



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

25 March 1983

New Jersey

Argentine Next of Kin

Thank you for your letter of 24 March (not to all) about the action we should take if an attempt is made to sail a vessel containing Argentine next of kin to the Falkland Islands. In advance of the OD(EM) meeting on 28 March it may be helpful to set out recent developments.

The ICRC have put our preliminary conditions to the Argentine organiser of the visit, Sr Destefanis. They have reported that he claims to be willing to offer all possible guarantees, ie the group will consist only of close relatives of Argentines who died during the hostilities; he would give guarantees of good behaviour; the ICRC would be permitted to search the boat; and there would be no press on board.

The Uruguayan Government have belatedly informed us of an approach they received from Destefanis on 7 March requesting humanitarian assistance with a visit. They ask for our urgent confirmation that we would agree to such a visit. Their concern is to be able to respond to the Argentine Government offering their good offices with the object of deflecting the intense criticism from Argentina which they have been experiencing over their involvement in our own next of kin visit which stages through Montevideo on 5/6 April and 16 April.

It would appear that the Argentine Government are keeping their distance from Sr Destefanis. He claims that he deliberately has not approached his government and the ICRC confirm that the Argentine Government are taking no position on his project, at least until the British Government's attitude becomes clear.

/The Civil





The Civil Commissioner has spoken to Falkland Island Government Councillors. He has not been able to move them far from a position of total opposition. But in a telephone conversation on 25 March he has been asked to try again to explain to Councillors the international and domestic difficulties and the sort of visit we envisage, ie direct from a ship moored close to the Darwin cemetery and involving no contact with the Islanders. He has indicated that he is not sanguine.

The ICRC have commented that Sr Destefanis himself will be the only member of the group who is not a close relative, and have indicated that they would expect us to stipulate that he should not be permitted to sail with the group. They have not gone on to make it clear whether this is a hint that they consider Destefanis to be a troublemaker who should be excluded.

We see advantage in an early public statement in this country of our position on the proposed Argentine visit. We are coming under pressure from the Uruguayans and now, as reported in the media on 25 March, from a delegation of the British Council of Churches which has recently visited Argentina. There is also the danger that Destefanis might at some point set sail with his group without waiting for our permission.

The subjects for discussion at the ministerial meeting on Monday appear therefore to be:

- (a) the terms and timing of any public announcement about acceptance of an Argentine visit;
- (b) what is to be said to the International Red Cross about the role we expect them to play in the vetting of Argentine visitors;
- (c) the instructions to be sent to the Civil Commissioner regarding the immigration arrangements to be made for any Argentine visitors;
- (d) what is to be said to the Uruguayan Government about our attitude towards Destefanis's request.

/I am

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I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries  
of all members of OD(EM).

*Your son*  
*R B Bone*

(R B Bone)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

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bc Sir A. Patten



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 March 1983

Dear John,

Argentine Next-of-Kin

After OD this morning the Prime Minister had a brief discussion of this subject with the Secretary of State for Defence and Mr. Hurd. The discussion was concerned in particular with the question of what action we should take if, contrary to present expectations, an attempt was made to sail a vessel containing or purporting to contain Argentine next-of-kin to the Falklands this weekend. It was agreed that, if this eventuality occurred, aggressive action should be avoided (Ministers had in mind both the effect on international opinion of such action and the possible consequences for our own next-of-kin visit to the Islands). The aim should be to escort the vessel to a suitable mooring point, after which the position could be further considered.

The Prime Minister would like to carry the discussion further on Monday, 28 March after the ministerial meeting which is to consider the question of loan service personnel in Oman. The Prime Minister's present inclination is that we should state publicly that we could consider a visit by Argentine next-of-kin only if it were organised by the International Red Cross and carried out strictly under their auspices. She would see advantage in an early public statement to this effect.

It would be helpful if you could circulate for the meeting on 28 March a letter summarising the stage reached in our discussions with the International Red Cross and containing recommendations for further action.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

You see  
pl. lola.

John Holmes Esq  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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