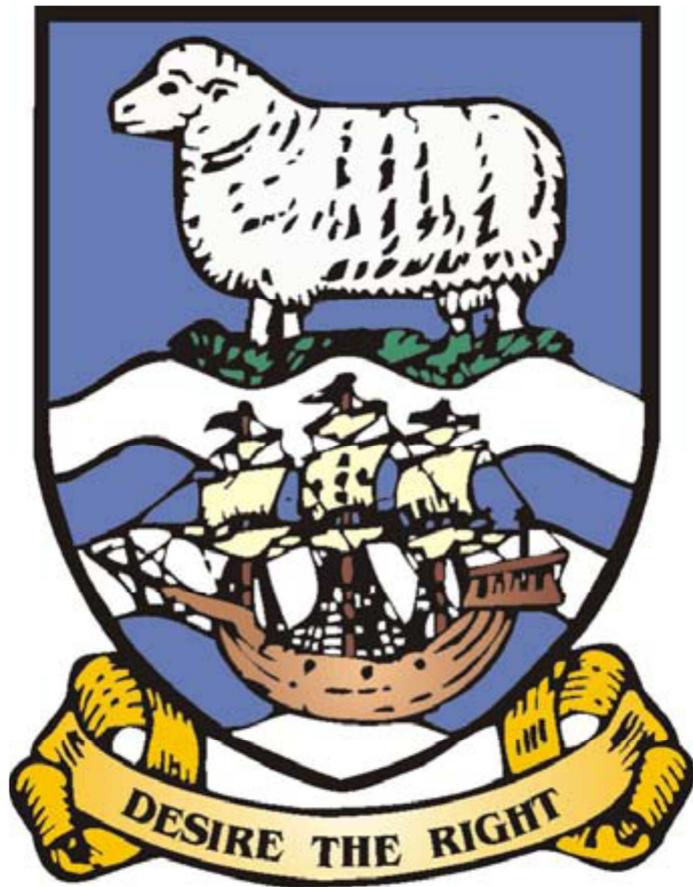


# FALKLAND ISLANDS



United Nations General Assembly

Special Committee of 24 on Decolonisation

26 June 2014

Statement by  
The Honourable Roger Edwards  
Member of the Legislative Assembly

Mr Chairman, Honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to address this committee to explain why the Falkland Islands are happy with their current status and have no wish to change it.

The Falkland Islands are an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom. Its people are an ethnically diverse group who choose to remain British. Their wish to retain the status quo was ably demonstrated in March 2013 when the Falkland Islands Government, not the British Government but the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly, organised an Internationally observed referendum asking the question:-

“Do you wish the Falkland Islands to retain their current political status as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom?”

The result was an overwhelming “Yes”.

With a turnout of 92%, 99.8% of the voters exercised their right of self-determination and demonstrated clearly their wish to continue to enjoy economic self-sufficiency, internal self-government and above all the right to determine their own future. International Observers adjudged the referendum to be free, fair and transparent, and in accordance with Falkland Islands law.

The right of Falkland Islanders to determine their own future is unequivocal. The principle of self-determination is enshrined in Article 1, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations. Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights affirm the right of all peoples to self-determination, and lay upon States Parties, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing Territories and Trust Territories, the obligation to promote the realisation of the right and to respect it, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter. At no point has the United Nations ever explicitly said this right does not apply to the Falkland Islanders.

I wish to make it clear that, contrary to the views of some of this Committee, we Falkland Islanders do not consider ourselves to be a colony. We have our own Constitution which was last updated in 2009 and which confirms a status and governance system that is very much post-colonial. As an example, this Constitution explicitly recognises that the natural resources of the Islands belong to the Government and the people of the Falkland Islands, a point which has been confirmed time and again by a succession of UK Prime Ministers. With this latter point in mind, it cannot be doubted that we enjoy a modern relationship and shared values with the United Kingdom.

I wish to further remind this committee that under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960, people from the Non-Self-Governing Territories can exercise self-determination and reach full measure of Self-Government by Free Association, by Integration or by becoming Independent. Building on this, United Nations

General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) of 1970 offered a fourth option as an outcome of a people's exercise of the right of self-determination. This fourth option enabled "any other political status freely determined by a people". The people of the Falkland Islands exercised their right to that fourth option through their referendum.

You will doubtless hear from the Argentine Representative that we are an implanted British population and as such do not have the right to be called a "people" nor to have the basic right of "self-determination" but they refer to us as the "inhabitants" or the "population". Nothing could be further from the truth. Our recent census clearly demonstrates that far from being "an implanted British population" the evidence produced states that we have people from more than 60 ethnic background groups living and working peacefully together and they have been doing so for the past 181 years. Except of course for a very brief period of 74 days in 1982 when Argentina brutally invaded our Island home. Our people have evolved in the same way as that of other countries in the region so why, I ask, should we be denied the same rights as our neighbours whose people have settled and evolved in the same way as us?

You will also probably further hear that the civilian population was evicted in 1833 as a consequence of unjustified armed attack. Nothing could be further from the truth. An illegal, mutinous Argentine military garrison who had murdered their commander was evicted, but the civilians, including Argentines, were invited to stay and the majority did. Even today we have Argentines living and working among us in perfect harmony.

You will notice that Argentina conveniently ignores the Settlement of Convention, negotiated during 1849 and 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 countries, a position which endured for 90 years until the infamous decade of military rule in the 1940s, when the claim resurfaced in Argentina, arguably for domestic political reasons. Since that time when the claim resurfaced, it has been resurrected time and again during periods of political or economic unrest; the greater the unrest, the greater efforts put into this false claim which is based on falsehoods and altered historical interpretation.

Argentina says they want to negotiate with the United Kingdom over their sovereignty claim to the Islands. How can one negotiate when, in their view there can only be one outcome to those sovereignty negotiations and that is the complete transfer of the Islands from being an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom to being a colony of Argentina. Argentina says they will look after the "interests" of the inhabitants, but surely our "wishes" should be paramount? Surely making the Falklands become a colony of Argentina against our wishes would be against the very aims and pursuits of this Committee?

Britain has retained sovereignty over our beautiful Islands since 1765, a time when Argentina did not exist as a sovereign nation. Britain has never relinquished its sovereignty claim over the Islands. The Republic of Argentina's claim to the 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 the Republic of Argentina.

We have lived without a break in these Islands for over 180 years and 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 pass it safely on to our own children and grandchildren. Our ancestors with all their varied ethnic backgrounds, worked hard to make our Islands prosperous while retaining and conserving its wildlife and abundant marine resources for future generations. We have been self-financing since 1991 and we receive no economic aid from Britain, nor do we pay any taxes or levies to the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom assists us with our foreign affairs and defence. A defence, I might say, only required because of the belligerent nature of our closest neighbour. It is a defence that is maintained at the smallest possible force in order to deter any future aggressor. Argentine stories of massive military build-up in the South West Atlantic are quite frankly just that, stories, not truth. Its recent claim that there is a nuclear NATO base on the Islands is patently ludicrous.

We would be delighted to have a normal, friendly relationship with all our neighbours, to freely trade with, work with and discuss things of mutual benefit – such as the conservation of straddling fish stocks. Instead, Argentina does not recognise nor accept us as a people in our own right and contemptuously refuses to deal directly with our Government. Indeed, Argentina has done all it can to damage our economy by persuading Mercosur countries not to permit Falklands' flagged vessels to enter their ports, by passing legislation which will penalise those who participate in the Falklands' hydrocarbon industry, and by disrupting cruise ships travelling to the Falklands. Even in international sport, they have used belligerent and provocative tactics by their use of banners spuriously claiming ownership of our Islands.

The Argentine Foreign Minister has refused to acknowledge our existence and declined a meeting with the British Foreign Minister because some of my colleagues were to be present. I can't help wonder if this rhetoric towards us is a means of diverting attention away from their own obvious economic and political problems? In the Falkland Islands we are continuing to develop our economy and unique society, despite our aggressive neighbour. We are an Island population and as such thrive on challenges. Indeed since the invaders' exit in 1982 we have grown financially, culturally and with even greater determination to forge a bright future.

The challenges we face are many. Our approach is not to react to each and every Argentine act of aggression but to continue to develop the economy in our own way, and to ensure that we are not diverted by outside pressures. Our focus will not be diverted by antagonistic attempts to prevent us from pursuing our aims. We are clear that we will concentrate on our goals and our agenda, not on someone else's.

Mr Chairman, a few brief weeks ago while attending the Pacific Regional Seminar in the beautiful Island of Fiji I invited you to visit us in our own beautiful Islands. Today I repeat

that invitation to both you, and should you wish other Members of this Committee, to visit. I have here today a formal letter of invitation which will be presented to you with a copy to the Secretary General.

Mr Chairman, this is the third 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, 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 to take note.

I will conclude by asking Members of this committee to ignore the false claims put forward by Argentina and to consider the role of this committee, its aims and purposes and then to support our wishes to remain an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom and to recognise our right to self-determination as is clearly defined in the various documents I have previously alluded to.

Once again Mr Chairman I thank you for allowing me to speak to this committee.