

**Statement to the Decolonisation Committee
New York June 21st 2007
The Hon Ian Hansen
Legislative Councillor, Falkland Islands**

Mr President,

Thank you for this opportunity to address this committee and to make representation for the people of the Falkland Islands.

I would like to begin by describing how the Falkland Islands Government has evolved and now operates.

In the areas of self-government and democracy we have made steady progress. In 1949 the first elected members joined appointed members on Legislative Council and they were elected by universal suffrage. In 1985 our first constitution articulated a range of fundamental rights and freedoms. It contained provisions for the independence of the judiciary and laid the ground for a fully elected Legislative Council consisting of eight members. Legislative Council meets regularly to pass legislation to promote peace, order and good government. Government policy is set by Executive Council, which is made up of three members of legislative council who we elect annually from our own number. The governor is obliged to consult Executive Council in respect of his functions. He retains responsibility for foreign policy and defence although our views are sought on these issues. The governor articulates the views and advice of the UK government and also represents the views of FIG to the UK Government. It is essential that there is an open co-operative relationship between governor and councillors, and this is the case.

Political parties have not developed and all legislative councillors are independent. In the absence of parties there is no elected leadership. This leads to a consensus style of government which serves well although in the absence of government and opposition other methods of scrutiny have evolved. Each councillor takes responsibility for a particular portfolio. We do not currently have ministerial responsibility although this is under active consideration as part of our current constitutional review. Portfolio responsibility is exercised by working closely with the relevant departments and chairing government committees. New policy is developed by these committees which meet in public and consult widely before sending it to Executive Council for further debate and ratification. This provides a good measure of scrutiny. Government policy is implemented by the Chief Executive, the head of our civil service.

I stand here not only as a democratically elected member of the Falkland Islands Government, but also as a fourth generation Islander whose ancestors made the Falklands their home over a hundred and fifty years ago. My great-great grandfather on my mother's side originally arrived from Scotland as a shepherd for those settlers who were already established owners of vast areas of land, while my great –great grandfather on my father's side sailed from Denmark and decided to stay. Settlers such as these arrived with the intention to make the Falkland Islands a home for themselves and future generations.

The Falklands can be compared to other New World countries including Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and even Argentina whose current populations consist of predominantly immigrant European stock.

The only significant difference is that there was not an indigenous population to replace in the Falklands as was the case in other places.

Today I still have family connections in both Scotland and Denmark but I do not consider myself to belong to those countries any more than I would expect them to claim to be Falkland Islanders.

My family—like many other families who settled in the Falklands over a hundred and fifty years ago—have not only farmed the land and sailed the Falkland waters. As society has changed and progressed, we have served our country as doctors, nurses, politicians, teachers, policemen, and contributed greatly to all kinds of craftsmanship needed to make our Islands the successful and prosperous place it is today—despite Argentina's constant refusal to recognise our right to self-determination and our right to choose our own future.

Twenty five years ago that right to self determination was challenged to the extreme by the unprecedented and appalling invasion of our Islands by Argentine forces. Thankfully our freedom and privileges were restored after the occupying military forces were removed. Now—twenty five years later—we commemorate those who made the ultimate sacrifice so that Falkland Islanders and all those who wish to make the Falkland Islands their home may do so in the knowledge that we can determine our own future.

Since the war, we have prospered and developed far beyond any expectation we would have had prior to 1982.

Today, the Falkland Islands have a strong economy, a profitable business community, excellent education and health services. There is no poverty within our community, indeed, most people live in modern houses with all modern conveniences.

Our Government continues to invest in capital infrastructure. The building of a wind farm to supply Stanley with a less expensive form of electricity, the construction of ferry terminals and the introduction of a ferry between East and West Falklands, are amongst many other commitments affordable to us.

Our fishing industry remains the main contribution to our national income. We continue to be recognised by many other countries as having a practice for regulation and conservation that is enviable and sets a good example world wide. Our desire to preserve and protect fishing stocks remains as strong as ever, and we would welcome more co-operation in this field from those who also have fishing rights in the oceans of the South Atlantic.

This will to cooperate, of course, also applies to the potential development of offshore minerals, which continues to attract interest from many companies, even in the face of opposition from Argentina.

Tourism at present is our second biggest industry but undoubtedly has the potential to become even stronger and more viable than it is. Despite Argentina's refusal to allow non scheduled charter flights into the Falklands, our tourist industry not only remains buoyant but continues to thrive and expand. The amount of cruise ship passengers has risen again this year as has the amount of land based tourists. We are now reaching the point where investment in infrastructure is needed to cope with the ever growing number of visitors to our shores, and this can only be seen as a good and positive thing. Again, responsible conservation and protection ensures that we still have some of the most fascinating landscape and wildlife in the world for the enjoyment of those visitors.

Communications within the Falklands proceed to develop with the near completion of our island wide road network, the introduction of mobile telephones and an advanced internet access. The possibility of having business opportunities in the rural community, other than farming is something that this will only serve to assist.

As in countries all over the world, agricultural enterprises in the Falklands are not in the best of health. The Falkland Islands Government recognises the need to support farming in general and have no qualms in doing so by aiding farmers with grants and loans so they may contribute to our economy in the longer term.

In short, our Government supports all industries within our Islands, without favour or preference. As long as it is understood we are a British Overseas Territory, we do not penalise or discriminate against any individuals or companies who would wish to play a role in the future development of the Falklands. The approach taken by the Falkland Islands Government is a positive and forward looking one.

I have taken the liberty to use these examples to illustrate our capability as a small but fiscally successful overseas territory. We ask for no financial aid other than that which provides our defence from a much larger and aggressive country. This financial aid would not be required if Argentina would only recognise our fundamental right to self-determination and cease their invalid claim over our Islands.

We are confident that we can maintain our positive outlook for the future and ask for your endorsement that we are permitted to proceed as we would wish - as a democratic society able to choose our own destiny.

I would respectfully suggest that to have your support would surely only uphold the stated aims of this committee.

Mr President, Thank you for allowing me to speak to this committee.