



Falkland Islands Government

News Release

1 January 2010

Prime Minister's Radio Address

2009 has been another year of significant change for the Falkland Islands.

Your democracy was further strengthened by your new constitution, and by the elections which took place in November when an impressively high voter turn-out resulted in an all-new Legislative Assembly. I wish the new Assembly Members well for their terms in office.

2009 also brought economic change and challenge for all of us. Nowhere has been immune. I know that this has been a difficult year for the Falklands economy. Reduced fish catches have led to a budget deficit. Such change demands a response, and I welcome the work that you are doing to develop a strategy to put the Falklands economy onto a more diverse and sustainable footing.

Early 2010 will see the arrival in Falklands waters of a drilling rig to continue hydrocarbons exploration. The British government will continue to support the development of your hydrocarbons sector. But there is of course no guarantee that commercially viable reserves will be found. And, should there be any, extraction will be some years away. You are right therefore not to factor any revenues into your economic planning. But the opportunities - and the risks - make careful preparations vital for this important work. The British government will continue to work with you on this agenda.

Argentine visitors are able to visit the Falkland Islands throughout the year, but I was particularly pleased that the visits of the next of kin of those who died in the Falklands conflict went so well this October. I know that planning these visits was very difficult for a number of reasons. But the visitors were full of praise and gratitude for the welcome they received, and for the sensitivity with which these humanitarian visits were handled. The next of kin were able to pay their respects with dignity. I should like to thank everyone involved for the hard work that went into ensuring that the visits were a success.

We will of course continue to encourage Argentina to co-operate on issues of mutual interest in the South Atlantic - fisheries conservation is just one example of where their cooperation would benefit all.

We will also continue to pursue a strong bilateral agenda with Argentina - a fellow G20 member and an important partner in efforts to address global concerns such as the economic downturn and climate change. I met President Kirchner twice in 2009 to discuss such issues. But, as always, I made it clear in our discussions that we have no doubt about the United Kingdom's sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, and that the principle of self-determination underlies this. There can be and there will be no negotiations on the sovereignty of the Islands unless and until such time as you so wish.

You and your new Legislative Assembly will face further challenges in the year to come. But I am sure that your community spirit, resilience and strong democratic foundation will help you face these challenges. I wish all on the Falkland Islands a happy Christmas and good health and good fortune for 2010.

Gordon Brown MP