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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International Decade
for the Eradication of Colonialism: goals and expected accomplishments

Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
31 May to 2 June 2011

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, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.
I am Roger Edwards, an elected member of the Falkland Islands
Legislative Assembly.

The Falkland Islands were discovered on 14th August 1592 by
the Elizabethan navigator John Davis in his ship 'Desire'. The
first recorded landing was by John Strong from his ship
'Welfare' in 1690 at 'Bold Cove', West Falkland. It was he who
used the name Falkland for the first time. The Islands were
uninhabited, there was no indigenous population.

The Islands consist of two main Islands and several hundred
smaller Islands around the coast. Total land area is some 12,173
sq. Km. (4,700 sq. miles), comparable in size to Jamaica for
instance. The land rises to some 705M (Mt Usbourne). The
climate is cool temperate. The temperatures are somewhat
muted by the influence of the cold South West Atlantic ocean.
The Islands are about as far South of the equator as London is
North.

The Islands were first settled by the French at Port Louis, East
Falkland, between 1764 and 1766 when Bougainville signed
away his Colony to the Spanish for "618,108 Livres" and they
finally departed on 1st April 1767. Meanwhile the British,
unaware of the French presence away to the East settled at Port
Egmont, and took formal possession in January 1765. It was a
complete shock to both the French and English when they met
for the first time in December 1766.

In June 1770, facing overwhelming Spanish forces, sent from
Buenos Aires, Britain surrendered the Blockhouse and
Settlement. This eviction was later repealed under conditional
restitution from Madrid. (A report of these negotiations in
Madrid can be seen in the North Transept of Salisbury Cathedral
on a marble plaque commemorating the life of James Harris,
later 1st earl of Malmesbury. I quote ' at the very

commencement of his career displayed in an important and delicate negotiation respecting the Falkland Islands’).

The British were withdrawn in 1774 as the men were needed to fight in the American war of independence. They left behind a lead plaque claiming the Islands as ‘sole property of King George III.

The population today is about 3,000 with very mixed backgrounds. We are often accused by the Argentines of having an ‘imported colonial population’ but in fact our population grew, probably the same as that of Argentina, with immigrants, in our case, from the United Kingdom but also from St Helena, Chile, Australia, Argentina, New Zealand, United States, Russia, Georgia, France and the Philippines. The language is English.

We are entirely self funded and self governing with the exception of Foreign Affairs and defence – a defence only necessary because of the continual aggression shown by our closest neighbour. We have a Legislative Assembly of eight Members who are freely elected for a period of four years. Each year the Assembly votes three of its Members onto Executive who advises the Governor. In our new constitution the Governor makes his decisions ‘in Council’ i.e. advised by the Executive. We have no political parties and each member is independent. We have a Standing Finance committee which considers and monitors the budget and consists of all eight Members. Each Member is responsible for several portfolios covering the various areas within Government. My Portfolios are Treasury, Taxation, EU Issues and Chair of Standing Finance Committee. We do not have a First Minister or Premier but each take it in turns to be ‘Chair’ of the month.

In 2007 our GDP was in the order of £109M with by far the greatest share coming from our fisheries sector. The value of this GDP per capita is around £21,000 or US\$36,000. We have

no unemployment. Our Annual operating budget is in the order of £45M and we have a rolling three year Capital programme worth £12M. It is estimated our economy grew by 5% in 2010 and our Policy Unit expect a further rise of about 2.5% in the current year.

All children receive free education to the age of 16 in the Islands. If they achieve sufficient 'points' in their examinations at the age of 16 they qualify to go overseas to study for their higher, 'A' level, examinations. Again this is free and students are given an allowance to cover necessary expenses and travel. University education is also free and students are supported. We usually have some 60 students overseas studying at any one time in further and higher education.

We have a small Hospital run by a permanent staff of General Practitioners with a Surgeon and Anaethetist. Specialists visit on a regular basis to see patients with particular problems. If treatment cannot be given in the Islands the patients are sent overseas to Chile or the United Kingdom. Medical services are free at the point of use.

As I briefly mentioned earlier the bulk of our finances comes from the fisheries sector where we sell fishing licenses to fish within our 200 mile economic and conservation zone. Initially local companies formed joint ventures with foreign partners, mainly from Spain, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom to gain experience. Since 2006 and the introduction of an 'Individual Transferable Quota' system local Companies are now in charge of the fish stocks and are more independent.

The boost in the revenue generated from fishing enabled the Government to assist the Agriculture sector to diversify into fine wool sheep and latterly, having built an EU approved abattoir, into meat products which we sell all over Europe. We are now pushing for more import substitution and encouraging more Horticulture, potatoes, carrots, cabbages and the like.

With our unique wildlife and such a clean environment we attract many tens of thousands of tourists every year with the majority coming off cruise ships but we do have a small but growing number of land based tourists. Most tourists want to see the spectacular wildlife in its natural habitat but some wish to walk the battle sites following the 1982 war with Argentina. Many veterans, both Argentine and British, visit to lay their ghosts to rest.

We are currently actively searching for Oil inside our legally constituted Economic zone. To date some 18 wells have been drilled and although oil has been brought to the surface we do not know if any will be commercial. We make no allowances in our budget for oil revenues.

The challenges we face in the future are many including attempts by the Government of Argentina to impede certain sectors of our economy. There are many reports of Companies coming under Argentine pressure. Our approach is not to react to each and every report but to continue to develop the economy in our way, and to ensure that we not diverted by outside pressure. Our focus must not be diverted by attempts to de-rail us, we must concentrate on our goals and our agenda. Not someone else's.

The Chairman Dr. Francisco Carrion-Mena quoted the two essential facts in determining whether a territory has attained a full measure of self Government – (1) political achievement of the population and (11) opinion of the population. We claim full marks on both points only falling short of the whole by the dispute over sovereignty. We do not see Britain as a hard task master or overseer but more as a benevolent Uncle, ready to advise and guide and always there to help when asked. We are content with the current status, any other would be “ the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation”.

We need to ensure that key messages about the Islands' status, constitutional and legal position, and the overriding determination of the community to remain British Overseas Territory are understood internationally. We need to tell the success story of the Falklands as a modern community with a successful economy and to a commitment to the highest levels of environmental stewardship. We need to demand that countries accept the wishes of our people and allow us the Right to Self Determination.