



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Written Ministerial Statement

28 June 2012

The Overseas Territories White Paper

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (William Hague): Today I am publishing the Government's White Paper on the Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability. This is the first review of the Overseas Territories since 1999 and it is the culmination of two years work and consultation.

We came to Government determined to renew and strengthen relationships with the Overseas Territories.

Our historical links go back more than four centuries. The Territories comprise a quarter of a million people and 90% of the biodiversity of the UK and Territories combined. They are valued constituent parts of the Realm and we have a responsibility to ensure their security and good governance. We also want them to be vibrant and flourishing communities that proudly retain aspects of their British identity. This means upholding their rights of self-determination, helping them become economically independent and able to generate opportunities for their people, and protecting their extraordinary environmental heritage.

The Government takes these responsibilities very seriously.

The White Paper has been developed across Government departments and in consultation with the people and governments of the Territories. It sends an important signal of long term commitment and engagement. It focuses on three goals and practical measures to achieve them.

First, it seeks to strengthen engagement between the United Kingdom and the Territories. We want to deepen our co-operation and share expertise more widely. At a government level, for the first time all departments have agreed that they will take a lead in engaging with the Territories in their respective areas of competence. Each has written its own paper on its work with the Territories. We are launching a Jubilee Programme to support the exchange of expertise between public servants in the Territories and the UK. We also want to build stronger links at political level. We are determined that the agenda set out in the White Paper will be driven forward by the UK and Territory leaders together through a Joint Ministerial Council. This strategy goes beyond government. It seeks to foster partnerships between the UK and the Territories in the private sector, professional bodies and civil society.

Our second goal is to help the Territories to improve governance, financial management and economic planning, where this is necessary.

We appreciate the remarkable diversity of the Territories, each with their own specific attributes, opportunities and needs. In these times of global economic difficulty we all face common challenges: building more diverse and resilient economies, cutting public sector deficits, regulating business effectively, ensuring the sustainability of natural resources and protecting the environment. There are certain standards which we must all uphold, in particular in maintaining the rule of law and integrity in public life, building strong and successful communities and respecting human rights. This Government is determined to help the Territories run themselves effectively, not to run them itself. The Territories have made considerable strides in their economic development. We are determined to support them and to ensure that those Territories that still need assistance will remain a first call on Britain's international development budget. We expect these Territories to do all that is necessary to reduce over time their reliance on subsidies from the British taxpayer; and we expect all Territory governments to manage their public finances sustainably.

The third goal of our strategy is to improve the quality and range of support available to the Territories. The Government is willing to make investments that will promote growth and economic independence in the aided Territories. For example, the Department for International Development is spending up to £247 million on a project to construct an airport on St Helena. This will be a significant step on the path to self-sufficiency and will help the island to reduce its dependence on UK aid in the future.

We also want to help the Territories build productive links with other countries and international organisations, particularly to make good use of support from the European Union and the Commonwealth. We will support this using the FCO's overseas networks and relationships.

This year, we have celebrated a number of important landmarks relating to the Territories. In January, we marked the centenary of Scott's heroic journey to the South Pole. Earlier this month, we welcomed Territory leaders to Britain to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. Two weeks ago, we commemorated the 30th anniversary of the end of the Falklands conflict in which British soldiers gave their lives to protect the Falkland Islanders' right of self-determination. This White Paper is another major milestone – one that marks a new era of positive engagement between Britain and the Overseas Territories.