FALKLAND ISLANDS

United Nations General Assembly

Special Committee of 24 on Decolonisation

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Statement by

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Member of the Legislative Assembly

Mr Chairman, your Excellencies and Committee Members

Following on from my colleague, I too would like to say that it is an honour to be able to help present our case to the C24.

What I have to say to you today probably isn't as polished as some speeches that you will have heard, but these are my words, written by me and comes from the heart of a Falkland Islander.

If I could seek your indulgence to introduce myself:

I am a 47 year old 6th generation Falkland Islander, (my children and grandchild taking our presence on the Falklands into the 8th generation) my forefathers arriving in the Falklands in 1842. My family have been in the Islands for as many, if not more generations than a lot of the Argentines can claim to have been in their country. I was born and raised on the Islands and am proud to say that I was completely educated there as well. My wife is from the 8th region of Chile. I work for a telecoms company and am vice chairman of the Islands only labour union. I am also a democratically elected member of the Falklands Legislative Assembly. It is worth pointing out that unlike my colleague and I, none of the Argentine representatives were elected by their people to speak on their behalf.

It is often stated by Argentina that we are an implanted people (thus, in their eyes, we have no rights) It is however pertinent to remember that when we settled the Falkland Islands, unlike in some countries, we did not displace any indigenous peoples. There were none.

I am somewhat confused as to why I am here, as this is, I believe a decolonisation committee. The Falkland Islands today are **not** a colony in any way shape or form but a British overseas territory **by choice.**

I will not, unlike Argentina, deny or try to twist history to suit our case. We were indeed a colony of Great Britain, as was Argentina a colony of Spain, but we have grown and matured, we pushed for change, we have even been **encouraged** by Britain to change and grow and become ever more internally independent. We are now self governing in all aspects with the exception of defence (we do have a capable local defence unit) and foreign affairs, although in terms of trade we are free to negotiate and trade with whom we wish.

Some of us have spoken and dreamt of the day when we might become independent but alas the dream always fades, as whilst we are being targeted by an aggressive and bullying neighbour (Argentina) we will always require some benevolent country to guarantee our safety and freedom and it is a sad certainty that were we to choose independence it would probably only last as long as it took our protecting power to leave and Argentina to arrive.

The resolution speaks of negotiating a solution to the problem over the sovereignty of my Islands. For me there is no "**problem**" to find a solution to. For Argentina on the other hand, the word "negotiation" has only one meaning, that they take over my home and turn it into what would be to all intents and purposes a colony of Argentina. I ask all of you here, would **you** wish to see your town or your state handed to a foreign power that has no right to it against **your** wishes?

I thought it was a cornerstone of the UN that the right to self determination and freedom of choice of peoples be respected. I am humbly asking **you** to respect **ours**.

As I said, I was born in the Falklands like a great many of those who elected me, and if the UN honours it pledges on self determination, as robustly as our protecting power does, we fully intend to end our days in our Islands under the government and nationality of our choosing, not one that is forced upon us.

I also note that Argentina now keeps quoting UN resolution number 31/49 of 1976 to try and further its unfounded claims and limit our ability develop our economy. It is interesting to note that they paid no heed whatsoever back in 1982 to UN resolution 31/49 or any others when it invaded and subjected us to 74 days of oppression and at times brutality before we had our freedom restored.

Argentina repeatedly twists history to favour its totally unfounded and illegal claim to my Islands.

One of the myths is that the Falkland Islands formed part of Spain, and were inherited by Argentina, and that the principle of territorial integrity should apply. This is historically and factually incorrect. Prior to 1833, there were a number of attempted settlements of the islands, in historical order; France, Britain, Spain and lastly Argentina. But none of these lasted. There was never any internationally accepted recognition of any settlements prior to 1833. However, in contrast, Argentina ratified the Convention of Settlement with the United Kingdom in 1850, after which Argentina did not mention sovereignty for the next 34 years. By the late 1870s there were consulates of Belgium, Chile, Germany, Italy, United States, Sweden and Norway in our capital Stanley.

In short prior to 1833 at times; France, United Kingdom, Spain and Argentina all claimed they had sovereignty. I believe in British sovereignty. After 1833 there is plenty of evidence of international recognition of British sovereignty and right now the UN Charter supports our right to self determination, and we exercise that right by choosing our own political future.

Another myth is that Argentines are not allowed into the Islands. The constitution of the Falklands contains provisions protecting people from discrimination. There is no provision in our immigration ordinance that prevents Argentine nationals from coming to the Falklands. Over the last two years over 5000 Argentine citizens have visited our Islands from cruise ships and over 600 by air. All were granted visitor permits to enter our Islands.

I believe we have formed our own identity over the last 177 years. We see ourselves as Falkland Islanders. I note that earlier this year Argentina celebrated 200 years of their people having their own identity, and my congratulations to them but it is most interesting that their history as a "people" is only 23 years longer than ours and yet they deny that as a "**people**", we exist.

We are now, training our people with even more vigour with the aim of having every position within our Islands filled with either native born Islanders or those who have freely chosen to

embrace and respect our way of life and customs, make the Islands their home; to become Falkland Islanders.

We would like nothing better than to have a peaceful coexistence with Argentina. For a time after the 1982 invasion this was achieved when a former Argentinean government took a pragmatic approach to us and decided to go down a path of peaceful coexistence, We signed agreements covering fisheries conservation and hydrocarbons and both sides shared information in an effort to preserve the fish stocks in the South West Atlantic on which we both depend to some degree.

However as often happens in Argentina the pragmatism was flung aside and the aggressive posturing returned. Now the agreements have been torn up (not by us I hasten to add) and even we can see that the path that they have chosen to go down with regards to fish stocks and their management is unsustainable and will probably lead to the collapse of the biomass in some stocks. This will affect us, as they are straddling stocks, but it will also affect their own people probably more than us.

This aggression now also seems to be taking the form of almost an attempt to blockade the Islands with the Argentine government issuing a decree which if enforced would interfere with the innocent passage of shipping to and from our Islands through international waters and which runs contrary to the UN law of the sea of which Argentina is a signatory. This is just another example of the disdain with which they, the Argentine government, treat internationally binding treaties as negotiated in the name of the United Nations.

I would also like to welcome the new Argentine Foreign minister, Mr Hector Timerman here today. I note that he is a passionate champion of human rights and I applaud this. I sincerely hope that he will just as enthusiastically champion the human rights of the Falkland Islands people as he has done others.

We have a right to exist, to be a nation and we believe that the UN charter gives us that right as a **people** and we ask you all here today to respect and protect our rights to self determination and freedom to choose how and with whom we shape our future.

Those Islands that we are talking about here today, the Falkland Islands isn't just a place where I happen to live and work, they are my home, my children's' home, my country – I am a Falkland Islander. We are a people. We have a right to exist.

I thank you for your time.