

Distr. RESTRICTED

PRS/2022/CRP.41

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

FORTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: advancement of the Non-Self-Governing Territories through the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond

Castries, Saint Lucia

11 to 13 May 2022

STATEMENT BY

MR. GAVIN SHORT

(FALKLAND ISLANDS (MALVINAS))*

*** 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) (see ST/CS/SER.A/42)**

Address to pre C24 120522

Madam Chairperson, honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee.

I am an elected representative of the people of the Falkland Islands. My family have lived in the Falkland Islands for 173 years.

The Falkland Islands are an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom and the UK supports the wishes of the Falkland Islanders to remain a part of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories and to exercise our right to self-determination. The UK has no doubt about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands nor about the principle and the right of we Falkland Islanders to self-determination as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and in Article one of the two United Nations Covenants on human rights.

I note that the theme of the seminar is the “Advancement of the Non-Self-Governing Territories through the coronavirus disease pandemic and beyond”.

I am happy to report that the Falklands, thanks to its geographical situation was able to protect itself from the effects of Covid 19 through a rigorous system of quarantine measures for incoming people and we managed to avoid any community spread of the disease up until two weeks ago by which time we had the population vaccinated and boosted and our medical services beefed up and ready to deal with community spread.

Indeed, we were that confident that we had everything in place that we deliberately rolled back our quarantine regulations on the 4th of this month.

Of course Covid has had some effect on us with the tourism sector being badly hit but our economic position was that strong that we could happily support the tourist sector by giving all residents, whether Falkland Islander, or someone in the Islands on a work contract, a series of vouchers to enjoy the Falklands free of charge to them, thus stimulating the tourist sector. This we have done for the past two years but are now very much looking forward to “normal service” resuming and all indicators are that there is indeed a pent-up demand from people wishing to visit the our country.

Covid is roaring through our community as I speak but we are taking it in our stride, and as of last night there have been no deaths or hospitalisations. We are taking it all in our stride as we do with whatever problem we are faced with.

Yesterday I was so heartened to hear the members of the C24 to a person, talk about the importance of self determination and how it underpins everything. I thank you for those strong words as it is self determination that I come to talk to you about today.

The Falkland Islanders desire to retain the status quo was amply demonstrated in the March 2013 referendum when 99.8% of those who voted in a turnout of 92% wanted to remain as an Overseas Territory of the UK. A referendum that was internationally observed to make sure it was conducted properly and the vote was free and fair.

In this time when we see Ukraine being brutally invaded by a large, powerful and bullying neighbour, I call on the United Nations not to have double standards. We in the Falklands were invaded (and yes it was an invasion as I was there, out with our local defence force that night doing my best to defend my country) and were occupied by a foreign country and our human rights and liberties trampled on. That same country still wishes to take the Falklands back to a truly colonial state against the wishes of the people who want nothing to do with that country. If Russia is being treated as an outcast for its actions one would expect the UN to publicly condemn another member state who clearly has the same ambitions towards the Falklands.

I wonder to myself how can the members of the decolonization committee pontificate on the Falklands as they have never once had the decency to set foot on the Islands and see the reality of our country for themselves, despite repeated invitations to do so. This makes me suspicious that they might be bowing to the pressure of a country that isn't interested in the Falklands exercising self-determination and decolonizing when the people vote for it in a referendum - but one that wishes to return the Falklands to a true colonial state. Putting peoples under the yoke of a would be foreign colonial power is not what this committee is all about and I respectfully ask you to remember this.

Normally at the C24 a resolution is put forward that calls on UK and Argentina to resume negotiations in order to find, as soon as possible, a peaceful and definitive solution to our sovereignty.

Sounds reasonable? or does it?

Let me tell you that the Falklands and my people have enjoyed perfect peace for 40 years after our liberation from foreign occupation. So we already have peace.

The resolution then goes on to call for the UK and Argentina to resume talks to find a definitive solution and this, delegates, should be where your alarm bells start to go off.

Have you ever heard such colonial language? Two big powers talking together about our future whilst we Falkland Islanders, the people of that country, are whitewashed out of the picture.

Pure colonialism at its worst. The resolution by the way, is put forward by supporters of Argentina not by us or the UK but by those who would happily see real colonialism return to the South Atlantic (and I think this includes Chile) whose president has just said that he will defend human rights wherever they are threatened in the world. Thank you, president, Boric. Our human rights in the Falklands are threatened by this colonial attitude.

You will hear the word negotiations being used but did you know that written into the Argentine constitution (the country that would put us back into a real colonial situation should they ever succeed in their neo-colonial ambitions to do a land grab) there is wording that says that there can be only one outcome to any negotiations and that is my country being handed back into a colonial state as it is transferred against the wishes of the people to a foreign power. Where is the self-determination in that?

Delegates, and others from countries who have fought long and hard for your inalienable right to practice self-determination, how can you sit back and say nothing?

You of all people who have worked so tirelessly to uphold your right to determine your own future should be standing up and supporting our right, the right of the Falkland Islanders to determine their own future.

Failure to do so will only besmirch your principals and struggles and will embolden nations who are natural bullies with expansionist desires just as we have seen with Russia and their invasion of the Ukraine – just as we saw 40 years ago when Argentina invaded the Falklands – your silence empowers and emboldens these countries to push to impose themselves on peaceful people – to crush that very principal that you have fought so hard for – the right to self-determination.

I do not come here to ask you to take sides in a so called dispute between the UK and Argentina about something that happened almost 200 years ago– no, what I am asking you to do is to stand up and be heard, to be heard saying that all people have the absolute right to determine their own future.

Nowhere in the UN charter does it say that the right to self determination applies to everyone except the Falklands.

Remember what you are standing up for – what this committee is all about - the right of people to choose their own future. Take that right away (as some want to) and you are left with a pretty bleak outlook for all peoples. Don't let history repeat itself. Stand firm and support those who seek to exercise their right to determine their own future.

I thank you