

Argentina to seek UN ruling over the Falkland Islands

Argentina won the unanimous backing of Latin America and the Caribbean as it prepared to press its claim to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands in a meeting with the United Nations.

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Jorge Taiana, Argentina's foreign minister, will travel to New York on Wednesday to demand secretary general Ban Ki-moon's intervention to kick-start negotiations with Britain over the ownership of the South Atlantic islands.

The Argentine position was buoyed by the unanimous backing of a 32-country group of Latin American and Caribbean nations including Brazil, Mexico and Colombia.



Desire Petroleum PLC said that it has started drilling for oil about 60 miles north of the disputed Falkland Islands Photo: AP

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The group also included 12 Commonwealth nations and is almost entirely composed of non-White former Spanish and British colonies.

Argentina's historical claim over the Falkland Islands has been brought back into the spotlight by plans to begin oil exploration.

Jorge Argüello, the ambassador to the UN said the Buenos Aires would wage an unceasing diplomatic campaign to force London into negotiations over the fate of the islands.

He said: "Argentina's sole objective is to create the conditions needed to restart a serious dialogue regarding the Malvinas sovereignty."

Argentina maintains the Falklands which it knows as "Las Malvinas", are part of its Tierra del Fuego province. The islands are home to 3,000 residents of British descent.

In recent months, Buenos Aires reacted angrily to efforts by British firms to explore the waters around the Falklands for oil. Some experts believe the islands could harbour as much as 60 billion barrels the equivalent oil wealth to the North Sea.

Since its military was defeated by a British Task Force after invading the islands in 1982, Argentina has sought support for its proposal of a negotiated settlement through the UN.

Christina Fernandez de Kirchner, Argentina's president, accused Britain of consistently violating joint agreements on exploiting the resource potential of the region.

The UN has called for talks to settle the dispute but they have no force in law without the backing of the Security Council where the UK is a permanent member with the right of veto.

Mrs Kirchner called on other Security Council members to help increase pressure on Britain.

"[What is] even more important will be to achieve a change of attitude in the big powers, in this case those which have a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council," she said.

The support of the 32-member group, which has no name but is part of a drive to launch a new "Americas" community that excludes the US and Canada, dominated the summit near Cancun in Mexico.

Fledgling members were warned not to allow splits to appear at the opening meeting.

"It's time to realise the unity of Latin America and the Caribbean," said Felipe Calderón, Mexico's president. "We have approved a declaration in which leaders of countries and governments present here reaffirm their support for the Republic of Argentina's legitimate rights in its sovereignty dispute with the United Kingdom."

The issue was seized on by Hugo Chavez, the leftist president of Venezuela, to parade his revolutionary views.

"We support unconditionally the Argentine government and the Argentine people in their complaints," Mr Chavez said. "That sea and that land belongs to Argentina and to Latin America."

A Foreign Office spokesman played down the unanimous backing the resolution received.

"We're used to Latin American countries being vocally with Argentina as acts of regional solidarity and its probably not the first time the Commonwealth countries have done this," he said.

"But when it comes to putting their money where their mouth is they never follow through.

"It gives Foreign Minister Taiana some ammo when he goes to meet Ban Ki-moon at the UN but just because more people are watching does mean it will have any more effect."

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