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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International
Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: the United Nations at 70: taking
stock of the decolonization agenda**

**Managua, Nicaragua
19 to 21 May 2015**

STATEMENT BY

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(SAINT HELENA)

C24. Nicaragua 2015

Mr Chairman, Honourable Delegates thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of St Helena. My name is Pamela Ward Pearce and I am an Elected Member of the Legislative Council of St Helena.

As you may be aware St Helena is very isolated, to illustrate this, my journey to reach here began 11th May – eight days ago, when I left St Helena and arrived two days later at Ascension Island (700miles away). After a wait of two days I flew from Ascension Island to Britain then from London to Managua via Miami.

This physical journey is measured in days not hours, although the last leg of the journey was far quicker. This illustrates our isolation better than any words I could utter.

St Helena does not have an airport, as yet, but one is being built and is almost completed, we hope to have it operational at the beginning of next year. Hence the first part of my journey was by ship and measured in days sailing rather than hours of flying.

This enormous change will be so much more than reducing the travelling time to hours rather than days or weeks, it will also have an emotional, cultural, historic and social impact. We are an island people and prior to this all our lives have been inextricably linked to the sea, our ancestors arrived by sea, eminent visitors arrived by sea – Halley, Darwin, Wellington- even Napoleon!

Historically we have mirrored British history from the glory days of the East India Company in 17th century where we were a major victualing stop, then to a British Colony and now as a British Overseas Territory. St Helena is and has always been very proud of her association with Britain and St Helenians fought hard to have our British citizenship restored in 2002. This partnership has spanned several hundred years and we value and depend on it.

Our economy is based on Budgetary Aid which we receive each year from Britain we currently do not have the ability or the will to become independent. However, with the advent of the new airport we are hoping and planning for an improved economy, with greater self-sufficiency and autonomy which should lead to increasing self-determination.

St Helena has become energised over the last 2-3 years when the construction of the airport began, people have started to have hope - St Helenians have begun to return to the island to help build and share the potential prosperity. There are correspondingly underlying fears that the tourism industry, crucial for the improved economy, will not deliver and there is no alternative plan B. There is also the fear that success will only benefit the few and not the many which will create a situation of the “haves and the have not’s” creating divisions within the island community.

There is similarly a fear surrounding an influx of expatriate government workers which has been necessary to help provide the skills that were not present on island for the improved infrastructure, needed for delivery of the airport (4 years ago there were about 20 families now there are 100 families and growing). This provides an overarching with almost another tier of government that appear to sometimes operate without reference to Elected Members; which, paradoxically, has the effect of turning the clock back to even greater colonialism. This has changed the island dynamics, which results in social divisions and lack of integration which disadvantages both the newly established expatriate community and the St Helenian community. There has also been increasing pressure to confer an easier pathway to qualifying for St Helenian status, which would enable expatriate workers

to stay beyond their contracts. This is not welcomed by the island that recognise with just 47 square miles and 4802 people (4170 of St Helenian origin) we could have the eventual consequence of overwhelming the island, with the ensuing effect of St Helenians becoming a minority in their own homeland. Trying to prevent this happening has led to accusations of racism.

The international wages, relocation packages and concessions enjoyed by these expatriate government workers are disproportionate in comparison with the local wages and affords them a privilege unavailable to local people. To grant them St Helenian status would be to further disadvantage our own people.

St Helena punches above her weight in some areas, for a population of just 4802 people there are 70 + civil societies on the island, over 90% of St Helenians own their own homes most people have physically built these homes with their own hands – this is a major investment!

These investments have been mostly financed by off shore working on neighbouring Ascension Island and on the Falkland Islands. Ironically these same people who have invested so heavily in the future of their island are now feeling abandoned – with the opening of the airport comes the demise of the ship which is the link between St Helena and Ascension Island (which provides an Air Bridge to the Falklands). There is no definite plan by Britain to operate an air link or a shipping service between the Islands, although there are still talks underway with the Local Government on Ascension, the British Government and the Americans who operate the airport on Ascension. Given how little real time remains before this happens people are, quite rightly too, feeling disenfranchised, they fear another Diego Garcia.

We cannot allow this to happen, a solution must be found, they too are St Helenians. They are not faceless people- they are family, friends, people I went to school with, worshiped in church with, camped at Girl guides with and therefore must not be abandoned.

Our new constitution of 2009 has enshrined many of the Human Rights Treaties, but there is much work that still needs to happen. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has not yet been implemented, there is the commitment to do so and work is ongoing, but The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities there is, as yet, no commitment to extend. Similarly The Freedom of Information has not been adopted and there are no plans to do so in the immediate future. In fact as recent as last year we successfully achieved the Right to Nationality and Citizenship as this was not included in our 2009 constitution.

St Helena stands on the brink of a momentous future, we need to organise and control that future, so that the legacy we leave is a St Helena capable of surviving and sustaining her people for generations to come, so our grandchildren and their grandchildren will have an improved St Helena, but fundamentally the same beautiful island home.