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PRIME MINISTER'S REPLY TO TELEGRAM FROM THE POPE - 24 May 1982

We share the anguish which you express at the loss of life in the tragic conflict over the Falkland Islands. I deeply respect the reasons which led you to send your message and should like to reply in the same spirit of frankness and candour.

The conflict was not of our making. It was the Argentine forces who invaded the Islands and broke the peace. We have striven for seven weeks to secure a negotiated settlement but Argentina has shown no disposition to match our endeavours in good faith. A ceasefire has to be accompanied by withdrawal of Argentine troops. To do otherwise would leave the aggressor in occupation and in possession of the rewards of military adventure.

That our cause is just and that the principles which we uphold are shared and understood by democratic nations, I have not the slightest doubt. Aggression must not be allowed to succeed. International law must be upheld. Sovereignty cannot be achieved by armed invasion. The liberty which the Falkland Islanders previously enjoyed must be restored. The world has seen too often in this century the tragic consequences of failure to defend the principles of justice, civilised values and international law. We seek peace with freedom, not peace at the expense of freedom.

The conflict could be ended immediately if Argentina were to withdraw its forces in accordance with Security Council Resolution 502. The authority of the United Nations would thereby be reasserted. I earnestly hope that such counsels may yet prevail in Buenos Aires before more lives are lost.