the very earliest settlers, over nine generations of living and working in these Islands.

Our population has grown and developed, over a similar timescale, to that of our closest neighbour, Argentina.

There was an attempt by Argentina in 2008, in the fourth Committee, to remove the right of self-determination in ‘disputed’ territories but this attempt was defeated. The United Nations claims that a dispute exists between Argentina and our administering power but as stated earlier the United Kingdom has no doubt about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands.

Similarly Argentina has argued that we are not ‘a people’ and so the fourth option does not apply to us, but there again, I have made my case very clearly that we are a people in our own right.

In the Falkland Islands we are continuing to develop our economy and unique society. We are an Island population and as such thrive on challenges. Indeed since 1982 we have grown financially, culturally and with an even greater determination to forge a bright future.

Britain has retained sovereignty over our beautiful Islands since 1765. Britain has never relinquished its sovereignty claim over the Islands and, once again, Falkland Islanders have freely demonstrated their wish to remain British.

The United Kingdom assists us with our foreign affairs and our defence, a defence, I might say, only required because of the 1982 conflict. It is a defence that is maintained at the lowest possible level to deter any future aggressor. Despite this support we receive no economic aid from Britain nor do we pay any taxes or levies to the United Kingdom.

The Republic of Argentina's claim to these Islands, which it bases on the principle of disruption to its territorial integrity, is without foundation, as the Islands have never legitimately been administered by, or formed part of, the sovereign territory of Argentina.

We would be delighted if we could have a normal, friendly relationship with all our neighbours, to freely trade with, work with and discuss things of mutual benefit. Instead we are not recognised nor accepted as a people in our own right.

Indeed, over many years, Argentina has done all it can to damage our economy by passing legislation which will penalise those who participate in the Falklands' hydrocarbon industry and putting sanctions in place to disrupt our fishing and tourism industry, even going as far as to lobby against quota free and tariff free access to Europe post-Brexit.

However, more recently we have seen under the presidency of Macri, for the first time in 37 years, the possible early signs of a new relationship with our neighbours. In September 2016 a joint communique, issued by the Argentine and British Governments, gave us hope that some of the sanctions, particularly those pertaining to over flights and fisheries science, imposed by previous administrations, could be lifted.

Since my last attendance at this Committee we have seen two meetings of the South Atlantic Fisheries Committee where Argentine and Falkland Islands scientists have exchanged fisheries data which is so important to the long term preservation of fish stocks in the South West Atlantic.

Falkland Island Government officials have had talks with a South American airline with a view to gaining a second flight from the South American mainland to the Falkland Islands on a weekly basis.

Following on from the assistance given to the International Committee of the Red Cross under the Humanitarian Project Plan, 112 of the 122 unknown Argentine soldiers lying in the Cemetery at Darwin have been identified and the Falkland Islands invited and facilitated two separate visits by family members who wished to come and pray at the gravesides of their lost sons.

Following the tragic loss of the Argentine submarine 'Santa Fe' and the mobilisation of search and rescue assets from our Islands a link has been established with the mainland to further enhance search and rescue facilities in the area.

The challenges we face are many. Our approach remains not to react to each and every external pressure but to continue to develop the economy in our own way, and to ensure we are not diverted by outside influences. We are clear that we will concentrate on our goals, on our agenda and not on someone else's.

Mr Chairman, for more than a decade we have invited the Chair and this Committee to visit our beautiful Islands and to see for themselves the way the people manage and conserve our natural resources but so far no one has taken up that invitation. Mr Chairman I wish to extend that invitation, once again, to both you and the Committee to visit the Falkland Islands so as to experience for yourself our way of life and the freedoms we enjoy.

Mr Chairman, this is the fifth time that I have addressed this Committee and I do hope that over the years our wishes have been expressed both loudly and clearly. I do realise that some people will only hear what they want to hear while others will only hear if they are prepared to listen but I do hope that on this occasion members of this Committee are prepared to listen and take note.

I will conclude by asking all 29 members of this Committee to ignore the unjust and false claims put forward by Argentina and to remain true to the mandate of this Committee, its aims and objectives as outlined in the Secretary General's message to the Pacific regional seminar hosted by the people and Government of Grenada during our meetings of May 2018. Furthermore, I ask that the Committee acknowledge the Falkland Islanders right to be recognised as a people and as such their right to self-determination.

Thank you Mr Chairman for allowing me the time to address this Committee.