



Falkland Islands Government

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Mr Colin Roberts
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Dear Colin

Thank you for forwarding Ambassador Castro's two letters of 23 April to Jeremy Browne, proposing discussions on flights and fishery issues. My colleagues and I have now considered these carefully, and I should be grateful if you could relay the views of the Falkland Islands Government directly to Her Excellency, as set out below.

Air links and fishery issues are both matters on which, as the Ambassador's letters attest, we have previously been able to have productive discussions with the Republic of Argentina. Indeed, through the South Atlantic Fisheries Commission and the 1999 Joint Statement respectively, we enjoyed formal agreements which served the practical interests of both the Argentine and Falkland Islands people. We would welcome a return to that spirit of co-operation.

However, we are also very conscious that the proposals set out in the Ambassador's letters are made, not within a context of amity and friendship towards to the Falklands Islands people, but against a backdrop of increasing hostility. As you know, the Government in Buenos Aires not only continues to deny our right to self-determine our future, but is also actively seeking to damage our livelihoods and prevent us from developing our own economy.

In the last few months we have experienced ongoing attempts to target our fishing industry through the harassment of vessels and the denial of port access to ships flying the Falklands flag. We have seen letters sent to companies, operating legally within the Falklands, designed to intimidate and deter further investment. We have witnessed incidents of cruise ships that have visited the Falklands being subsequently denied entry into Argentine ports, as part of an effort to damage our tourist sector. And we have received threats, including from the President herself last September, to block the only flight that links the Falklands to South America.

As a small and vulnerable population, we understandably feel threatened when the Government of a large country goes to such lengths to make our lives difficult. It was very telling, in our view, that the Government of Argentina recently sponsored the deeply offensive television advert, depicting an athlete training on our war memorial. It illustrates, I am afraid, the contempt which the current Government of Argentina has for our rights as a people. Argentina's current approach inevitably colours how we view their proposals on flights and fisheries.

Flights

We value very much the existing LAN flight to and from Chile. We note that this service already stops at Rio Gallegos on a regular basis, enabling passengers to fly direct to and from Argentina. We welcome – and will continue to welcome – visitors from Argentina and from all over Latin America to the Falkland Islands. The LAN Chile route is well established, and serves not only as a passenger service but also enables us to receive fresh produce such as fruit and vegetables. It is also a vital link for the 300 strong Chilean community on the Islands. So it is our firm view that we want this service to continue, and hope very much that the Government of Argentina will confirm that it has no intention of blocking this vital link.

We are also keen, however, to strengthen communication links between the Falkland Islands and the continent, and are prepared to discuss with the Argentine Government ways in which this might be achieved. A welcome first step would be for the Government of Argentina – if it is sincere about improving air links to the Islands – to rescind its unjustified and illegal ban on charter flights overflying Argentina which, since 2003, has impeded access for tourists, business travellers and other visitors. This would be the sort of confidence-building measure which would allow discussion of other proposals, both those from the Argentine Government, and others which we might wish to table.

Fishing

We would welcome the resumption of scientific exchanges under the auspices of the South Atlantic Fisheries Commission. It is a matter of profound regret that the Government of Argentina walked away from the SAFC. Both we and Argentina have a responsibility – to the environment and to future generations – to resume practical co-operation to safeguard straddling fish stocks. Conservation and sustainability have been the cornerstone of our fisheries policy since the establishment of the Falkland Islands fishery a quarter of a century ago. It is therefore important, in our view, that we are able to exchange data and to discuss the scientific rationale behind policy decisions such as season start-dates and allowable catch volumes. So the Falkland Islands Government would welcome a resumption in dialogue with Argentina, involving experts from here and the UK, for a discussion of these issues. It must be clearly-understood by all parties, however, that such exchanges would be about practical issues of mutual benefit only and should not involve, or be regarded as a precursor to, discussions about the sovereignty of the Islands. I should be grateful if you could make this point to the Argentine Government.

Let me conclude by saying that the Falkland Islands Government hopes these offers from Argentina herald a more positive and constructive approach to the Islands than we have experienced from them recently. Attempts by President Kirchner's Government to coerce us into abandoning our absolute right to determine our own political future are not only doomed to fail, but will only add to tensions – which can be in no one's interest. So we urge Argentina to sit down with us, as democratically elected representatives of the Falkland Islands people, and find common ground. Attempts to sideline, ignore or 'disappear' the Falkland Islanders are no longer sustainable in a region that respects human rights, rule of law and democracy.

Yours sincerely,



Hon. Sharon Halford MLA
On behalf of the Legislative Assembly