



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
23 JUNE 2022**

***by* THE HONOURABLE LEONA ROBERTS
MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Chair, Committee Members – my name is Leona Roberts and I am proud to be one of the eight elected representatives of the Falkland Islands Government. I am here today to speak for our people and to defend our tiny, democratic and freedom-loving country against the colonial ambitions of our aggressive neighbour.

I will not dwell on dates or treaties - we are confident of our legal and moral right to our home. I will focus upon simple truths and will begin by again inviting this Committee to send a fact-finding mission to the Falklands.

The C24 has a duty to understand the territories and people it considers. That the Argentine Government so vehemently opposes such a mission speaks volumes: Argentina fears that by visiting our Islands you will see the truth.

Chair, we are a modern people with a distinct national identity and culture, proud of our heritage and the country we have built.

Our population of less than 3,500 people is made up of more than 60 nationalities and is diverse and inclusive. Some families, like mine, can trace 9 generations in our Islands. Others came to the Falklands more recently and from all over the world – countries ranging from Argentina to Zimbabwe – many of those families have achieved citizenship and are now proudly Falkland Islanders. It is a natural growth and very far from the “implanted population” that Argentina proclaims.

Argentina does not want you to see our vibrant, self-sufficient, self-governing country. We voted with blistering clarity in our referendum to continue our partnership with the United Kingdom, but we have our own Constitution, pass our own laws, manage our own democracy, are financially independent and fiercely protective of our self-governance.

They fear that you will see how they – a neighbour more than 12 thousand times our size – actively tries to restrict our social and economic growth; to disrupt trade, communications and international relationships. They seek to illegally sanction organisations doing business with us, have threatened to arrest cruise ships visiting us and even harass our sports teams competing overseas.

The Argentine government has withdrawn from agreements to protect the long-term sustainability of both our fisheries – work which we see as regionally and globally vital.

Since the 1940s, Argentina has built a mythology around the Falklands, claiming that a population was forcibly expelled in 1833. The facts show that a small garrison was removed when Britain re-asserted its legitimate sovereignty, and all but four of the mixed nationality group chose to stay and happily accepted the stability provided by British administration.

In past years an Argentine delegate spoke here of their ancestor’s piano and how they planted tulips.

Well, my father was Chilean, but my mother’s family arrived in the Falklands 180 years ago. James and Margaret Biggs were genuine and humble settlers. They could not dream of luxuries such as pianos –

they initially lived in canvas and turf huts. And there was no time for tulips – no, my ancestors planted vegetables and raised livestock to keep their children alive.

Life was hard, but these pioneer families prevailed and built a country where none existed.

Almost 200 years of peaceful, legitimate settlement make Falkland Islanders an inconvenient truth for Argentina. They wish for us not to exist and, in their desire to seize our home, officially deny us the right of self-determination. But Falkland Islanders do exist and I will not stand by as any foreign power seeks to strip us of our right to a voice – to demand that my son and my daughter are somehow unworthy of basic human rights.

Many countries here claim to value democracy and freedom, to oppose colonialism and defend self-determination. Yet, some will today suggest that these rights should be withheld from my people.

The moment a powerful nation demands that human rights – principles such as self-determination - should only be selectively applied for the sake of political convenience – every person who values freedom, human dignity and the rule of law should feel a chill in their hearts.

Chair - I lived through 74 days of Argentine occupation. I was only 10 years old but remember all too well the violent invasion of my home – an illegal act which cost around 1000 lives, shattered many more, and for which Argentina has never even apologised. I remember my teenage brother and my Mother being held at gunpoint as our house was searched and, in the last few terrible days of occupation, I remember accepting that my family and I would likely die.

I WAS afraid of Argentina then, Chair. I am not now and I refuse to ever be again. We may be a small people, but we are resilient and we will never give in to intimidation.

So, these are the truths that Argentina do not want this committee to see. It may be inconvenient, but Falkland Islanders – Kelpers – do exist and we are proud of that. Our windswept Islands are our only home and we will protect them. But this is not about land – it is about people – people of whom I'm credibly proud – and we should be protected too.

We Falkland Islanders, whether ninth or first generation, must not be denied our voice. Our fundamental right to determine our own future should be respected by all who value freedom and democracy, and this committee should not, through its support or its silence, condone the threats and colonial desires of our bullying neighbour.