



**FALKLAND ISLANDS GOVERNMENT**

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**ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION  
WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE  
GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES**

**UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE OF 24**

**21 JUNE 2018**

***by* THE HONOURABLE ROGER EDWARDS**

**MEMBER OF LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

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Mr Chairman, Members of the UN Decolonisation Committee, ladies and gentlemen.

I am very happy to be here to address you once again on behalf of Her Majesty's Government of the Falkland Islands and the people of the Falkland Islands. The reason I stress the fact that we are 'Her Majesty's Government of the Falkland Islands' will become clear later in my intervention.

Mr Chairman, I believe the Falkland Islanders, with their rich heritage and such a diverse ethnic society, meet all the requirements of the Charter of the United Nations to the right of self-determination and have met the terms to be delisted as expressed in 1970 as the fourth option. In 185 years the people have grown politically, economically and culturally to now be accepted as a people in their own right.

When first discovered the Falkland Islands had no indigenous people: it did have a vast array of rich wildlife that was later to be exploited but it had no people. I raise this because, once again, I hope to make the point clear later in this speech.

Mr Chairman, you will hear later from both members of the Committee and member states that the Falkland Islands is populated by an implanted population to further the colonial aspirations of the administering power. This is not correct. You will hear how Argentine settlers were brutally forced out by military intervention of the administering power. They were not. You will no doubt hear that having the Islands populated as they are today is a breach of the Territorial Integrity of Argentina. It is not. Furthermore, claims will be made that there is a growth in military power in the Falkland Islands leading to a militarisation of the South West Atlantic. There is not.

These falsehoods and others like them were first offered up to the United Nations by Jose Maria Ruda in his impassioned speech in 1965 during a period of political turmoil back home in Argentina. Indeed, this was the first serious claim by Argentina in almost twenty years. Although Argentina states regularly that its claim to the Falkland Islands runs continuously from the 1820's it simply does not. Their claim is based on Spanish succession, which was never accepted by the United Kingdom, was effectively ended by treaty in 1850 and,

following on from this treaty, several Argentine leaders stated that they had no dispute with Britain thereby nullifying this particular claim.

Later you will be told by the 'expert' Luis Vernet that his great great grandfather had been appointed Governor of the Falkland Islands and had been given a land grant in the 1820's. He had indeed been given a land concession by the Governments of the Province of Buenos Aires but this was later ruled null and void by the Government of Argentina in 1882 and he had been granted the unpaid position of Commandante Politico y Militar, a rank somewhat beneath Governor, by the, very brief, illegitimate Government of Juan Lavelle in 1829. Vernet, in July 1831, seized three United States sealers. The Americans had been sealing in the southern oceans for decades. Vernet left the Islands in one of these sealers, the Harriet, on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1831 and never returned. In reprisal the USS Lexington was despatched to the Islands and broke up Vernet's settlement over the new year of 1831/32 and took away many of the inhabitants. Following this American intervention, Rosas sent a small garrison to the Islands in November 1832 but they mutinied and murdered their Commandant. Hearing of these actions and fearing United States' aspirations in the South Atlantic, Britain reasserted its sovereignty in January 1833 removing the illegitimate military garrison and the four civilians who wanted to leave, a Brazilian and his wife and a Uruguayan and his wife. All other civilians opted to stay.

At this time in the United Kingdom many reforms were going through Parliament making it difficult for small farmers and crofters to earn a living and many left to seek their fortunes elsewhere in the world. Some went to Canada, Australia and New Zealand and some from the UK's West Country and Scotland went to the Falkland Islands and established farms, sheep being the stock of choice. Other settlers came from the whaling industry, from passing ships and even included a group of Royal Marine pensioners.

Today we are a diverse cultural mix from, as our latest Census tells us, some 60 nationalities, from literally A to Z, from Argentina to Zimbabwe. No one can say we are an implanted population.

As for being a Colony of the United Kingdom; we certainly used to be many years ago. If a Colony is as described in Wikipedia "a territory under the

immediate political control of a state, distinct from the home territory of the sovereign” then the Falkland Islands as first settled was a colony. Even as late as the 1960’s and early 70’s the Governor appointed Members to the Executive Council. We were known as a colony until the 60’s when we were referred to as a British Protectorate. Over the years our political status changed. We are now recognised as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom and in a referendum of March 2013 99.8% of those who voted wanted to remain with that status.

The introduction of a completely new constitution that came into being in 2009 and devolved even more powers to the local Government means that we are now totally internally self-governing and economically self-sufficient. We make our own laws, raise our own taxes and license our own natural resources. We pay no dues to our sovereign power nor do we receive any.

There is some confusion over who gives ‘Assent’ to our laws and we have been accused of not being able to pass our own laws. In the United Kingdom when Parliament passes new legislation it is the Sovereign who gives ‘Assent’ to those Bills. Here, when Her Majesty’s Government of the Falkland Islands passes new Legislation, it is the Governor, the Sovereign’s representative on the Islands, who gives ‘Assent’ to those Bills on her behalf.

Since 1982 our constitution has been rewritten, updated, modernised and changed such that we have even more internal self-governance and our Colonial past is a distant memory.

The United Kingdom is responsible for our defence and our Foreign Affairs. Far from having a massive military presence in the Islands the British forces are maintained only at a level that will deter any erstwhile aggressor. Impassioned accusations of militarisation are baseless and have no factual evidence but are designed only to deceive the international community into believing there is a military threat to others in the region. Regarding Foreign Affairs our Sovereign power consults the Islands’ Government at every level so there are no surprises to either us or them.

Mr Chairman, for the past decade we have invited Members of this Committee to visit our beautiful Islands in order that they may see and learn for

themselves the steps we have taken to both preserve and protect our future but no one has yet been bold enough to come. At our meeting in Grenada only a few short weeks ago the Member for Cuba said there was no point in visiting as it was simply a case of a sovereignty dispute. If that is the case, Mr Chairman, then what are we doing here at this Committee for Decolonisation? It has no responsibility for disputes, sovereign or otherwise. Might I take this opportunity to remind this Committee that they have responsibility only to the people of the Non Self-Governing Territory.

Having a British Overseas Territory some 300 plus miles off the coast of Argentina somehow is interpreted as a threat to the Territorial Integrity of Argentina. Mr Chairman, how can this be? We are a peaceful, hardworking Island people wishing for nothing more than to be allowed to develop our Islands in our way whilst protecting our environment and preserving and conserving our unique wildlife for our children and their children. We now have families who have settled these Islands for nine generations and I am sure that if we looked hard enough could find someone who is now a tenth generation.

More recently, Mr Chairman, we have seen and heard less rhetoric from the Presidency of Mauricio Macri, but, underneath this change we must always remember it is built into the Argentine constitution that they wish to take over our homeland. It is they who would, today, like to colonise us.

During this period of less rhetoric we have moved forward on subjects that are common to us both. We have held joint fisheries talks about the conservation of straddling fish stocks and we have seen some of the sanctions imposed on our industries being softened or possibly lifted.

For many years the Falkland Islands Government was proactively leading on the project to identify the unknown soldiers buried in the cemetery at Darwin. Following meetings between Argentine, United Kingdom and Falkland Islands representatives, along with the ICRC, a project was proposed with the result that some 90, of the 122 bodies were identified. This then led to the visit of some 240 family members, who in March of this year, came to pray at the gravesides of the newly identified soldiers.

Furthermore, units of the Military based in our Islands were able to assist with the unsuccessful search for the, sadly still missing, submarine ARA San Juan.

While the community still feels the after effects from 1982 we are not without compassion.

Mr Chairman, to summarise, we are not a colony of the United Kingdom but an Overseas Territory that has long since progressed beyond colonial status. Through our own, internationally observed, referendum we have expressed our clear wish to remain an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom with Her Majesty the Queen as our head of state. We have been a British territory for over 250 years and, over the past 185 years of continuous and peaceful settlement, our population has grown into a unique Island people with the right of self-determination as prescribed in the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr Chairman, we wholeheartedly agree that colonialism must be eradicated in all its manifestations. That no people should be subjugated against their will, or have their people, their governance or their natural resources under the control of another country, against their wishes, is a fundamental human right. It is for that reason that Chapter 1 Section 1 of the Falkland Islands Constitution reflects the first chapter of the Charter of the United Nations in recognising that all peoples have the right to self-determination and that realisation of the right to self-determination must be promoted and respected.

Mr Chairman, it is that fundamental right I seek here today.

Thank you Mr Chairman.