

# **FALKLAND ISLANDS**



**United Nations Committee of 24  
(Special Committee on Decolonisation)**

**20<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

**Statement by  
The Honourable Mike Summers  
Member of the Legislative Assembly**

Mr Chairman, Ambassadors and Members of the UN Decolonisation Committee.

You have heard from my colleague, MLA Sharon Halford, about the referendum held recently in the Falkland Islands, to set out clearly and unequivocally the views of Falkland Islanders about their political status. I would like to expand a little on why you, as Members of this Committee, should take heed of this message.

Throughout the many years Falkland Islanders have attended this Committee, we have put the case for the collective voice of our people to be heard and respected. To be heard and respected is what each of the NSGT's might reasonably expect from a Committee, charged by the UN with assisting those few remaining territories who have not yet reached independence, to achieve a political status that is acceptable to them.

But this Committee has failed to deliver on that responsibility. Why? Because this Committee seems to prioritise the interests of certain Member States over the wishes of the peoples it is supposed to be assisting. If this Committee is to remain relevant that has to change. The call by Cuba and others at the recent C-24 seminar in Quito, for a decade of solidarity with the NSGT's might begin to show the way forward, but only if the Members of the C24 examine their collective conscience, about where their responsibilities lie as a Members of the C24, and put first those people for whom they have assumed responsibility, the NSGT's.

I would like to pay special tribute here to those Members of this Committee who have stood firm in protecting the important principles entrusted to you. For reminding the Committee, year on year, in the face of increasing pressure, that the right to self determination is sacred to the decolonisation process, that the right to self determination is a universal human right not to be denied, and that the people of the NSGT's have an absolute right to be involved in any and all discussions about their country, and their future. To those members, thank you.

In contrast we have heard a number of other countries come here, and raise issues about the Argentine claim to sovereignty to our Islands, and on the back of that seek to deny us our basic human rights. Sovereign countries have the right to take whatever views they wish on whichever

topics they wish, however correct or misguided those views might be. That is your right, and indeed your duty as an Ambassador to the UN, to represent your countries views. But it is not the purpose of this Committee to hear, or discuss, or have any opinion on the sovereignty of a territory. This Committee is not charged by the Secretary General or the General Assembly with discussing or resolving sovereignty disputes. And to advance, or support, claims to the Falkland Islands, or any other territory, in this forum, is an abuse of this Committee's purpose.

Nor is it this Committee's responsibility to judge whether or not any particular territory on the C-24 list is entitled to self-determination. According to UN Resolutions 1514 and 1654 every territory on the list is entitled to self-determination. That was set down by the GA in 1960, reaffirmed in 1961 and reaffirmed again by resolution 2625 in 1970, and has not changed since. So to argue here, as certain members do, that Falkland Islanders do not have the right to self-determination, is to contradict the founding principles of this Committee. You do not have that discretion.

The only responsibility and duty of this Committee is to the peoples of the NSGTs. In the case of the Falkland Islands this Committee is not required or empowered to choose in a sovereignty dispute between the UK, the administering power, or Argentina the aspiring colonial power.

The duty of this Committee is to assist the people of the Falkland Islands to achieve a political status that is acceptable to them, free of coercion and harassment from other parties. If some Committee members are unable to exercise this duty, either because they have been instructed to support the Argentine claim, or because they believe that they have some other moral justification to deny us our basic human rights, then so be it. But in advancing such a views in this Committee, you are not acting in accordance with the purpose of this Committee.

This Committee has one purpose, and one purpose only. To end colonialism by helping to achieve a just and lasting settlement for the people of the NSGT's, under whatever political solution they choose for themselves. So I would once again strongly urge you, in discharging your duties in respect of the Falkland Islands, to listen to the wishes of the Falkland Islanders expressed so clearly and democratically in our

referendum, namely that we wish to maintain our current status as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom.

We have generally avoided in this Committee discussing the history of the Falkland Islands, not because we do not have faith in our research and conclusions, but because it is simply not relevant. The people of the Falkland Islands have the right to self determination by virtue of being on the list of NSGT's agreed by the General Assembly in 1961. However that position was arrived at, the history that preceded it is irrelevant.

But I thought it might be worthwhile trying to correct some misconceptions, given that those countries which offer support to Argentina in its demands for negotiations with the UK over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, do so on the basis of a wilfully distorted version of historical events, and in apparent ignorance of Argentina's relinquishment of its claim to the Falklands, over 160 years ago.

The British sovereignty claim dates to 1765, several decades before the Republic of Argentina was established. That claim has never been renounced.

An Argentine military garrison was sent to the Falkland Islands in 1832 in an attempt to impose Argentine sovereignty over what was already, and had been for 67 years, British territory. The United Kingdom immediately protested, and expelled the Argentine garrison, in Jan 1833. But the civilian population, including some Argentines, was encouraged to remain, and most of them chose to do so. Compare these facts to the Argentine rhetoric, which claims that "An Argentine native civilian population was expelled in 1833". The difference between rhetoric and reality is stark, and we would urge you to check the facts for yourselves.

But the Argentine version of history not only conveniently ignores those 67 years of British sovereignty prior to its first invasion in 1832. It also conveniently ignores the Convention of Settlement, ratified in 1850 by the British Government and the Republic of Argentina, which comprehensively settled all existing differences, and established what was called a "perfect friendship" between the two states, a position which endured for 90 years until the infamous decade of military rule in the

1940's, when the claim again resurfaced in Argentina, arguably for domestic political reasons.

So Honourable Ambassadors, please be clear. If it is the position of your Government that it does not support the right to self determination of the people of the Falkland Islands, it does so not only in direct contravention of UN Resolution 1514 (XV) which states that "All peoples have the right to self determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development", but your position is also based on a series of inaccuracies, untruths and obfuscations.

Argentina never owned the Falkland Islands, though clearly it aspired to do so. Our Islands had no indigenous population, and in that respect we are unlike most colonial situations of the 18th and 19th centuries. This is unlike the Argentine situation where the indigenous population was routinely slaughtered by the invading European colonists, the forefathers of today's Argentine citizens. The reality is the Falkland Islands has been British territory for very nearly 250 years, and has been continuously and peacefully settled under British administration for over 180 years. I am a sixth generation Falkland Islander, I have 8th generation grand children, and there are now families in the Islands who can trace 9 generations. Settlers arrived and departed of their own free will, and arrived from many different parts of the world. At recent censuses Islanders have identified themselves as coming from 57 different ethnic backgrounds. Until the second illegal invasion of the Falklands by Argentina in 1982, in breach of two UN Security Council resolutions, there were effectively no immigration restrictions. Those that exist now under Falklands law are non partisan and non discriminatory.

We are very clearly a people in our own right, who have the right to be heard, and demand to be heard. No member of the UN can reasonably deny that right, and for that reason alone, you should not support the expansionist Argentine agenda.

Any suggestion that the people of the Falkland Islands do not have the right to self-determination is a denial of basic human rights. Any resolution before this Committee that does not specifically acknowledge the basic human rights of our people is a resolution that should not be

here. In this Committee you are expected to set aside your geo-political alliances and friendships, and to concentrate on the issue in hand, which is the will of the people of the NSGT's. And let me be absolutely clear, in this session on the Falkland Islands, the Committee is not being asked by Falkland Islanders to support the UK position against the Argentine position, it is being asked to do what the C-24 mandate requires of you, and support the right of Falkland Islanders to choose the Government they wish for themselves, irrespective of competing sovereignty claims.

Mr Chairman, this Committee has, by its own admission, failed in its duty and its mission for the past two decades. I encourage the Committee to examine what has caused that failure and remedy it. Above all get out to the territories that are in your care, talk to the people, see how they live, test the extent of their self-government, and ask them what they want for themselves. That is the way to discharge your duty, and to have real success going forward. We have formally invited the Committee of the C-24 to send a visiting mission to the Falkland Islands on at least six occasions before. We have not even had the courtesy of a response. Mr Chairman, you are reported recently as having said "Visiting missions were critical not only in terms of hearing the concerns of the people in Non-Self-Governing Territories, but also in terms of arriving at informed conclusions through the collection of data". In my capacity as a petitioner, and as a representative of my Government, I now formally extend yet another invitation to the Committee to visit the Falkland Islands. Come to the Islands and see who we are and how we live, and respect our wishes. We have been assured that the UK as administering power has no objections to this invitation, and nor do we or the UK set any conditions on the makeup of the delegation. If Argentina objects it can only be that it is afraid of the truth, of openness and transparency, and of the power of basic human rights.

I referred in my opening remarks to the Falklands referendum, and I have explained why the wishes of our people should be your guide. As the Secretary General said to you in his opening remarks this year "We no longer have the luxury of indulging in rhetoric and rituals. Concrete action and tangible results are essential". I urge you to discharge your duty to all the NSGT's in accordance with the Secretary General's urgings, and listen to us to provide the way forward. To do otherwise is to risk making this Committee an irrelevant anachronism.