



FALKLAND ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

**ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH
REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF
INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES**

UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE OF 24

24 JUNE 2021

***by* THE HONOURABLE LEONA ROBERTS**

MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Madam Chair, Committee Members, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour to speak to you today, not just as an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly of the Falkland Islands but also as a 6th generation Falkland Islander.

Since the 1940s the Government of Argentina has put forward changing narratives, history distorted to suit its goal of assuming control of my country. They have created a mythology around the Falkland Islands, and this dangerous practice continues today.

To take just one example - Argentine propaganda claims that a settled population was ousted in 1833; history shows this is simply not true. When Britain reasserted its control of the Falklands, a small illegal garrison, in the Islands for less than three months, was asked to leave. This was following mutiny and murder. All but two civilian couples (who were from various nations) stayed, welcoming their new-found safety.

However, given the time available, I will not dwell on historic arguments. Suffice to say, we are confident in our British sovereignty. Instead, I would speak to you about colonialist aspirations and about the inconvenient truth that the Argentine government seeks to avoid – namely, the people of the Falkland Islands.

Madam Chair, my maternal ancestors arrived in the Falklands 179 years ago. This was an ordinary family – of no wealth or standing and at that time with 4 young children – they were simply seeking a better life in a new land.

That family lived in makeshift shelters, under canvas and behind peat-sod walls, struggling through many hardships in what was a far from gentle land. They endured and are now recognised as one of the most established families of the Falklands, with nine generations of Kelpers descended from Margaret and James Biggs.

Throughout those nine generations the Biggs family has contributed to every part of Falklands' society and helped create a country where there was none. We are an ordinary

family, Madam Chair, and our roots run strong, deep and true, as do the roots of many other Falkland families.

Our earliest settlers came from across the world – many of British origin, but other nations too. That diversity has continued to grow and today – although we remain a small country, with a population of less than 3,500 – we are proud that our community is made up of more than 60 nationalities. Alongside our longest-standing families live not temporary, but *settled* communities of Saint Helenian, Chilean, Filipino and Zimbabwean families, who have chosen to become Falkland Islanders too.

My own father came to the Falklands in search of opportunity with a group of Chilean labourers, a good number of whom established families, and their children and grandchildren are proud Kelpers today. This story is repeated time and again, throughout almost 200 years. It is a tale of natural migration and organic growth – there is no implanted population here as Argentina would have you believe.

With no indigenous peoples, we are a young country. Our cultural identity is British in many respects, but draws on a range of influences and is quite distinct. We are our own people – Falkland Islanders – Kelpers – and deeply proud to be so.

Argentina's refusal to acknowledge two centuries of natural settlement is abhorrent, particularly coming from a nation that is itself built on European migration and, tragically, the largely successful decimation of its indigenous people.

1982

Sadly, it is impossible to speak of the Falklands without referring to the 1982 war. There is so much that I would say about what Islanders endured during that dark time – our helplessness in the face of growing threat from our vastly larger neighbour; the horror of invasion, an act of violence which leaves an indelible scar on the soul of a nation; the fear and despair experienced during occupation and the violation of our home; the hope when rescue came;

and of course, the profound sorrow for lives cut short and wounds – physical and emotional – suffered even today by those who liberated us and, indeed, by many Islanders themselves.

Madam Chair, I was 10 years old in 1982. I remember all too well the terror of invasion night – huddled under upturned furniture and a kitchen table, as shells and bullets flew around our house. The days that followed were bleak, as our country was filled with machines of war and thousands of armed invaders; as our homes were taken over and machine-gun posts were built in our gardens – and so much more... All this carried out by a country that even then spoke of “the interests” of Falkland Islanders.

But thankfully we were liberated and June 14th will forever be the most significant date in the Falklands’ calendar because it is the day upon which our freedom was restored.

Yet even today, Madam Chair, Argentina attempts to restrict our economic, political and social wellbeing – threatening those who seek to do legitimate business with our islands and even attempting to block our sportsmen and women from competing in international events.

And at the height of the pandemic, the Argentine government sought to include the Falklands’ Covid-positive numbers within their national statistics, seeking political advantage from a global crisis.

For our part, the Falklands has actively supported the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross, resulting in the DNA identification of Argentine war dead buried on the Islands, so that almost 120 families now know the resting place of their lost sons. Although the Argentine authorities do not acknowledge our role in this humanitarian endeavour, we know it is appreciated by those bereaved families.

We have sought to share data on fish stocks, to ensure the sustainability of biodiversity in the South Atlantic, but Argentina has now withdrawn from this important work.

It is unerringly the Falklands which behaves responsibly and with decency, even toward those who would do us ill.

Madam Chair – moving to the subject of colonialism.

The modern Falklands is not a colonial enclave. We are economically self-sufficient and are internally self-governing. Successive British governments have stated clearly that the political future of the Falklands is dependent upon the will of our people – that will so clearly stated in our internationally-observed referendum of 2013.

Our democratic and mature partnership was also reaffirmed by our 2009 Constitution and continues to evolve, underpinned by the principle of self-determination.

Contrast this with the position of the Argentine Government, which speaks of “respecting the interests” of the people of the Falklands, yet denies our existence; that claims to value democracy, yet refuses to recognise our legitimate government.

Argentina demands that the fundamental right to self-determination does not apply to what it calls an implanted population and insists that my children – 7th generation Islanders – have no status and be denied the basic human right of a voice... it is unacceptable.

Please be clear when you hear the Argentine delegation speak of a ‘peaceful, negotiated settlement’ what they seek is nothing less than the commandeering of my home against the clearly-stated wish of my people. For Argentina, the only acceptable outcome of any “negotiation” is control of the Falklands – a position recently enshrined in their Constitution - purely because it covets our land and resources. Argentina’s colonial intentions and refusal to acknowledge modern realities must be seen for what they are.

I see from recent reports in Argentine newspapers that the latest approach may be to judge all Falkland Islanders as being born in Argentina and to “incorporate” us. Falkland Islanders

do not wish to be “incorporated” by Argentina. We do not wish to be a colony of Argentina, and, Madam Chair, we will not be bullied into submission.

All that we ask is that this Committee, entirely in keeping with its goals, acknowledge our people’s legitimate right to self-determination.

Madam Chair, Committee Members – it is unacceptable to me that Argentina would white-wash my family from history, would deny my children the right to a voice and would seek to absorb my people against their will.

On behalf of nine generations of Kelpers, on behalf of all Falklands children and the generations yet to come – I ask that this committee recognise that although we are few in number, Falkland Islanders must not be denied the basic human right to self-determination.

I would end by reiterating my Honourable colleague’s invitation: Please, send a mission to the Falklands, Madam Chair. See for yourselves the reality.