

# FALKLAND ISLANDS



United Nations General Assembly  
63<sup>rd</sup> Session

Special Committee of 24 on Decolonisation

18 June 2009

Statement by  
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Legislative Assembly of the Falkland Islands

Mr. Chairman, your Excellencies, Members of the Committee,

I stand before you with great pride as a democratically elected member of the Falkland Islands Government speaking about our small but dynamic country. There are probably only two of us, in this room today, that can talk currently, historically, knowledgably and legitimately about the Falklands and how our families and the families of the people we know and represent, have worked from the early eighteen hundreds to shape the country that we call home: The Falkland Islands.

The Argentines will argue on four main topics which are 1) The Spanish colonial claim inherited at independence in 1816; 2) the brief, partial and sporadic post-independence occupation before 1833; 3) the Islands proximity to Argentina and 4) the transient nature of the Falklands population. If sovereignty rights were to be determined by these arguments and applied to the Falklands case alone, it would be unfair but otherwise the implications would be huge. Imagine every country complying with these demands with every international border reverting back to how it was in 1833. Would America for example return parts of California to Mexico or Russia demand Alaska? The territorial integrity, if abided to by all, would also mean unbelievable global chaos.

I have chosen to concentrate my address on the people and their achievements and to demonstrate how they have earned their right to determine their own future.

Hundreds of thousands of cruise ship passengers have visited the islands in recent years. These people bare witness to a society with its own distinctive Falkland Island flavour. Many of our guests are Argentine (over three thousand this year alone) who take the opportunity to walk around Stanley or go on trips to wildlife hot-spots or places of interest. A few make the trip to the Argentine cemetery outside Darwin, which is an hour and a half from Stanley.

These cruises into Stanley mirror the route that many settlers to the Falklands took in the eighteen hundreds up until the 1970s although not quite in this luxurious splendour

The evidence of our 176-year history starts for many on the approach to Port William, which is the outer harbour of Stanley. The Pembroke lighthouse, visible today, was built in 1906 but its predecessor was built from iron and wood and was functioning in 1855. Two earlier structures were used to mark the entrance to Port William and the associated dangers.

Port William is where many large cruise vessels anchor and many visitors board their tenders which motor through the Narrows and view Stanley's waterfront stretching East and West with the prominent features like the Anglican Cathedral, Marmont Row and Crozier Place standing out for all to see. All tenders dock at the Public Jetty. This was built when the town was first established in the 1840s. One of those responsible for building it was James Biggs, who had arrived in 1842 with his wife Margaret and four young children. After they had made their new home in Stanley, the couple went on to have two more children, thirty-eight grandchildren and a hundred and forty-one great grandchildren. Today one of their great-great-great grandchildren is the Librarian; another is a farmer, a third manager of the Museum. Of the sixth generation, their great-great-great-great-grandchildren, one is assistant editor of the local newspaper; another is deputy head of the Infant and Junior School.

Moving West along Ross Road, the visitor comes to Stanley Cottage built in 1844, probably the first private house to be constructed in the new town of Stanley. For many years it was the home of successful merchant George Dean and his wife Orissa. They had no children of their own and effectively adopted the family of William Luxton from Devon, who had come to the Falklands in 1864. The Luxtons established themselves as craftsmen and farmers and today William Luxton's great-great-great granddaughter, Zoe, is the Veterinary Officer with the Agricultural Department.

Immediately to the West of Stanley Cottage, the visitor comes to Marmont Row, a long stone building overlooking Victory Green in the centre of the town. Jacob Goss, who had arrived in the Falklands like James Biggs in 1842, constructed this in the 1850s. He opened the first hotel in Stanley, known as The Eagle Inn. He went on to build up a successful business as a merchant. A visitor flying in the Islander aircraft today might be grateful for the mechanical skills of Morgan Goss who is part of a

team that maintains these planes and is the great-great grandson of Jacob. Another great great grandson, William, manages our Islands fuel imports and deliveries.

Going west again is the Police Station. This attractive stone building was constructed in the 1870s. Here is the office of Police Inspector Len McGill, another great-great-great grandchild of James and Margaret Biggs.

Almost directly south of the Police Station, a few hundred yards up the hill, stands the Rose Hotel another venerable Stanley establishment, opened in 1864 by Thomas Aldridge. Thomas Aldridge came to the Falkland Islands from Nova Scotia, Canada, in the late 1840s and married Mary Ann Price in Holy Trinity Church, Stanley in 1856. If Thomas Aldridge could look today from the upper west window of his hotel, he would see, across the children's playground, the modern hospital where his great-great-great granddaughter, Nina Aldridge, works as a radiologist. Working with her as a physiotherapist is Anna Luxton, another of William Luxton's great-great-great granddaughters.

Returning to the waterfront, visitors find themselves among the oldest Stanley buildings at the Government Dockyard. The jetty, storehouses and smithy were, like the Public Jetty, built by James Biggs and his fellow-workers in the 1840s, as they helped establish the new town of Stanley. Flanking the western entrance to the Dockyard are two wooden buildings. One of them houses the offices of the local paper, Penguin News. At the editor's desk sits sixth-generation Falkland Islander, Ailie Biggs, the great-great-great-great granddaughter of James and Margaret.

The other building is known as Gilbert House and is the office of the eight elected members of the Legislative Assembly. However it was once the home of the Government pilot, James Anderson. Anderson was a Danish mariner who came to the Falkland Islands in 1859. He married Mary Riley in Stanley in 1867 and they had twelve children. A visitor today using the local air service might find Eddie Anderson, great-grandson of James Anderson, at the controls.

James Anderson is an example of the many mariners from Scandinavian countries that have settled in the Falkland Islands over the years. The terrible storms encountered on

the great nineteenth century trade route around Cape Horn forced many sailing ships to seek refuge and repair in the Falkland Islands. Others were wrecked on the rocky shores. Their crews embodied remarkable seamanship, courage and endurance and brought their skills and enterprise to the Islands when they chose to settle. Names such as Andreasen, Henricksen, Larsen, Berntsen and Pettersson echo through Falklands' history.

Two of the elected members who work from Gilbert House today represent this legacy. Councillor Ian Hansen, who spoke here in 2007, is the great-grandson of Charles Hansen, a mariner from Gothenburg, Sweden, who settled in the Falklands in 1882. Councillor Dr Andrea Clausen is married to Gustavius Clausen, great-great grandson of Ulrich Clausen, who was born in Schleswig-Holstein in 1853 and came to the Falklands on the sailing ship 'Star of India', which put into Stanley for repairs in 1877. For the descendants of many mariners, agriculture replaced the sea as a profession and Councillor Hansen, as the owner of a farm on West Falklands, represents this tradition today.

Past the Councillors Office, set back behind playing fields, is the Falkland Islands Community School, opened in 1992. Contrasting it with the facilities available one hundred years earlier shows how far education in the Falklands has come. In 1892 the secondary school was in temporary accommodation in the loft of the Dockyard store, the old school building having been destroyed by a landslide. The Government Schoolmaster, Frederick Durose, had about sixty children under his care. The one hundred and forty children in secondary education today are looked after by eighteen trained teaching staff, one of whom, is yet another great-great-great grandchild of James Biggs. Another teacher is the great-great-great granddaughter of William Fell, who came to the Falklands from Scotland as a shepherd in 1860. Of Frederick Durose's own great-grandchildren, one runs the Market Garden that supplies Stanley with fresh fruit and vegetables; another is captain of the inter-island ferry.

Returning from the Community School towards the Public Jetty, we pass the hospital where another great-great-great grandchild of William Fell is a doctor, working with the descendants of William Luxton and Thomas Aldridge. Further along the same road stands the Infant/Junior School, modernised and extended in 1996 and again in

2002. Teaching here, along with James Biggs' great-great-great-great granddaughter, is Juliet Poole, the great-great-great-granddaughter of shipwrecked mariner, Charles Poole, who was born in Germany and came to the Falklands when the barquentine Concordia ran ashore on the north coast in 1891.

Finally, at the end of John Street, as we turn down Philomel Hill back towards the Public Jetty towards, we find Waverley House, built by Charles Williams, a merchant from the Azores who made his home in the Falklands, becoming naturalised in 1867. Today the building is the headquarters of Fortuna, a pioneer among successful fishing companies in the Falklands. Until recently, Fortuna was co-owned by a great-great-great granddaughter of James and Margaret Biggs.

Outside Stanley much has also happened: Just as we remember the men that cut the first clay roads by hand, we know the individuals that have built over 900 kilometres of road over the last 20 years or more. Roads that have really improved the quality of life and have contributed to the development of our country.

A typical journey by road from Kingsford Valley, a farm on the West of the East Falklands, to Stanley is less than two hours. This is a world away from the pioneers of this region who had to travel on board one of the local schooners that plied their trade in Falkland waters and were the backbone of communications in those days. A recent article in the local press describes a harrowing trip in one of those schooners, at the turn of the century, where they ran aground and ended up abandoning the vessel and making a shelter on a small Island near by. I mention this again because it is all about Falkland Islanders in the past, living and building a future in the Islands from personal choice.

The Captain of this schooner was Frank Rowlands who arrived in the Islands as a boy when the vessel he was on was wrecked in 1860. Rowlands is another name that is part of today's rich tapestry of Falkland life.

We are accused by Argentina of being an itinerate, planted, people shipped in by the British, but the few old family names that I have used to highlight the historic diversity of Falkland people suggest that this is not the case. This variety continues to

this day with individuals and families hailing from counties all over the world. Surely no-one believes that the British could force or coerce the people of all these countries, with no affiliations in those days, to come to the Falklands and live here for a number of generations. Today Islanders and potential immigrants alike, see the Falklands life style and society as a safe and stable one with a personable community with a number of ways to better one's self. I suggest that these are the natural forces that have brought peoples to all parts of the New World

We have a strong identity. We are Falkland Islanders. We know the people that have built our country from roads, farms, shops, hotels to businesses and today's private sector.

We recognise our high-fliers who we hope will shape our future and the folk who will do the day-to-day tasks in our community. We have our likeable rogues and the more puritanical. Every one is an important and integral part of our community and makes us the society that we are today. Even Falkland Islanders that live overseas write to our local newspaper voicing their opinions on what is right or wrong for the place they call home.

This pride and feeling of belonging is not exclusive to big and powerful countries: we have it in abundance here in the Falklands and it is not for sale or trade.

Argentina, however, dismisses us as a people but our presence is clear and permanent for all to see. William Ratliff, a fellow of Harvard University's Hoover Institute, wrote in the International Herald Tribune in 2007 "A high percentage of Falkland families have resided longer in the islands than Argentines on the mainland"

The Argentines then accuse the British of removing their population even though borders weren't decided between Chile and Argentina in Patagonia until the late 1870s

Penultimately, all reasonable nations look to negotiation as the way forward in today's modern world but in our situation we aren't talking about negotiation. Argentina is talking about our total capitulation which is a completely different

concept and in fact would introduce the modern equivalent of the very thing this committee was set up to dissolve. A small country dominated by a ruthless overlord with no thought and much contempt for the populace that have worked so hard to make the Falklands what they are today.

Your Excellencies.

This is the last year of this Legislative Assembly but I am sure that whoever gets elected towards the end of the year will come to power on a strong mandate regarding our right for self determination and they will stand here like my colleague and I and ask you to examine the rhetoric of Argentina regardless of her size and influence and recognise our right as a small community to live the life of our choice and not to be swallowed up by an alien power that see us as imposters in our own land.

Mr Chairman, your Excellencies and Committee Members, thank you for your time and consideration.