



UKOTA statement: UK Overseas Territories Self-determination

The Charter of the United Nations was signed on June 26th 1945 and it was there that the concept of self-determination as an international right of peoples was enshrined. Article 1 included a statement that “respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples” was amongst the purposes of the UN.

For the Overseas Territories and their historical relationship with the United Kingdom – previously as colonies and then for some time as Dependent Territories - self-determination has been the concept at the heart of their political and constitutional development as small nations.

For Territories such as the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar, the right of self-determination is crucial in the context of the UK’s pledge to defend their freely expressed wishes to remain British in the face of at times aggressive attempts by third countries to claim sovereignty over them.

The UK’s respect for the right of self-determination of the peoples of the UKOTs is key to the balance of powers and responsibilities between the Territories and the UK.

Whilst the United Kingdom is mostly responsible for OTs’ compliance with international obligations, for which reason it holds ‘reserve powers’, the constitutions of the Territories significantly reflect their ability to meet their obligations. Self-government is an important component of the expression of self-determination.

“In recent times the United Kingdom has characterised its engagement with the OTs as a partnership, and describes the OTs as an integral part of the British family. This is very important to all of us in the Territories. The UK is clear that we should have the maximum self-government possible and that our relationship is no longer colonial in nature. Any visitor to the Territories would see clearly that we do in fact run our Territories in a way that reflects our traditions, cultures and the democratic choices of our people”, said a spokesperson for UKOTA.