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FOURTH INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Fourth
International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism:
pursuing goals and addressing needs of
the Non-Self-Governing Territories**

Caracas, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

14 to 16 May 2024

STATEMENT BY

MR. KARL THROWER

(SAINT HELENA)

Distinguished Chairperson, Honourable Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be before this esteemed committee once again, representing the people of St Helena.

I want to start by thanking the Government and the people of Venezuela for hosting this seminar in their awe-inspiring capital city.

The large-scale emigration of mainly our young and working-age people has increased our Islands struggle to achieve economies of scale. For instance, our healthcare system is under strain due to the shortage of medical professionals. By February 2024, the island's population decreased to 4,332, with 4,120 residents and 212 visitors. Compared to February 2023, there were 21 fewer children (0-14 years) and 76 fewer working-age individuals, but an increase of 25 of those aged 65 and over.

The Dependency Ratio of the resident on-island population (the number of those 65 and over compared to those of roughly working age) is estimated to be 47.3 at the end of February 2024, an increase compared to February 2023, when it was estimated to be 44.9.

The United Kingdom, through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), provides crucial financial aid to support the delivery of public services and access to the island. We are deeply grateful for this support. In 2023/24 the UK Government provided £33.06 million (an increase of 4%) on the previous year and is providing up to £34.06 million in 2024/25 (a further 3% increase). In addition, up to £30 million is being provided between 2019-28 for long-term capital infrastructure development.

As outlined in our previous statement in Bali last year, St Helena's dependency on long-term financial aid from the United Kingdom poses a significant barrier to genuine self-determination. However, I am pleased to report that we have made strides towards addressing this challenge and paving the path for a brighter, better future.

In April this year, our government launched a new investor prospectus, signalling our commitment to economic development and attracting potential investors. Additionally, in order to address population decline, imminent changes to our immigration policies aim to encourage inward

migration alongside updating our labour market strategy in order to attract and retain our own people, known affectionately as 'Saints', from overseas, marking significant milestones in our journey towards economic self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, in line with last year's seminar theme, we have intensified our cooperation with the United Kingdom and are making efforts to strengthen the relationship between the Government of the United Kingdom and the British Overseas Territories. This is now evident in the recently agreed Joint Declaration that was decided upon in November 2023. Against this backdrop, the UK Government reaffirmed the deep, historic, and enduring partnership between itself and its Territories. Building upon this Declaration, the UK Government have recently been consulting with its Overseas Territories to establish a UK Strategy. This will be a roadmap for how the UK fulfils its obligations and responsibilities towards its Territories. The strategy will refresh the 2012 White Paper on the Overseas Territories, setting a clear direction and renewed aims across each theme: economies, environment & climate, defence and security, governance and communities. Following the publication of the Strategy, attention will be given to developing the Partnership Compacts.

These Compacts will set out the responsibilities of the UK, elected Governments and Governors, consistent with each Territory's constitution.

St Helena most welcomes this approach as it will provide the opportunity to clearly define our strategic priorities, the challenges we face and the support required to achieve our intended aims and objectives.

It is recognised that some of these will be similar to those faced by our Overseas Territory family, whilst others will be unique to St Helena. It is these unique areas that will need to be clearly articulated to aid understanding and help us make the necessary progress if we are to build upon our existing relationship and modernise our partnership within the British Family.

We are also exploring avenues to strengthen our island's ties with the United Nations. Our partnership with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) has been pivotal in navigating the complexities of developing our relations with the United Nations, focusing on joining a regional commission and engaging with Small Island Developing States

and the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

Allow me to emphasise the significance of St Helena's integration into one of the United Nations regional commissions. Doing so not only gives us access to invaluable resources, expertise, and opportunities crucial for our journey towards self-sufficiency and self-determination, but it also allows us to contribute to the regional commission, thereby enhancing our international standing and influence.

After careful consideration, the St Helena Legislative Council unanimously opted to pursue membership in the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC). Despite our geographical proximity to Africa, this Caribbean Regional Commission offers a more strategic fit for St Helena's unique circumstances and membership is a tangible step which will deliver tangible results.

ECLAC boasts a remarkable representation of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), with SIDs accounting for 49% of its member states. This significant presence of SIDS within the region offers unparalleled opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement, knowledge exchange, and collaborative solutions tailored to St Helena's context.

Furthermore, the key focus areas of ECLAC closely align with our developmental priorities, including sustainable development, gender equality, and economic growth. By aligning with ECLAC, we gain access to a wealth of expertise, resources, and initiatives to foster sustainable development and enhance economic resilience.

The ECLAC Regional Commission encompasses members, including other British UK Overseas Territories (OTs), who have traversed a similar trajectory to St Helena's aspirations. Many Caribbean nations have successfully transitioned from dependencies to independent entities, offering valuable insights, best practices, and potential partnerships tailored to our context.

In contrast, while the Economic Commission for Africa holds relevance for our continental proximity, its focus primarily caters to mainland African nations, which may not fully align with St Helena's unique needs and challenges.

In summary, our decision to seek membership as an associate member in the ECLAC Regional Commission, with the backing of the UK government, is not just practical but strategic. It's based on a deep understanding of our circumstances, goals, and our desire to forge connections with similar territories grappling with common challenges like climate change, sustainable fishing, and affordable renewable energy.

We acknowledge that pursuing this goal will be difficult and may require the UN to depart from its traditional approach to assigning regional commission memberships to Non-Self-Governing Territories. However, if Resolution 1514 is to serve as a beacon of hope for such territories and if they are to be treated individually, we believe the groundwork is laid for the C24 Committee, the regional commission, and ECLAC members to consider our request for associate membership.

We recognize the numerous obstacles and challenges to attaining associate membership in ECLAC. Nevertheless, we are confident that if granted the opportunity to present our case for associate membership, we can gain support from all relevant parties. This would represent a substantial advancement towards St Helena's overarching goals of achieving financial independence and true self-determination.

In closing, we humbly request the support of the C24 committee to support our goal of becoming a member of ECLAC.

Thank you for your attention and support.