



FALKLAND ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

PRESS RELEASE

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Hon Emma Edwards MLA reports on UN Decolonisation Seminar

The Honourable Emma Edwards, MLA attended a seminar in New Caledonia organised and funded by the United Nations to mark the 50th anniversary of the General Assembly's Declaration on Decolonisation. A key objective of the seminar was to help the Special Committee on Decolonisation (the 'Committee of 24') to assess progress towards decolonisation, particularly in the Pacific region.

New Caledonia is a French overseas territory in the Pacific Ocean. It was discovered and named by Captain Cook. It has a population of about 300,000 people, with 28 languages spoken across the Islands, although French is used as a common language. The economy is based on nickel, with New Caledonia being the world's second largest nickel exporter.

The seminar was entitled 'The eradication of colonialism in the first decade of the 21st century'. It was attended by 48 delegates including representatives of non-self-governing territories, member nations of the Committee of 24, observers and experts on colonialism. The Falkland Islands were discussed on the second day.

Miss Edwards began by saying that Falkland Islanders have repeatedly expressed their firm view that they are content with their current status, and noted that for a variety of reasons the alternative options of full independence, free association or integration with an independent State are not suitable for the Falkland Islands.

Miss Edwards told delegates: "We are happy with the status quo, and do not like being told by others what to do. The Falkland Islands are currently not ready for independence, but we do express our right of self-determination with almost all of the people of the Falkland Islands wishing to remain and enjoy our British Overseas Territory status."

Outlining aspects of the healthy democracy enjoyed by Falkland Islanders, Miss Edwards informed the seminar that they included elections in November 2009, and a new Constitution, which had entered into force in January 2009, and enhanced local democracy, establishing a greater degree of internal self-government and providing mechanisms for transparency and accountability.

While the Falkland Islands had, like elsewhere, been affected by the global financial crisis, its economy remained strong, and Miss Edwards cited a number of programmes and initiatives in the areas of transport, telecommunications, energy, production, health care and education which benefited Falkland Islanders.

The final day of the seminar included a very interesting debate, which centred on how little progress on decolonisation has been made in the past ten years, with only New Caledonia expressing a wish to become a new nation. There was also discussion on whether the word 'eradication' was too ambitious when discussing colonialism, with some delegates strongly of the view that the Special Committee should be finding ways to help the remaining territories on the UN Decolonisation List achieve more governmental autonomy rather than full independence.

Looking back after the conclusion of the seminar, Miss Edwards said: "It was a very useful opportunity to meet representatives from other overseas territories and to discuss their issues with them, as well as meeting C24 member representatives."

On her return journey home to the Falkland Islands, while travelling through London, Miss Edwards attended the state opening of Parliament along with Falkland Islands Government Representative Sukey Cameron. This was followed by a reception hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Office of the Legislative Assembly
Gilbert House
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For more information please contact Alison Inglis, Media Liaison Office, Falkland Islands Government at tel. +500 27451 or email media2@sec.gov.fk. Photographs and interviews are available on request, and more Falkland Islands information is available at www.falklands.gov.fk.

For UK media enquiries, please contact Katie Liddell at Keene on 020 7839 2140 or email katie@keenepa.co.uk.