



Falkland Islands Government

Office of the Legislative Assembly
Gilbert House, Ross Road
Stanley, Falkland Islands
Telephone: +500 27455
Facsimile: +500 27456
e-mail: assembly@sec.gov.fk

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The Guardian Response column

Simon Jenkins' article, "The Falklands can no longer remain as Britain's expensive nuisance" (26 February), fails to acknowledge the fact that the Falklands have moved on, unlike Mr. Jenkins' opinions. Argentina's endeavours to force their colonial ambitions on a small country in direct denial of the freely expressed wishes of its people are not new and ignore our basic right to self determination.

The Argentine claim to the Islands is certainly not strong, as Mr. Jenkins believes; the claim to a territory 300 miles away is neither logical nor valid. Falklands inhabitants did not replace an indigenous population because there was none. The Islands were claimed by Britain in 1765, long before Argentina existed as a country and have been permanently settled since 1833. Some families like mine, can now boast eight and nine generations – my grandchildren are eighth generation Islanders. The Falkland Islands are an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom, with internal matters governed by a democratically elected Legislative Assembly, of which I am a Member.

Neither does the United Nations accept the legitimacy of the Argentine claim. As he made clear to President Kirchner last week, the most that the Secretary General is prepared to do is to mediate between Britain and Argentina should both sides agree to discuss sovereignty. That is a far cry from endorsing Argentina's arguments. The annual vote in the UN Decolonisation Committee is a sham - the Falkland Islands are not a colony and the debate there is therefore an irrelevance. More relevant are the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, both of which endorse the principles of self-determination.

We have repeatedly attempted to work with Argentina and agreed a joint declaration on co-operation on oil exploration in 1995. This was renounced by Argentina in 2007. Co-operation on sustainable fisheries through a Joint Commission was a way for the Falklands and Argentina to conserve South Atlantic stocks through the exchange of scientific data, joint experimental cruises and the setting of sustainable catch levels. Argentina not only withdrew from the Commission but also sets unsustainably high quotas in some fish stocks. This is an abrogation of a responsibility to their own people, as well as the rest of the world.

Mr Jenkins states that "Argentina has not threatened military action over the Ocean Guardian" (the oil rig currently drilling in our waters). But it is clear that our large neighbour is attempting to achieve by economic warfare what it failed to achieve by military means. It has threatened sanctions against companies holding licenses to fish in Falklands waters and tried to exclude Falkland Islands representatives from participating at international conferences. It prevents charter flights from other countries in South America flying to the Islands and is now it is attempting to disrupt our oil exploration by threats to hinder shipping to the Islands. These are hardly the acts of a friendly and peaceful neighbour.

We remain eternally grateful to those who liberated us from the Argentine aggression in 1982, by referring to that time as "the silliest of wars" Mr. Jenkins not only insults their memory but also manages to diminish the incredible achievement of those who freed us.

Mr. Jenkins believes us to be an “expensive legacy of Empire”, he should be aware that the Islands are self financing, except for defence and the Falkland Islands Government has expressed the wish to contribute more to these costs, should oil be discovered in commercial quantities. Of course, it should be pointed out, that the reason that defence is needed is the continued Argentine claim to my country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Cheek". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

The Honourable Jan Cheek
Member of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly

Email: jancheek@horizon.co.fk