

SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: assessment of decolonization process in today's world

**Nouméa, New Caledonia
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STATEMENT

BY

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(Falkland Islands (Malvinas))¹

¹ A 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,

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to present the case of the Falkland Islands to the Committee of 24 Seminar, here in beautiful New Caledonia. At this point may I pass on my thanks to President Gomez and the People of New Caledonia for their warm welcome and hospitality.

The Falkland Islands are a group of nearly 800 islands in the South West Atlantic. We cover an area of 12,173 Km², with a population of 2,478 people (based on the 2006 census) and 500,000 sheep.

The Falkland Islands enjoy a healthy democracy; on the 5th November 2005 eight new members of the legislative assembly were elected. A new constitution came into force on the 1st January 2009, enhancing local democracy, establishing a greater degree of internal self-government and providing greater transparency and accountability by introducing a public accounts committee and Public Complaints committee. The eight members of the Legislative Assembly elect a speaker of the house and each member is responsible for a number of portfolios. The role of Governor has diminished to one where he advises on good governance, foreign affairs and defence of the Islands.

The Government of the Falkland Islands has full control over the legislation and fiscal regime. We enjoy a very healthy economy based on deep sea fishing, tourism and agriculture. In the last financial year the Islands through licensing of fishing vessels, and various taxes had a revenue of £42 million, although due to a decrease in revenue from the financial markets, the islands are expecting to work on a budget resulting in a £1 million deficit. However, due to the healthy reserves we have built up in the good years this will not have too great an impact on the Islands and we hope that this will be the last year we work on a deficit budget.

All money raised by the Falkland Islands Government is invested in the good of the Islands. A major road construction project linking all settlements outside of Stanley was completed last year. A local ferry service links the two major islands and a coastal shipping service supplies the more remote Islands. A local air service FIGAS is also an effective way to get about the Islands and supplies a flying doctor service.

The Islands also have harnessed the power of the internet, with most families having at least one computer linked to the Internet. This service is currently being improved for the more remote settlements, although all of the islands currently use broad band connections.

Healthcare is also provided free of charge to all local residents and a reciprocal agreement with the UK's National Health Service allows UK residents to enjoy free healthcare on the Islands and for Islanders to gain medical treatment for more serious ailments in the UK.

Education is very high on the agenda. Education is compulsory and free, for all children from the age of 5 to 16, pre-school is also available for children from the age of 3, although it is up to the parent if they wish to send their child. Currently 392 children are educated in the Islands. Class sizes are under 20 children, with about 34

children in each school year. The schools follow the UK's National Curriculum, however, the children follow a local citizenship course tailored to Falkland Islands culture, heritage and nationality. After 16 we have a Training Centre, on the Islands, offering National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in plumbing, carpentry and electrician. This is currently growing and from this year will offer additional NVQs which are more suitable to the new industries developing in the Islands, such as the hospitality industry and catering. Pupils who gain enough points are encouraged to go to the UK to gain A levels or NVQs currently not offered in the Islands. Again students who achieve enough points are then encouraged to go on to tertiary education, this could be anywhere in the world. We currently have 70 children overseas in higher or tertiary education. Most of these children will return to the islands. The Islands can now boast home-grown doctors, vets, lawyers and teachers.

The Falkland Islands have never been a grant in aid colony, depending on the UK for aid. We have no national debt and a healthy reserve. Although the world recession has affected us our investments are starting to recover.

Falkland Islanders are a proud people and rightly so. Our harsh climate, poor soil quality and no onshore minerals make the islands a difficult place to live. However, we have overcome these hardships and adapted to our environment. We have embraced creative thinking and looked forward to new technologies to help advance the Islands.

Every farm has a wind generator, which was subsidised by the Falkland Islands Government, allowing 24 hour power in the most remote of locations. New wind generators developed in Germany, now supply 60% of the power in Stanley. This has allowed us to reduce the cost of electricity, which in the past has been a hold-up to certain developments, but now new doors are open and new opportunities are being planned, so helping to diversify the Islands' economy more.

Offshore a hydrocarbon industry has been developing since 1995. Currently the Islands have a rig drilling an additional eight exploratory wells. Any revenues from this industry will go to the people of the Falkland Islands.

The people of the Falkland Islands have repeatedly expressed our firm views on our position to the Special Committee in the United Nations: we are content with our current relationship with Britain.

But this committee continues to inform us that we have three options – none of which are feasible for us.

The first is full independence. We feel we are currently not financially able to achieve this. Although the Islands have a degree of financial security it is not enough to allow the islands to pay for a full defence programme. This is important to us given the experience of the 1982 invasion by Argentina, and their continued efforts to hold back the Islands' economy.

The other option is to become a freely associated independent state. This would be with either the UK or with Argentina. As Argentina is not a suitable option this

would be the UK. The British Government, however, does not offer us or its other Overseas Territories the possibility of free association.

The third option is integrating with an independent state. Again our choices would be the UK and Argentina. Again, the wishes of the people of the Falkland Islands would be the UK, but again, the British Government does not offer us this possibility.

We are happy with the status quo, and do not like being told by others what to do. During the course of this seminar we have heard how important this committee rates the right of self-determination. I know in the past many of you (who share a common Spanish heritage with Argentina) have supported Argentina in their claim to our Islands.

But the people of the Falkland Islands have a right to self-determination. This is enshrined in the UN Charter. We do not want to be a part of Argentina. It is our right to choose how we wish to govern ourselves.

I believe this committee should be looking to safeguard the rights of small territories and continue to fight for these peoples' rights to self-determination. The Falkland Islands are currently not ready for independence, but we do express our right of self-determination. With almost all of the people of the Falkland Islands wishing to remain and enjoy our British Overseas Territory status it is quite clear where we stand on this issue.

Thank you for your time today.