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SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Caribbean Regional Seminar on the implementation of the Second
International Decade for the Eradication of
Colonialism: next steps in decolonization

St. George's, Grenada
22 to 24 May 2007

Statement by Dr. Richard Davies

Falkland Islands (Malvinas)



C24 CARIBBEAN REGIONAL SEMINAR
ST. GEORGE'S, GRENADA
22-24 MAY 2007

STATEMENT

THE HONOURABLE DR RICHARD DAVIES
LEGISLATIVE COUNCILLOR
FALKLAND ISLANDS

C24 Caribbean Regional Seminar 2007
Statement by the Hon. Dr. Richard Davies
Legislative Councillor, Falkland Islands

Madame Chair, your Excellencies, thank you for inviting me to this seminar. I would also like to thank the government of Grenada for their warm welcome and hospitality. Thanks are also due to the secretariat for their assistance with my travel arrangements. It is a pleasure to be here, as a democratically elected representative of the Falkland Islands, to address you on behalf of our people. I have missed budget session, the most important week in our legislative calendar in order to be here. We take the committee's work seriously and we believe that it is important that we represent ourselves, whatever the difficulties of limited resource and isolation.

De-colonisation without self determination is meaningless.

Firstly I will summarise our views the views of Councillors and people of the Falkland Islands on our present status. I will then briefly describe our government and economy, demonstrating that we are no longer a colony. I will go on to make some comments about our relationship with Argentina, and finally suggest how progress can be made.

Firstly, it is our clear and informed wish to continue our present association with the United Kingdom. This is an appropriate form of self determination and we do not currently seek independence or integration. We have an appropriate and modern relationship with a member state of the United Nations. The nature of our relationship with Britain is enshrined within the Constitution – a public document which clearly demonstrates Britain's commitment to protecting our right to self-determination. For our part we commit ourselves to abide by Britain's international obligations and the principles of good governance. This is not a colonial relationship. It is a voluntary and continually evolving partnership which is based on our right to self-determination, and which seeks to give us the greatest possible control over our own lives. This is entirely consistent with the principles and Charter of the United Nations. British sovereignty does not imply a colonial status.

Secondly, we do not wish the British Government to negotiate our sovereignty with Argentina. Falkland Islanders are strongly opposed to Argentine sovereignty and no one who visits the Falklands could have any doubt about this. We have never been part of Argentina. I am not going to rehearse the arguments again but I will just repeat that we have never been part of the Republic of Argentina and territorial integrity is not a valid argument, however frequently repeated. It is clear to us that Argentina has no intention of negotiating anything other than a complete hand over of sovereignty to them. We would become a colony of Argentina and we do not want that. It is a clearly established principle that the political future of the non-self-governing territories should be determined in accordance with the wishes of their inhabitants. It is we who should be deciding our own future, not the Argentine and British governments.

Given this deadlock, it seems inconceivable that if you pass the same resolution this year, that it will make any progress. For over 40 years the committee has heard arguments about the relative merits of self determination and territorial integrity in our case. You have passed an annual resolution calling for negotiation between the UK and Argentina, although Falkland Islanders, the people concerned in the issue, are vehemently opposed to this. We are grateful that Britain has supported our right to self determination and has resisted this call. Resolution 1514 clearly states that "the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation and domination... is contrary to the Charter of the UN". Annexation of our country by Argentina cannot be the way ahead. Argentina's claim that Falkland Islanders have no political rights in their homeland is disgraceful, unjust, dehumanising and contrary to the ethos of the United Nations. De-colonisation without self determination is meaningless.

I will now briefly describe our economy and government.

The Falkland Islands lie about 500 km east of the southern tip of South America. Many of the inhabitants trace their ancestry back to the 1840's, and the earlier immigrants came largely from Scotland, Ireland and Scandinavia. Many recent immigrants come from Britain, South America and St Helena, but individuals from a wide range of other countries have also become Falkland Islanders. We are a vibrant and multicultural community, and have evolved a distinctive and characteristic national identity. Like many other countries, including Argentina, we are a nation of immigrants, but we are certainly not a 'transplanted people' as is sometimes claimed.

The traditional economy was based on wool production on large farms. Much of the revenue left the islands. In the 1970's and 1980's the process of transferring farm ownership from big landlords to local owner-occupiers took place. In 1986 we declared a Fisheries Conservation and Management zone and since then have developed a thriving economy based on fishing, tourism and agriculture. We are economically self sufficient apart from the cost of defence. Hard work and careful use of our revenue has enabled much needed development of infrastructure, and high standards of education and medical care. With better access to education, young islanders are returning to the islands with the skills we need. We are proud to have created a society with low crime levels, no class distinctions, no drug culture and no significant poverty. We are proud to have created a society to which our young people wish to return to after higher education abroad.

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. Our 1985 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.

We take our international responsibilities seriously and for example I am pleased to say that we recently ratified the Kyoto protocol. This is a serious issue and should not be used as an opportunity for political lobbying as appears to have occurred recently. As with many other island communities we are very aware of our vulnerability to climate change. We are taking active steps to reduce our carbon emissions with a wind farm and other projects. These projects will reduce our carbon dioxide emissions by almost a ton per head of population, and impressive achievement.

Madame Chair, this is not a colony I am describing. This is a flourishing, self sufficient island democracy. We are, by choice a non-independent territory. We are not a non self governing territory.

I would now like to say something about our relationship with Argentina. Until recently we were beginning to make progress and increase mutual confidence. This was good for all three communities – the Falkland Islands, the United Kingdom, and Argentina – as well as the wider international community. We are disappointed that the current Argentine government has changed its approach and appears to have taken steps deliberately designed to damage our economy and pressurize us to negotiate away our sovereignty. Economic sanctions such as refusal of permission for charter flights to cross their air space appear to be part of a deliberate programme. Recent fisheries legislation will prevent companies with licences for Falkland Island waters from also obtaining licences to fish in Argentine waters. In April Argentina withdrew from the 1995 Joint Declaration on Hydrocarbons. This may have little immediate practical effect but it was a door for potential future co-operation and confidence building. Now it has been closed. It is easy to close these doors, but opening them takes patient work and political courage. We in the Falklands remain committed to the concept of co-operation on practical

issues under a sovereignty umbrella. For example, we have invited the families of those Argentine soldiers, sailors and airmen who fell in 1982 to come and hold a commemoration for their loved ones later this year. We welcome such contact between our communities, which can increase understanding and heal the scars of war.

In summary Madame Chair, I ask you to consider that the annual resolution on the Falkland Islands is fundamentally flawed and will not lead to any progress. It ignores the views of the very people it refers to and thus cannot advance the process of de-colonisation.

This does not mean that progress cannot be made – it can. There are many other areas of the world where deeply held convictions and principles appear irreconcilable, and yet progress has been made – look at the cases of Gibraltar and Northern Ireland. Instead of passing this resolution again, I ask that you encourage measures which reduce tension, which promote understanding and confidence, and that you call for co-operation on regional issues.

These are areas in which progress can be made, but to ignore the views and rights of the people involved will lead nowhere.

Madame Chair, your Excellencies, thank you for your attention.