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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International Decade for
the Eradication of Colonialism: accelerating action

Denarau, Nadi, Fiji
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STATEMENT BY

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(FALKLAND ISLANDS (MALVINAS))¹

¹A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Mr Chairman, honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. I am Roger Edwards, an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly of the Falkland Islands and today therefore am representing the views of those Islanders.

Falkland Islanders enjoy financial self-sufficiency, internal self-government and the right to determine their own future – in other words, the right to self-determination. Falkland Islanders are British, living in a British Overseas Territory because they want to. It is a wish ably demonstrated in March 2013 when we, the Legislative Assembly, organised an internationally observed referendum in which 99.8% of the 92% of the voters answered “yes” to the question-

“Do you wish the Falkland Islands to retain their current political status as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom?”

The Government of Argentina has refused to recognise the result of the Referendum and, more recently, has accused the United Kingdom of ‘double standards’, comparing our Referendum with the one in Crimea. The circumstances of the two referenda are completely different. The Falkland Islands Referendum was developed by the Falkland Islands Government over a period of several months and in consultation with the Islanders. International Observers adjudged it to be free, fair and transparent, and in accordance with Falkland Islands Law. The Crimean Referendum, however, breached the Ukrainian Constitution, and was organised in a rush, without consultation, and without the participation of the Ukrainian Government. It was held in the intimidating presence of external, armed forces rather than international observers.

The right of Falkland Islanders to determine their own future is unequivocal. The principle of self-determination is enshrined in Article 1, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations. Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights affirm the right of all peoples to self-determination, and lay upon States Parties, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing Territories and Trust Territories, the obligation to promote the realisation of the right and respect it, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter. At no point has the United Nations ever explicitly denied this right to the Falkland Islanders.

At this point, I wish to remind this committee that it is not charged by the Secretary General or the General Assembly with discussing or resolving sovereignty disputes nor to advance, or support, claims to the Falkland Islands, or any other territory, in this forum and to do so is an abuse of this committee’s purpose. I wish to make it clear that contrary to the views of some of this Committee, the Falkland Islanders do not consider themselves to be a colony. We enjoy a modern relationship and shared values with the United Kingdom.

I wish to further remind this committee that under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960, people from the Non-Self-Governing Territories can exercise self-determination and reach full measure of Self-Government by Free Association, by Integration or by becoming Independent. Building on this, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) of 1970 offered a fourth option as an outcome of a people’s exercise of the right of self-determination. This fourth option enabled “any other political status freely determined by a people”.

I believe that the Falklands Referendum referred to earlier demonstrates that fourth option perfectly.

Argentina argues that we are not a 'people' but an implanted British population put there to further Britain's colonial aspirations. Our recent census clearly demonstrates that this is not the case as the evidence produced states that we have people from more than 60 ethnic background groups living and working peacefully together and they have been doing so for the past 181 years. Except of course for a very brief period of 74 days in 1982 when Argentina brutally invaded our Island home. Our population has evolved in the same way as that of other countries in the region.

I have no doubt that Britain has retained sovereignty over our beautiful Islands since 1765, a time when Argentina did not exist as a sovereign nation. Britain has never relinquished its sovereignty claim over the Islands and, once again, Falkland Islanders have freely demonstrated their wish to remain British. The Republic of Argentina's claim to the Islands, which it bases on the principle of disruption to its territorial integrity, is without foundation, as the Islands have never legitimately been administered by, or formed part of, the sovereign territory of the Republic of Argentina.

We have lived without a break in these Islands for over 180 years and our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents have forged a lifestyle for us to enjoy in a beautiful and unique environment, one for which we retain stewardship until we pass it safely on to our own children and grandchildren. Our ancestors with all their varied ethnic backgrounds, worked hard to make our Islands prosperous while retaining and conserving its wildlife and abundant marine resources for future generations. We are now self-financing and have been since the late 1980s and we receive no economic aid from Britain nor do we pay any taxes or levies to the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom assists us with our foreign affairs and defence. A defence, I might say, only required because of the belligerent nature of our closest neighbour. It is a defence that is maintained at the smallest possible force in order to deter any future aggressor. Argentine stories of massive military build-up in the South West Atlantic are quite frankly just that, stories, not truth. Its claim that there is a nuclear NATO base on the Islands is patently ludicrous.

We would be delighted to have a normal, friendly relationship with all our neighbours, to freely trade with, work with and discuss things of mutual benefit – such as the conservation of straddling fish stocks. Instead we are not recognised nor accepted as a people in our own right. Indeed, Argentina has done all it can to damage our economy by persuading Mercosur countries not to permit Falklands' flagged vessels to enter their ports, by passing legislation which will penalise those who participate in the Falklands' hydrocarbon industry, and by disrupting cruise ships travelling to the Falklands. The Argentine Foreign Minister has refused to acknowledge our existence and has declined a meeting with the British Foreign Minister because some of my colleagues were to be present. I can't help wonder if this rhetoric towards us is a means of diverting attention away from their own obvious economic and political problems? In the Falkland Islands we are continuing to develop our economy and unique society, despite our aggressive neighbour. We are an Island population and as such thrive on challenges. Indeed since the invaders' exit in 1982 we have grown financially, culturally and with even greater determination to forge a bright future.

The challenges we face are many. Our approach is not to react to each and every Argentine act of aggression but to continue to develop the economy in our own way, and to ensure that we are not

diverted by outside pressures. Our focus will not be diverted by antagonistic attempts to prevent us from pursuing our aims. We are clear that we will concentrate on our goals and our agenda, not on someone else's.

Mr Chairman, your predecessors have visited Argentina and have no doubt received a one sided fantasy briefing. Each year, for several years, we have invited the Chair of this committee to visit our beautiful Islands and to see for themselves the way the people manage and conserve our natural resources but so far no one has taken up that invitation. Mr Chairman, I hope that you are a man who is open to the truth as I would like to invite you, publicly, to visit the Falkland Islands to see for yourself our way of life and the freedoms that we enjoy.

Mr Chairman, this is the third time that I have addressed this committee and I do hope that over the years our wishes have been expressed both loudly and clearly. I do realise that some people will only hear what they want to hear, others will only hear if they are prepared to listen but I do hope that on this occasion members of this committee are prepared to listen and take note.

I will conclude by asking Members of this committee to ignore the false claims put forward by Argentina and to consider the role of this committee, its aims and purposes and then to support our wishes to remain an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom and to recognise our right to self-determination as is clearly defined in the various documents I have previously alluded to.

Once again Mr Chairman I thank you for allowing me to speak to this committee.