

News story: Prime Minister's 2018 Christmas message to the Falkland Islands

2018 has been an exciting year for the people of the Falkland Islands – one that has brought with it new faces, new friendships and new opportunities.

The new legislative assembly has completed its first full year, with all your MLAs working hard for the people of the islands.

Plans for a new air link to Brazil have been agreed, including a regular stop in Cordoba in Argentina. It's a move that will make the islands more accessible than ever and boost economic development, and is something your MLAs have done much to deliver.

Talks about fisheries are underway for the first time in 14 years – a vital step in ensuring that we manage our natural resources in a sustainable way while protecting a key local industry.

The islands have welcomed a new chief justice and the FIDF has a new major.

Falklands teams swept the board at the first ever Mega Patagonian Ice Hockey Tournament – with members of the Stanley Penguins also joining their Chilean and Argentinian counterparts in mixed teams for friendly matches.

The Falklands' flag flew proudly at the Commonwealth Games, bringing the islands to whole new audiences.

And tourism has increased – with more people from more places coming to experience the natural wonders of your beautiful home.

Alongside the tourists, this year you also provided a gracious welcome for overseas visitors of a very different kind.

Since 1982, many of the graves at Darwin Cemetery had been marked simply as those of "an Argentine soldier known only to God".

In March more than 200 relatives were finally able to mourn at the graves of their sons, brothers, husbands and fathers – and the dignity and respect the people of the Falklands extended to those families said much about the character of your community.

Not far from Darwin another legacy of the war was dealt with as Goose Green became the islands' first settlement to be completely cleared of mines.

Demining was also completed at Fox Bay East and although there is still much work to be done – work we will continue to support – more than 8,000 mines have now been destroyed.

Nearly 40 years after the conflict the new air link, the joint ice hockey teams and the support provided to the families of Argentina's war dead all point towards warmer relations with your nearest neighbours.

Indeed, when I met President Macri earlier this month – becoming the first British Prime Minister ever to visit Buenos Aires – it was a pleasure to focus not just on what separates us, but on what we can achieve together.

However, while the relationship between our governments is changing, I can assure that one thing will never change: our absolute commitment to the people and sovereignty of the Falkland Islands.

It is not up for debate.

As long as you desire the right to be part of the United Kingdom family, we will defend that right – and a valued part of our family is what you will remain.

This year has been all about progress, about moving forward.

As it draws to a close we can all be positive about what the future holds for the Falkland Islands.

2019 will bring continued work on the Islands Plan, further discussions with Argentina under the 2016 Communique, and a referendum to determine constituency boundaries of the Legislative Assembly.

And as the United Kingdom leaves the European Union we will strengthen our ties across globe, bringing greater opportunities not just for the UK itself but also for our overseas territories.

You may be half a world away from us here in the UK, but you are very much in our thoughts.

So from myself and my husband Philip, and on behalf of the whole United Kingdom, let me wish a very happy Christmas to all the people of the Falkland Islands – and a peaceful and prosperous new year.