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FOURTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth International
Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism:
innovative steps to ensure the attainment of the Sustainable Development
Goals in the Non-Self-Governing Territories**

**Bali, Indonesia
24 to 26 May 2023**

STATEMENT BY

MR. KARL THROWER

(SAINT HELENA)

**Madam Chairperson,
excellencies,
honourable delegates,
ladies and gentlemen.**

I want to thank this committee for this opportunity to provide an update on the situation in the British Overseas Territory of St Helena on behalf of our people.

The last time a representative of St Helena presented a statement to this committee was in 2015.

Our previous Government decided that St Helena should move towards closer ties with the UN by declaring itself a Small Island Developing State or SIDS and joining one of the regional commissions. The United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office fully supported the decision and have been helping to facilitate membership in one of the Regional Commissions.

Unfortunately, COVID hit around the same time as we declared ourselves a Small Island Developing State, and our island's political focus shifted.

In a meeting of the legislative council held on the 21st of April this year, after much deliberation, the elected members of St Helena unanimously decided that the primary remit of the C24 Committee does continue to have significant meaning for the people of St Helena. Despite the name of The Special Committee on **Decolonization**, the C24's primary remit is that everyone has the right to self-determination. We don't believe any reasonable person can disagree that everyone should have the right to self-determination.

The ongoing work of this committee to support all the Non-Self-Governing Territories' move towards their people having the right to

self-determination and ensuring that once made, that decision is globally supported is essential in a world which is increasingly moving towards tighter and tighter global economics and global policymaking. Within the last few decades, it has become clear that a country's future no longer depends on its own decisions or, in the case of Non-Self-Governing Territories, its decisions and those of its administering power.

Even a country as geographically isolated as ours is subject to the effects of decisions and policies made thousands of miles away, far outside of our sphere of influence. The climate crisis, plastics in our oceans, and rising fuel & food prices are all good examples.

It is doubtful that our people would ever vote to become fully independent. However, there are many possibilities between being a fully independent country and being utterly reliant on an administering power.

For our people to be able to vote in any referendum linked to self-determination, we have to ensure that our people can make their decision utterly free from any external pressures and influences in an informed way. Declaration 1514 Declares in sub-sections 2 & 3:

2. All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

3. Inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence.

St Helena is a model democracy; one of the most significant changes in St Helena in recent years is that following a political governance review conducted in 2019 and 2020, a consultative poll was held on the 17 March 2021. Legislative Council endorsed the result; a

Constitutional Amendment Order was made by Order in Council and laid before the UK Parliament in July 2021. The order came into effect on 25 October 2021. The Order made provision for the introduction of a ministerial system of government to replace the previous committee system.

On the 22nd of October 2021, a general election was held, and the Island changed to a Ministerial based system of Governance. 60% of eligible voters turned out to vote for 12 representatives from a selection of 29 candidates.

The twelve elected members then selected a chief minister from amongst them; the chief minister selected four ministers, whom they formed the Government with.

For many years our community has placed social responsibility high on its list of priorities for the Government and other elected members. All our people have access to the same quality of public health care, social benefits and **free** education.

The high priority we place on social targets has led to St Helena achieving many social goals that other countries still attempt to achieve. Equality has become one of the mainstays of our way of island life. An example of this is shown in the diversity of our 12 elected members:

Five are female, including two of the four ministers and the Chief Minister. We come from an extensive range of career and racial backgrounds, with an age range of 26 to 60+.

The main issue preventing our community from being able to hold a referendum entirely free from any external pressures and influences is our long-term reliance on the UK for Aid. Without the generous financial support it receives from the UK, St Helena wouldn't survive.

For the 2022/23 financial year, our recurrent budget & total financial aid required from the Government of the United Kingdom is £31.79 million, including £26.79 million for core budget support, £2.8 million for airport operations and £2.1 million for conditional contingency funding.

One of the largest overseas projects ever undertaken by the UK was the construction of St Helena's first airport, which opened in 2016. The UK provided funding for the airport project totalling over £246 million, to help end the Territory's isolation and open up economic and social opportunities for the island's people.

Our continued long-term reliance on aid from overseas is mainly due to the complex challenges associated with developing St Helena's economy. Two examples of these are:

Geographical location, our Island is one of the most geographically isolated Islands in the World. This isolation leads to significantly higher travel and transportation costs; for example, it costs a minimum of £800 for a return flight to St Helena from the closest serviced airport. The cost of shipping a 20ft container from the nearest serviced port is over £8000. These high costs ensure that St Helena will always be more expensive than most countries.

The high travel and transportation costs also make it extremely difficult for goods from St Helena to be competitively priced in international markets.

A small shrinking tax base; higher living costs are leading to many people moving overseas to gain financial stability. Our Island currently has a community of 4233; in 2018, we had a community of 4579. This large-scale emigration of mainly our young people has increased our overall age dependency ratio increasing from 56 per cent to 67.6 per cent. That ratio places Saint Helena among the highest old-age dependency ratios in the world, with little potential

for natural population change to remedy the situation in the foreseeable future. The small size of our community also makes it difficult for local businesses across all sectors to realise any economies of scale.

These and other challenges threaten to hamper the Island's development gains and achievements made towards moving the Island towards financial independence.

In 2020 St Helena took the first step towards developing its relationship with the UN when it declared itself to be a Small Island Developing State it is now time for St Helena to engage with this committee and other institutions and specialised organisations within the UN such as UN-OHRLS.

This Committee can help St Helena realise what will be one of the most significant steps in our Island's future by helping the people of St Helena gain access to the full range of institutions and specialised agencies within the UN in order to achieve the final goal of ensuring that our people can hold a referendum free from any external pressures and influences in an informed way.

Lastly, on behalf of the people of St Helena, can I express our appreciation to the Government and the people of Indonesia for hosting this seminar?