

Statement to the Decolonisation Committee
New York June 21st 2007
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Mr President

Thank you for this opportunity for the people of the Falkland Islands to explain their position through their democratically elected representatives.

Last time I stood here I outlined the contrast between the history of Argentina and the Falklands.

In Argentina, Europeans arrived and over time replaced the indigenous populations. In the Falklands, without an indigenous population, the Europeans, aided and abetted by the US, jockeyed for sovereignty with Britain coming out on top.

Unlike Argentina the Falklands has enjoyed stability and prudence through the good times and the bad throughout our 170 year history. We have, since the conflict, enjoyed a financially buoyant period, developing our country on many fronts. We are a multi cultural, tolerant society that wants for very little. We are totally different from Argentina in most fundamental areas and just want to carry on evolving without the constant negative actions from our nearest neighbour.

It is an unhappy duty to tell this committee that so much good has come directly as a consequence of the 1982 conflict. From years of procrastination where we did not want to offend our covetous neighbour, we moved to a position where we were able to declare an economic zone in the seas around the Falklands, and to invigorate what was a shaky farming based economy. Today, due to our own efforts, we have a vibrant economy with an ever strengthening private sector.

One of the first areas that we invested this new found wealth in was roads. Within two or three years we will see the completion of the basic road network which ties in all the farms, settlements and our town together. East and West Falkland roads are now developing a regular ferry service. These developments have improved living in camp and have led to opportunities in many areas, but especially tourism.

Education has been transformed from the basic to a sophisticated system from Early Child Care and Pre-School to University. Not so long ago further and higher education was for the privileged or the very gifted who won scholarships. Today we build a strong foundation here in the Islands up to GCSE and then a healthy cross section of students go on to further education in academic or vocational fields with further opportunity to carry on to degree level.

Our nation is starting to reap the rewards of this investment with tradesmen with internationally recognised qualifications, and young adults returning to the Islands as vets, doctors, lawyers, plumbers, teachers, and students with childcare qualifications – and other certified skills in many areas. Even politically we are feeling the benefits of our education policy with graduates sitting on this and the previous council.

Health services today are unrecognisable to the ones we had pre conflict. We have a well funded, modern department with skills and expertise in areas that were virtually unheard of here 25 years ago. We have speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, health visitors. All these improvements have been carried out by our Government with our money.

The number of houses in our capital must have doubled in the last 15 to 20 years with East Stanley housing development reflecting not only the strength of our economy, but people's confidence in the Falklands future. Most people live in houses that have modern conveniences like central heating, double glazed windows, fully insulated and with modern furniture and fittings – microwaves, gas cookers, dish washers, automatic washing machines etc. Most people in the Falklands have a comfortable existence. We have a social welfare system that helps our vulnerable and the less fortunate members of our community. We do not have chronically poor or people living on the streets.

Telecommunications have made a great difference to the Falklands, just like it has to people world wide. Today we enjoy the benefits of a modern telecommunications system – and we don't stand still. This year mobile phones have been introduced to Stanley with broadband internet access to follow shortly. This is an initiative driven by the private sector and an investment that reflects the confidence in our economy and in our future.

Politically we continue to improve our democratic processes developing a system where local politicians drive policies and are accountable for their actions to the electorate. Much of the workings of government are open to the general public and the press. The present council is working on the next step of having the equivalent of ministries and direct responsibilities in all areas of local governance. For a number of years we have replaced the Governor in Legislative Council and now have a Speaker of the House. Our continuously maturing democracy makes a mockery of the claim that we are a Colony.

The Argentines have always spoken about 1833 and how they were thrown out of the Islands. A claim that we challenge on a number of grounds. Many borders have changed in South America and indeed the world from the 1800s to the present day. Chile in a war from 1879-83 gained the provinces of Antofagasta from Bolivia and Tarapace and Arica from Peru. Even more recently in the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay and the treaty of 1938 which settled boundaries in Paraguay's favour. What chance is there of America returning lets say Alaska to Russia (1867) or California to Mexico, first discovered by the Spanish in 1542 and ceded to USA in 1828. Perhaps it is also worth mentioning that Uruguay was not a country in its own right until an agreement between Argentina and Brazil.

How could anyone envisage us becoming an Argentine Colony – why would we want to change our stability or our identity of over 170 years to embrace the alien ideology of a different people? With all the experience of the UN we know what happens when peoples are forced to live side by side.

My presentation is focussed on us, the Falkland Islands people, where we are, the progress we have made and where we would like to go. We celebrate 24 years of being liberated this week. We also celebrate our achievements, our confidence and most of all our society as a people. We would like to continue our success story. We would also like to have a normal relationship with our neighbour Argentina. I ask the foreign minister of Argentina today to engage on the Global issues of our region like protecting the straddling species that inhabit our independent areas and to join forces generally to look after the environment. Surely in today's enlightened world these things should not be forgotten just because of our differences.

As members of the committee of 24, the people of the Falkland Islands urge you to exercise your stated aims and to support that fundamental right of Self Determination.