



Adjournment Debate

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members I rise in support of this debate and wish to raise the following issues:

We welcome the announcement of a further extension to RMS and also the release of the Tender for an interim Air service. The Island and our people remains grateful to British tax payers for their unfailing support to us during these difficult times.

It has been some eight months since we were informed that our much anticipated Airport would not be taking commercial flights, much have happened since in particular the work to find a solution.

To say that the last eight months have been turbulent would be an understatement I say this Mr Speaker because although work is happening behind the scenes much of this is been overshadowed by the lack of information and engagement with our people.

This have been particularly so with regard to regular updates as to what is been done on behalf of the people, after all the British tax payers funded the airport for the people of St Helena, but we seems to have for gotten that along the way, or to put it more accurately certain senior officials at DFID seems to think that.

I refer previously to a turbulent 8 months, I said that because as an elected member and a member of our Government's Executive Council the way we have been treated by certain key officials in the Department for International Development anything airport has been disgraceful.

At the start of the crisis over the airport the one thing that all elected members were clear on is that the RMS had to be extended for as long as possible simply because we had to restore confidence to the travelling public and for our food security and of course we had the Crew to think of too.

The resistance from key officials in DFID to this knowing that the problem with Wind Shear was never going to be a quick fix was unbelievable and it showed how unprepared they were and the sheer lack of knowledge they had of the importance of continued access and in making an early decision to extend the RMS.

It took two months for them to recognise that the problems at the Airport was never going to be a quick fix and they finally agreed in late June to extend the RMS until July next year.

Mr Speaker Honourable members by then much damage had been done and you all know the rest tourist numbers down bookings on RMS down this is because people could not plan and when a new schedule was released it was far too late for this year.

Many of our Saints who had plans to visit the island using the plan air service had to cancel as by the time the agreement was reached to extend the RMS for a further year it was too late for them to arrange the additional leave. We thank senior officials in DFID for that and hope they enjoy their Xmas with their families, I doubt very much they will be thinking of us or families that are apart as a result of their resistance to make that early decision to extend the RMS as elected members had requested.

Against this background those same officials were attempting to run our Government from White Hall, they were refusing to release information and sadly on 7th October elected members received an E-mail from SHG Press Office, effectively putting an embargo on any news about what was happening with our Airport. In this message it had this sentence and I quote: **"We have discussed this approach with DFID and they agree"** unquote.

Mr. Speaker Honourable Members I pause here to reflect because in September 2016, The Honourable Mike Olsson raised a series of questions in this Honourable House about what constitutes the St Helena Government the answer to a question of who was the highest decision making body in SHG the answer given was Executive Council, it was not that we did not know, but I say this today so that we can remind ourselves of this and what is set out in our constitution.

Turning back to that famous message of 7th October, Executive Council was not aware of this news embargo nor were they consulted before this decision was made. The constitution is very clear that the Governor have to consult with Executive Council.

Elected members met with Her Excellency the Governor and the Chief Secretary, that same day, where we protested about this turn of events and raised the constitutional position.

On 11th Oct I am pleased to say Her Excellency responded to the issues we raised in the earlier meeting and the result of this was to be better lines of communications between Officials and Councilors' and more importantly with the public. These were Her Excellency's words not mine.

One other important point arose from this communication from Her Excellency that was an elected member should sit on the Airport Project Board as an observer apparently this board is chaired by DFID. This Her Excellency said would ensure that elected members will have the same up to date information as officials.

Sadly DFID overruled her Excellency and did not want an elected member on that Board, needless to say Elected members protested but this have been to no avail and we have been told this is a DFID Board.

Mr. Speaker Honourable Members I cannot find any provision in our Constitution that makes provision for DFID to set up such a board in the territory. St Helena is an internal self-governing territory as set out in our constitution. Executive Council is the highest decision making body and have never been consulted about such a board and have been excluded. How can this be allowed in a territory.

Given the fact that we have an Airport that is currently not fit for the purpose to which it was built, and we have a Board chaired by DFID in our territory that is taking decisions about our island it is nothing short of a political disgrace that senior officials in DFID and here would wish to have such a set up without representation by an elected Exco member. I submit senior officials on island are condoning this unconstitutional act and I call for the immediate disbandment of this board.

I call upon the Attorney General to advise elected members if his Chambers were consulted when this board was constituted, if so what was his advice and whether such advice included representation by Exco if not why not, please can he make his advice available to elected members.

Mr. Speaker Honourable members we have in our constitution section 2 the Partnership Values, two of which states, the partnership between the United Kingdom and St Helena **shall** continue to be based on the following values:

Good faith, and good government, how can it ever be good governance for a department of HMG Government to be acting this way in an overseas territory and where is the good faith and governance when in fact the peoples representatives are been excluded. I submit that that senior officials in DFID who is acting in the way I have demonstrated is in breach of these those components of our constitution and so is officials here. The Airport Board is I further submit unconstitutional and no other of Britain's territories would tolerate this and I ask why officials here think we should what are they doing about this.

I therefore, call upon the Officials in both DFID and here that given that Exco is excluded from this board where decisions are been taken without consultation this is unconstitutional and this board must be discontinued forthwith.

The promised of better communication that Her Excellency set out in her message to Councilors' of 11th October have not been forthcoming and there have been very little information to the public on anything airport. Recently my Colleague Councillor Derek Thomas and I met the two officials concern in DFID we were promised a narrative that we could use for the release of information to the public this too have not been forthcoming.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members I call upon this Honourable House to agree to a delegation of St Helena's all Party Parliamentary Group to visit St Helena on a fact finding mission in relation to our Airport and that they should report to the United Kingdom parliament. I am not satisfied with the way elected members here are been constantly kept out of the decision making process when it comes to anything airport, this needs to change and elected members of Executive Council must be given full excess to decision making.

Finally, I urge elected members to call for an urgent video conference with the FCO Minister so that we can sort this matter out once and for all. I say Mr. Speaker Honourable Members enough is enough we need the good governance back on this island and the good faith this has been sadly lacking over the last 8 months and it seems that senior officials in DFID rules rather than elected members of Executive Council.

I beg to move and support his adjournment debate!