

Thank you, Mister Chair.

The UK government maintains our long-standing position on independence for the territories. Any decision to sever the constitutional link between the UK and a territory should be on the basis of the clear and constitutionally expressed wish of the people of the territory. Where independence is an option, and it is a clear and constitutionally expressed wish of the people to pursue independence, the UK government will meet its obligations to help the territory to achieve it.

The British government published a white paper in June 2012, setting out its overall approach to its overseas territories. The white paper confirms the government's commitment to maintaining the overall relationship between the UK and the territories.

In the introduction, the government said, we have reviewed the constitutional status of the territories. Each territory has its own unique constitution. The previous government launched in 1999 a process of modernizing the constitutions of the inhabited territories. We are continuing this work with the view to equipping each territory with a modern constitution.

We expect these constitutions to continue to evolve and require adjustments in the light of circumstances. But we believe that the fundamental structure of our constitutional relationships is the right one. Powers are devolved to the elected governments of the territories to the maximum extent possible, consistent with the UK retaining powers necessary to discharge its sovereign responsibilities.

We believe that at this point in the history of our relationships with the territories, when a decade of constitutional revision is coming to a close, the time is not right to embark on a further round of constitutional change. Rather our strategy is to ensure that the constitutional arrangements work effectively to promote the best interests of the territories and of the UK. The government recognizes that it is important to continue to reflect on the constitutional relationship. We will ensure that a dialogue on these issues is sustained with all those territories, which wish to engage.

In the chapter on links with the wider world, the white paper contains the following passage on the decolonization committee: "The UK believes that the UN's decolonization committee, the C24, no longer has a relevant role to play in respect of our territories. The British territories on the committee's list have all a large measure of internal self-government, and have all chosen to retain their link to the UK. In the UK's view, all our territories should have been de-listed a long time ago."

Nevertheless, given that some members of the UN wish to retain the committee, some democratically elected territory representatives wish to present their own positions directly to the committee and to the 4th committee of the General Assembly at annual meetings of these committees. The UK's government will continue to support this and these territories' rights to determine their own futures.

The white paper made clear that the UK government's fundamental responsibility and objective is to ensure the security and good governance of the territories and their peoples. This responsibility flows from international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. But being an overseas territory of the UK also entails responsibilities. We expect territory governments to meet the same high standards as the UK government in maintaining the rule of law, respect for human rights, and integrity in public life, delivering efficient public services, and building strong and successful communities.

I am pleased to report on positive developments in the Turks and Caicos Islands. In June 2012 the UK government announced that significant progress had been made on the 8 milestones set for return to democratic government, and on putting in place robust financial controls, and that elections will be held in the Turks and Caicos Islands in November 2012. A new Turks and Caicos Islands constitution, drawn up following wide consultations in the territory and UK ministerial discussions with political leaders and members of the civil society, will be brought into force on 15th October, in advance of elections to be held on 9th November 2012. The UK government is pleased that sufficient progress is being made in order to bring about a restoration of democratic government in the territory. The UK government will take firm and resolute action wherever there is evidence of corruption or maladministration in the territory.

The relationship between the UK and its overseas territories continues to be a modern one, based on partnership, shared values and the right of each territory to determine whether it wishes to stay linked to the UK or not. For as long as the UK overseas territories wish to retain the link with the UK, the UK government will remain committed to their future development, and continued security.

British government ministers and democratically elected territory leaders will continue to have regular discussions on issues of mutual interest and concern. They will meet again for political talks in London in December 2012.

Thank you, Mister Chair.

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