

News story: Prime Minister's 2017 Christmas message to the Falkland Islands

I am delighted to be able to send this personal message to the people of the Falkland Islands this Christmas

This year marked the 35th anniversary of the conflict to preserve your freedom and independence. So as we remember the 255 UK servicemen and three Falkland Islanders who gave their lives in defending your liberty, I want you to know that I will never allow anyone to compromise your right to self-determination – a right you freely expressed in the 2013 referendum; and a legacy for which so many paid the ultimate price.

I am equally committed to supporting your vital work to address the legacies of the conflict and to advance the broader prosperity of the Islands.

So I want to thank you and your government for your continued help in enabling the identification of Argentine soldiers killed in the conflict and buried at Darwin. I believe this shows all that is best of the Falklands – fierce in defence of self-determination but always ready to help those in distress whoever they may be. And the work done by the International Committee of the Red Cross on this sensitive humanitarian matter should, I hope, bring some peace to those Argentine families who lost their loved ones.

Building closer links with all countries in the region brings unprecedented opportunities to ensure a better, long-term and sustainable future for the Falkland Islands. I continue to believe there are non-sovereignty related areas where we can work together with Argentina for the benefit of all concerned. Whilst progress has been slower than anticipated, we will continue to work with Argentina to ensure delivery of all Joint Communiqué commitments, including the removal of restrictive measures against the Islands.

I am also pleased to see further progress to tackle another of the conflict's legacies. The current phase of demining, represents a significant increase in our demining efforts to date, backed by £20 million of additional funding. Since commencing in October 2016, work on the project has cleared over 3,200 anti-personnel mines and over 100 other items of unexploded ordnance.

The results of your latest census, and your new legislation on same-sex marriage, demonstrate a growing, diverse, and prosperous community in the Falklands today. You have an increasing international presence. Your students had their best educational results ever this year. And we will do all that we can to support your government's new economic strategy will see the start of a transformational process in the Islands'.

I also want to congratulate all your newly elected Assembly Members following

the elections last month. I was delighted to meet one of them – Teslyn Barkman – in Downing Street last month as part of my annual meeting with representatives from all the UK's Overseas Territories.

We discussed the UK's departure from the European Union where I reaffirmed the commitment of the government I lead to secure a deal with the European Union that is right for the whole United Kingdom and all our Overseas Territories. We also discussed the work to support the recovery effort in our Caribbean communities following the devastating hurricanes and we warmly welcomed the financial contribution from the Falkland Islands.

Finally, this last year also saw the passing of both Sir Cosmo Haskard and his wife Phillada. I know Sir Cosmo was a much admired former governor, a pioneering defender of your sovereignty and a great believer in a bright and exciting future for these very special islands. I share that belief and my message to you this Christmas is very simple: You can count on me as a UK Prime Minister who will do everything possible to support you in realising the full potential of these Islands.

With that, let me wish you and all your families a great Christmas and a very happy and prosperous 2018.