



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 MARK POLLARD
MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Madam Chair, honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

Why am I here before you today? Why have I travelled 12,000 miles away from my family during a global pandemic?

I'm here because our expansionist, aggressive neighbour wants to take my home, my people's home, my children's home and I simply cannot accept that. When my daughters look me in the eyes in the future and ask "Daddy, why did you let these people take our home?" I have to be able to look them back in the eyes and promise them that I did all I could to provide them with the most basic of things. A safe home, to live and raise their own children. A future of their choosing.

Our neighbours aim not to empower our territory to reach a post-colonial status that is acceptable to us. It is instead to seek to deny us our basic human right of self-determination. We are perfectly happy with our current political status, as evidenced in our referendum in 2013 where 92% of the Falkland Islanders turned out to vote 99.8% in favour of retaining our current political status as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom.

I am just one more in a line of democratically elected representatives of the people of the Falkland Islands to speak to this Committee. Over the years you have heard talk of facts and figures, resolutions and nuanced historical arguments. It is no secret that we disagree with the erroneous arguments and falsified history continually put forward by our neighbours. I want to talk to you about people. It seems to me that the very reason this committee was

created was to help people. For that reason, I want to tell you my Falkland Islands story.

My story starts 6 generations or 172 years ago. John and Esther Smith arrived in the Falkland Islands hoping to carve out a home for their family, much as the pioneers did here in the US. It was one year after the Californian Gold Rush had started and 12 years before the start of the American Civil War. Successive ancestors of mine chose to continue carving out a living in what is a rugged but beautiful part of the world.

I was born in 1979, three years before Argentina invaded my family's home, a multinational heritage of Irish, English, Falkland Islander and Uruguayan blood. My mother (of both Falkland Islands and Uruguayan parentage) was living overseas at the time. She had to watch the invasion from afar with no idea what was going to happen to her family, her friends, her people. She had to watch as a nation 16,000 times the size of her own invaded and locked up members of the civilian population under armed guard. Completely unable to help them in any way. Her own brother was taken from his wife and children at gunpoint. Marched off and taken away by helicopter. Argentina was at that time a nation that had a well-founded reputation for making its own civilians disappear.

I grew up in a Falkland Islands that had been ravaged by war. When other children were being warned of the danger of talking to strangers, we were taught to recognise landmines, booby traps, unexploded ordnance. I grew up in a country that had had its innocence taken away, this innocence had been replaced with an anger, bitterness and confusion. A country with post-

traumatic stress running through the very heart of it. Civilians who have never been able to understand why military troops would wave guns in their faces, their children's faces. 39 years later the minefields have been cleared, but the dangers of unexploded ordnance lie potentially in every field, on every beach. Reminders everywhere of the death and destruction have become part of our everyday life. Physical scars on our land may be healed over time, but some mental scars on my people will never go.

I have two daughters. One is 6 months old and the other 3 years old. I want them to grow up confident and safe in our own home. I will have to teach them never to trust our closest neighbours though. I also know that the innocence taken from our community, staring down the barrel of a gun, will not return any time soon. An innocence my children and possibly their children may never know. I will ensure they know determination, resolve and to never kowtow to bullies. I will teach them that although we are small in number, we can be confident and must always speak out against tyranny.

In case you are wondering why have I laid out my ancestors' story, my story and described my children's likely story? It is because our neighbours, that outnumbered us by 16,000 to one still want to take my home away from me, our people's home from us, and my children's home away from them. They have never shown remorse for their actions, instead they brazenly stand here before the world claiming to have been treated unjustly themselves.

These people, the Argentina of today, will likely tell you that they are a different nation. A peaceful, friendly nation. Yet they still seek to annex our country against the wishes of our people. They still hold economic and

environmental sanctions over us. They will stop at nothing to interfere with us, even denying humanitarian flights to repatriate fellow South Americans during this very pandemic. More importantly though, Argentina seeks to deny us our basic human right to self-determination. Something I believe that most members of this committee seek to protect.

So back to my original question. Why am I here before you today? Why have I travelled 12,000 miles away from my family during a global pandemic? It's because Argentina want to take my home, my people's home, my children's home, to turn us into a colony of theirs and will stop at nothing to do so. Even attempting to corrupt the proceedings of this very organisation, the United Nations. Using your committee, part of an organisation set up as a bastion of international peace and security, to try and deny my people their basic human rights. I am here to ask you. No, I am here to beg you, to allow my children to grow up knowing only peace. The only way to do that is to pressure Argentina into being a responsible neighbour. To recognise my people's right to determine their own future.

Will you support myself, my people, my children's right to determine our own future? Or will you let them use your Committee as a tool for colonisation, allowing an aggressive, expansionist bully seeking to colonise an innocent, peace-loving nation, already more than content with its current political status?

Many will call for bilateral talks between the UK and Argentina to solve "the question of the Falkland Islands". Argentina has already pre-empted the result of any potential negotiations through its constitutional reinforcement of its

claim over our home. The only people who can solve the question of the Falkland Islands, are the people of the Falkland Islands and we see no problem with our current political status. If the international community would support our basic human right to determine our own future then it will have fixed “the question of the Falkland Islands”.

Doubt will be cast over what I have said here today. But I am so confident that my views represent the people that put me here in the first place that I will, as the current Chair of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly, invite this Committee to come and see it for themselves. Since 1965 this committee has sent 37 missions to 23 different territories, but not once to my home, the Falkland Islands. We as a people are happy with our current political status as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom, please come and see it for yourselves.