



General Assembly

Distr.: General
1 February 2024

Original: English

Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Saint Helena

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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Note: The information contained in the present working paper has been derived from public sources, including those of the territorial Government, and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the administering Power under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Information was transmitted by the administering Power on 4 December 2023. Further details are contained in previous working papers, available at www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



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The Territory at a glance

Territory: Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations, is administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Representative of administering Power: Governor Nigel Phillips (since August 2022).

Geography: Saint Helena is a small island of volcanic origin situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, approximately 1,900 km from Angola and 2,900 km from Brazil. Ascension lies 1,200 km to the north-west of Saint Helena, and Tristan da Cunha and the other small islands lie approximately 2,400 km to the south.

Land area: 310 km², consisting of the islands of Saint Helena and Ascension and the Tristan da Cunha group.

Exclusive economic zone: 1,641,294 km².

Population: The estimated resident population is 4,078 on Saint Helena (September 2023); 822 on Ascension (September 2023); and 246 on Tristan da Cunha (November 2023).

Life expectancy at birth: Women: 81 years; men: 74 years (2022).

Language: English.

Capital: Jamestown (Saint Helena); Georgetown (Ascension); Edinburgh of the Seven Seas (Tristan da Cunha).

Main political parties: None.

Elections: Most recent: Saint Helena: October 2021 (general election); Ascension: October 2022 (general election); Tristan da Cunha: March 2019 (general election).

Legislature: Unicameral Legislative Council on Saint Helena (15 seats, 12 elected members; 40 per cent of the 15 seats are held by women, including the Deputy Speaker). Under the 2009 Constitution, the Governor, acting after consultation with the relevant Island Council, may make laws for Ascension and/or Tristan da Cunha. Ascension and Tristan da Cunha both have elected Island Councils.

Gross domestic product per capita: £8,850 (Saint Helena, 2021/22). According to the administering Power, because Ascension has no permanent population, its gross domestic product per capita cannot be calculated. Data are unavailable for Tristan da Cunha.

Economy: The export revenue of Saint Helena is derived from tourism, fishing, coffee and the sale of commemorative coins and postage stamps. The provision of public services on Saint Helena depends on income taxes, customs duties, fees and financial aid from the United Kingdom. For Ascension, the United Kingdom provides financial assistance for the development of critical infrastructure, and the main source of revenue is derived through taxes and business levies, with additional revenue from sales of stamps and coins. The economy of Tristan da Cunha is based on sustainable lobster fishery, with some income from tourism (prior to the pandemic) and the sale of stamps and coins. It receives financial assistance

from the United Kingdom for the development of infrastructure, the funding of posts in education, health care and public service training.

Unemployment rate: 3.6 per cent (Saint Helena, 2021 population and housing census). On Ascension, people must be employed to stay on the island, except for children, spouses and long-term partners. Tristan da Cunha has full employment.

Monetary unit: Saint Helena pound, which is pegged to the pound sterling (Saint Helena and Ascension); pound sterling (Tristan da Cunha).

Brief history: The island of Saint Helena was reportedly discovered in 1502 by a Spanish navigator in the service of Portugal. By the end of the sixteenth century, it had become a port of call for ships en route from Europe to the East Indies. In 1633, it was claimed by the Netherlands, but not settled. In 1659, the British East India Company took possession of and settled the island, after the grant of a charter to govern by the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell, two years earlier. It officially became a Crown colony in 1833, a British dependent territory in 1981 and a British overseas territory in 2002. According to the administering Power, Tristan da Cunha is the most remote inhabited island in the world. There is no airport and there are 9 scheduled sailings a year. A one-way trip from Cape Town, South Africa, lasts about seven days.

I. Constitutional, legal and political developments

1. The current Constitution of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, which entered into force in September 2009, provides for the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. The new Constitution changed the name of the Territory from “Saint Helena and its Dependencies” to “Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha”, giving the three islands equal status within the Territory. The Head of the Government is the Governor, who is appointed by the British Crown. However, the ability of the Governor to act inconsistently with the wishes of elected councillors is curtailed in comparison with the previous Constitution. The British Overseas Territories Act 2002 provides for the granting of British citizenship to “British overseas territory citizens” when certain qualifications are met.

2. The Legislative Council on Saint Helena comprises the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the Attorney General and 12 members elected by the public. Only the 12 members elected by the public are voting members. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are elected by the voting members and the Attorney General is an ex officio member. The Executive Council consists of the Chief Minister, four Ministers and the Attorney General, who is ex officio and non-voting. The Chief Minister is elected by the Legislative Council. The Chief Minister selects four Ministers from the voting members. The Governor presides at meetings of the Executive Council. There shall be a general election of the elected members of the Legislative Council at such time, being not less than six weeks nor more than three months after the date of every dissolution of the Council, as the Governor appoints.

3. The 2009 Constitution contains enhanced provisions for ensuring the independence of the judiciary from the legislative and executive branches of the Government. The judicial system comprises the Court of Appeal, the Supreme Court and subordinate courts (currently the Magistrates’ Court and the Labour Regulating Authority to determine employment claims; others may be established by ordinance) and the Coroner, to investigate certain sudden or suspicious deaths. There remains a final appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in prescribed circumstances. The Media Commission has been established by ordinance and deals with complaints about breaches of the media codes of practice.

4. Following a political governance review conducted in 2019 and 2020, a consultative poll on 17 March 2021 and the endorsement of the result of the poll by the Legislative Council, a Constitutional Amendment Order was made by Order in Council and laid before Parliament in July 2021 and came into effect on 25 October 2021. The Order made provision for the introduction of a ministerial system of government to replace the previous committee system.

5. In April 2021, the Public Service adopted a new structure with five portfolios and a Central Support Service providing overarching support to all portfolios. The five portfolios are: health and social care; education, skills and employment; environment, natural resources and planning; safety, security and home affairs; and treasury, infrastructure and sustainable development. In 2023, a review of the portfolio structure resulted in some of the services that had been allocated under the treasury, infrastructure and sustainable development being moved to the safety, security and home affairs Portfolio or to the Central Support Service, and a new portfolio was created for economic development.

6. Two inquiries were launched in the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in April and June 2023, respectively, one, by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, to explore the constitutional arrangements of the overseas territories and whether the relationship is fit for purpose in the twenty-first century; and the other, by the House of Commons Procedure

Committee, to examine options for the representation of overseas territories within the House of Commons.

7. In its written submission to the first inquiry, the Saint Helena Chamber of Commerce noted the challenges facing the business community and the vulnerability of the territorial economy. It also stated that a closer constitutional relationship with the United Kingdom would be beneficial.

8. In its submissions to both inquiries, the Saint Helena Equality and Human Rights Commission argued that the people of Saint Helena needed and wanted a move towards greater autonomy and freedom, pointing out that there was clear evidence that the existing constitutional arrangements were colonial and obsolete. In their view, if the overseas territories were treated as British rather than foreign, most of the problems would resolve themselves.

II. Budget

9. Owing to a small tax base due in part to migration and an ageing population, Saint Helena depends heavily on the United Kingdom for funding. The budget for the 2023/24 financial year, presented by the Minister for Treasury, Infrastructure and Sustainable Development on 28 June 2023, amounts to £47.1 million, representing a 5.3 per cent increase in comparison with the previous financial year. According to the administering Power, to balance the recurrent budget, total financial aid required from the Government of the United Kingdom is £33.06 million for the 2023/24 financial year (an increase of 4 per cent on the previous year), including £27.86 million for core budget support, £2.9 million for airport operations and £1.7 million for conditional contingency funding.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

10. The largest employer is the Government of Saint Helena. The next largest sectors for employment are retail and services. The local population also earns income from construction, fishing, horticulture and livestock-raising. Since the completion of the construction of the airport, wages on Saint Helena have generally risen less than inflation, resulting in a small drop in real terms. In 2021/22, the median gross income from full-time employment, adjusted for inflation, was £9,460, a decrease of 1.5 per cent compared with the previous year. The cost of living is regarded as high because most goods must be imported. Prices are influenced heavily by external factors, including the exchange rate of the pound to the South African rand, sea freight rates and inflation in the United Kingdom and South Africa. In the third quarter of 2023, the annual rate of inflation was 2.7 per cent. The biggest export of Saint Helena is the provision of services to visitors, who typically spend money on accommodation, food, hospitality and transport. The opening of the airport to commercial air services in October 2017 led to an increase in tourist numbers (including both tourists and members of the diaspora returning home to visit family and friends). As a result of pandemic travel restrictions, expenditure of visitors dropped to between £2.6 million and £3.6 million in 2021. In 2022, such expenditure was higher, with visitors spending between £3.8 million and £5.3 million on the island.

B. Development

11. On 1 May 2018, the Executive Council approved the Sustainable Economic Development Plan 2018–2028, which is focused on raising the standard of living and improving the quality of life in the Territory by increasing exports and reducing imports.

12. In 2019, the then-Department for International Development launched an economic development investment programme for the period 2019–2026, worth up to £30 million, to improve the infrastructure of the island, assist it in adapting to climate change and provide additional funding for the rehabilitation of the cloud forest.

13. According to the vision and strategy of the Government of Saint Helena for the period from April 2022 to March 2025, sustainability is at the core of all its strategies and plans. Where possible and relevant, activities have been selected that are linked with the Sustainable Development Goals (in particular Goals 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13 and 14).

C. Fisheries and agriculture

14. According to the Statistics Office, fish and coffee are the two main commodity exports of Saint Helena, with a total value of around £0.35 million to £0.4 million in each of the fiscal years 2017/18 and 2019/20 (roughly 1 per cent of the gross domestic product). During fiscal years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23, there were no exports of fish owing to the closure of the Saint Helena Fisheries Corporation. In 2022/23, the value of coffee exported was £51,000. The value of the export of goods commodities is normally much smaller than the export of services to visitors, including tourists.

D. Transport and utilities

15. Saint Helena is accessed mainly through its airport. A weekly scheduled commercial air service to the island from South Africa commenced on 14 October 2017, providing passenger and freight capability. The service switches to a twice-weekly operation during peak periods. In addition, Saint Helena receives other air traffic, such as private charter and medical evacuation flights.

16. A cargo vessel provides regular freight service to the island, with calls at Ascension four times per year. The Territory has 166 km of paved roads (116 km on Saint Helena, 40 km on Ascension and 10 km on Tristan da Cunha) and 30 km of unpaved roads (20 km on Saint Helena and 10 km on Tristan da Cunha).

17. Saint Helena has two local radio stations and one satellite television provider that is rebroadcast terrestrially. Ascension has one local radio station and receives relays of broadcasts from Saint Helena. Broadcasts from the British Forces Broadcasting Service are available, as are television services for the military of the United States of America. Tristan da Cunha receives television and radio broadcasts from the Service. In August 2021, a branch of the Equiano subsea cable was landed in Rupert's Bay in Saint Helena, and the cable became operational in October 2023, providing super-fast connectivity.

18. According to the administering Power, as at 2023, around 20 per cent of energy is produced using renewables. One of the goals of the energy strategy is to increase renewable energy to 80 per cent by 2027/28.

19. According to the administering Power, Saint Helena has developed a water strategy and is planning on developing a detailed water resource management plan. The water resource strategy for the period 2020–2050, endorsed in 2020, addresses the need to reduce the risk of water shortages and the associated impact on livelihoods, the economy and the environment.

E. Banking and credit

20. The Bank of Saint Helena is the sole banking entity; it provides banking and related financial services within Saint Helena and at its sub-branch on Ascension. A local debit card service commenced in December 2017.

21. In May 2018, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, pursuant to which the Secretary of State was required to provide all reasonable assistance to the Governments of overseas territories to enable each of those Governments to establish a publicly accessible register of the beneficial ownership of companies registered in its jurisdiction and to prepare, no later than 31 December 2020, a draft Order in Council requiring any overseas territory that has not introduced such a register to do so. On 14 December 2020, the Government of the United Kingdom published a draft Order in Council setting out a framework for the registers. The Government of Saint Helena has committed itself to introducing such a register, and the Government of the United Kingdom is providing support where required. In 2020, the Government of the United Kingdom set out a reasonable expectation that the registers of the overseas territories would be in place by the end of 2023.

F. Tourism

22. According to the administering Power and the Government of Saint Helena, the airport is an important means of bringing new financial opportunities to the island and helps to promote tourism. The rugged natural beauty of the Territory, its rare wildlife and its historic sites, such as Longwood House and Napoleon Bonaparte's tomb, attract visitors. In the six years since the opening of the Saint Helena airport for commercial flights, 17,181 passengers have arrived by air. A total of 8,785 passengers were leisure visitors, of whom approximately 4,933 were Saint Helenians visiting family and friends and 3,052 were tourists (totals calculated for the period from October 2017 to September 2023). Flights operate weekly between Saint Helena and Johannesburg, with twice-weekly flights scheduled between late November and February. A monthly charter flight usually connects Saint Helena with Ascension. In 2022, 132 yachts arrived, carrying 460 persons. This number is low compared with pre-pandemic levels, as arrivals have not yet fully recovered from the impact of reduced movement during the initial stages of the pandemic. According to information from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom, the tourism industry declined during the pandemic. The Saint Helena Government's Tourism Recovery Strategy 2022–2024, launched on 24 April 2023, sets out a road map for the island to return to pre-pandemic levels of visitor activity.

23. According to the Statistics Office, the number of arrivals to Saint Helena in fiscal year 2022/23 (excluding day visitors on cruise ships) was 3,606, considerably higher than in the same period in 2021/22.

IV. Social conditions

A. General

24. According to the administering Power, following the reintroduction of the granting of British citizenship to Saint Helenians in 2002, the island experienced an exodus. The population census conducted in 2016 showed some recovery, with a resident population of 4,534, an increase of 5.5 per cent from 2008. The increase in population began with the air access project, which has resulted in an increasing number of Saint Helenians returning to the island to take advantage of the improved employment and business development opportunities. The results of the February 2021 census showed a total resident population of 4,439, a slight drop compared to the 2016 census figure. Censuses are normally conducted every 10 years, but the decision to conduct the 2021 census after a shorter period was taken in view of the introduction of air access in 2017, following construction of the airport. Estimates published by the Statistics Office in October 2023 showed the resident population to be 4,078 at the end of September 2023, representing a reduction of 3.4 per cent compared with September 2022, when there were 4,223 residents on the island.

25. Measured by international standards, Saint Helena is a middle-income Territory with few signs of material poverty, according to information provided by the administering Power. A minimum income standard, introduced in July 2013, protects against poverty by providing an income-related benefit to households in receipt of income below that threshold. At the end of October 2023, 257 families were in receipt of income-related benefits, and 845 persons collected the basic island pension. The number of recipients of the pension has risen steadily in recent years, consistent with demographic projections and the ageing population.

26. The most recent estimate of the old-age dependency ratio of the resident population, from the end of August 2023, is 47, an increase compared with the estimate of 41 from the 2021 census. That ratio places Saint Helena among the highest old-age dependency ratios in the world, with little potential for natural population change to remedy the situation in the foreseeable future. This is starting to place pressure upon the delivery of appropriate care services for people with complex needs and the care requirements of older persons. There are challenges related to the age range of staff working in the care industry (25 per cent between 55 and 65 years of age and 10 per cent over 65 years of age).

27. There is one general hospital in Jamestown and three health clinics (Longwood, Levelwood and Halfree Hollow) that serve people living in rural areas. All primary, non-complex secondary and emergency care is delivered within the Jamestown hospital setting and surrounding clinics. The Health Directorate provides oncology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, obstetric support, gynaecology, radiology and dentistry services. There is a paramedic service that provides all health emergency responses and supports the day to day running of the emergency department. Patients who require specialist or tertiary care are referred to South Africa. In addition, 10 slots at facilities in the United Kingdom are available for Saint Helenian residents who require complex health-care intervention. There is an older people's residential care service that accommodates 45 older adults with physical and mental complexities associated with age and declining overall health. There is a residential care setting for adults with disabilities and additional needs and a supported living service, which is currently being expanded with a view to moving away from the institutional care approach for this client group. There is one residential care setting for children in care and a continued recruitment drive for foster carers. The Strategic Delivery Plan 2024–2027 of the Health and Social Care Portfolio encompasses six strategic priorities addressing the complexity of delivery of health and care services on Saint Helena.

28. According to the administering Power, in August 2022, the regulations with regard to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) were amended, and restrictions with regard to quarantine and testing were repealed. The island was therefore reopened in line with the rest of world, and the response to COVID-19 shifted to living with the disease. When the island opened up in August 2022, 98 per cent of the population had been vaccinated with up to four doses of the vaccine, offering the community one of the highest levels of protection available at that time.

29. According to the administering Power, significant progress continues to be made in Saint Helena with regard to the development of a professional children's services department that delivers effective child protection services and preventive interventions for children and young people. The department provides a statutory social work response in line with the rest of the world, ensuring that children and young people are protected from harm and achieve the best possible outcome with support and intervention. With a view to improving the multi-agency response to children in need, the department works in conjunction with health and education departments to deliver an early help offer. The administering Power continues to facilitate the Children and Adults Safeguarding Board, a working partnership between Saint Helena and a local authority based in the United Kingdom aimed at fostering continuous improvement and effective safeguarding. This multi-agency strategic partnership is made up of senior officers from Children's Social Care, Adults Social Care, Education, Criminal Justice, Health, Police, voluntary organizations and service user representative groups.

30. The Equality and Human Rights Commission of Saint Helena developed a strategic plan for the period 2022–2025 that provides the Government of Saint Helena with the flexibility, responsiveness and relevance required to advance human rights on the island. Furthermore, the Commission has confirmed that the goals established in the plan were aligned with relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

B. Employment

31. According to the administering Power, the unemployment rate is currently very low, but there are concerns about the productivity rate of the labour force. A significant number of Saint Helenians are employed off-island.

C. Education

32. Education is compulsory and free for children between 5 and 16 years of age. There are currently four publicly funded schools in operation in Saint Helena (three primary schools and one secondary school). All schools are supported by a teacher training section that focuses on the professional development and upskilling of all teaching staff. The Inclusion Service supports children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

33. Students from overseas territories benefit from the home student rate for tuition fees at British universities, provided that they have lived in a British overseas territory, the European Economic Area or Switzerland for the three years prior to the first academic year of their course of study. Students will be eligible for tuition fee loans in England provided that they have settled status upon arrival in the United Kingdom and are starting full-time or part-time undergraduate courses in the 2023/24 academic year. Eligible students are encouraged to ensure that they hold a British passport before applying for home fee status to study in the United Kingdom.

34. The Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio has taken advantage of the opportunity presented by Student Finance England to support higher education studies in the United Kingdom, which has been available to the overseas territories since the academic year 2022/23. Further work on securing maintenance loans for students is in progress. Career Access Saint Helena, a service providing free and impartial career advice, information and guidance to anyone 11 years of age or older, was established in 2021 and has had positive engagement with the unemployed and school leavers. The service continues to offer all school-leavers the opportunity to engage in further education or work-based training and development. The Portfolio has revised the apprenticeship programme in order to improve equality between vocational and academic students and ensure that there are opportunities for apprenticeships in the Government of Saint Helena.

35. Retaining qualified and experienced teaching staff has become increasingly difficult. While staff are supported with professional development opportunities on the island, the ability of the Portfolio to deliver that support consistently is a challenge. According to the administering Power, the level of retention of local teachers dropped from 94 per cent in 2022 to 85 per cent in 2023 (96 per cent in primary education and 75 per cent in secondary education). Currently, 80 per cent of local teachers are internationally qualified at level 4 or above.

36. According to the administering Power, in 2023, 32 per cent of students achieved five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education passes with a grade of C or higher, including in English and mathematics. This result, although lower than that of 2022, passed the predicted target. Advanced Level results for 2023 showed a 100 per cent pass rate (27 examinations). Six students were successful in gaining sponsorship from Student Finance England for higher education studies in 2023. Two students completed undergraduate studies in 2023. To date, none of those students have returned to Saint Helena to take up employment.

37. Rigorous work continues in primary education to meet the demands of the new curriculum and to raise the levels of attainment in mathematics and English. In 2023, the key stage 2 standardized assessment test results showed an increase in the attainment of pupils compared to 2022. In mathematics, 70 per cent per cent of pupils attained age-related expectations, compared with 56 per cent in 2022, while 71 per cent attained age-related expectations in English, compared with 57 per cent in 2022. In all, 58 per cent of pupils attained age-related expectations in both English and mathematics. Inclusion continues to be a key focus within schools, with all schools sharing a commitment to providing opportunities for all pupils, but remains a challenge, given the growing number of children in the school system with special educational needs and disabilities or social, emotional and mental health needs. Currently, 21 per cent of students of secondary school age and 19 per cent of students of primary school age are on the register of students with special educational needs and disabilities. In previous years, a multidisciplinary team provided ongoing support to these students, but that support is no longer in place. The Inclusion Service does not have access to such professionals as educational psychologists, clinical psychologists or speech and language therapists. Despite that lack of access, with the resources available, the inclusion service ensures that appropriate individual learning plans are developed in close collaboration with the students, teachers and parents or carers and are regularly reviewed. Saint Helena Community College continues to offer robust programmes of study and support to adult learners, with an increasingly broader range of academic and vocational courses. There has, however, been a noted decline in the number of people accessing its services since the subsidy for courses at level 3 and above was discontinued. The College currently offers over 300 courses and has 649 active students.

38. In November 2019, the Education and Employment Directorate officially launched the Saint Helena Research Institute (see [A/AC.109/2020/13](#)). Interest in research has improved following the decrease in applications for the Institute as a result of COVID-19. In 2023, 14 applications were received and authorized. The Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio also operates a public library service for the people of Saint Helena. To date, membership stands at 1,337, comprising 997 adult members and 340 children.

D. Environment

39. According to the administering Power, the isolated position of Saint Helena has given rise to an unusual and remarkable array of terrestrial and marine flora and fauna. Saint Helena relies heavily on project funding to support conservation initiatives. The Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023–2026 of the Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio encompasses six strategic priorities, with corresponding targets, for the improvement and protection of the environments, natural resources and biodiversity of Saint Helena. A 200-nautical-mile maritime zone in the sea around Saint Helena was formally designated a marine protected area in 2019.

40. According to the administering Power, following the adoption of a waste management policy and an implementation plan, significant improvements in waste management have been achieved, notably the processing of organic waste into compost and the establishment of a small materials recycling facility that compacts and bales aluminium drink cans (for export), plastics and cardboard at the landfill site. A recyclable waste collection service from district hubs, homes and businesses, was planned for early 2024 to complement the operation of the facility. These outputs are expected to significantly extend the remaining useful life of the landfill site.

V. Ascension

A. Constitutional and political status

41. Executive authority for Ascension is exercised by the Governor of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. The resident Administrator is appointed by, and reports to, the Governor. The Governor is advised by the Island Council, currently comprising five elected members and three ex officio members: the Administrator, the Director of Resources and the Attorney General. Ex officio members have no voting rights. The current Administrator, Simon Minshull, was sworn in on 2 November 2022. The Administrator represents the Governor of the Territory, is the Head of the Government of Ascension and, as an ex officio member, chairs the Island Council in the Governor's absence.

42. Elections are held every three years. The most recent general election was held in October 2022. All registered voters over 18 years of age are eligible to vote. Under the 2009 Constitution, the Governor, acting after consultation with the Island Council, may make laws for Ascension. Ascension has its own legislation, but Saint Helenian law applies to the extent that it is not inconsistent with local law, insofar as it is suitable for local circumstances and subject to such modifications as local circumstances make necessary.

43. According to the administering Power, there are five full-time police officer positions on Ascension, including a senior officer with the rank of Inspector, reporting to the Chief of Police of Saint Helena. The role of Law Officer is fulfilled by the Attorney General of Ascension, who also serves as Attorney General of Saint Helena and Tristan da Cunha. The Attorney General is based on Saint Helena and is supported

locally by a Crown Counsel. The Chief Magistrate of Saint Helena serves as the Magistrate of Ascension and is supported by four local lay justices of the peace. The Saint Helena Public Solicitor provides legal advice to residents of Ascension and is supported on site by two local lay advocates. There are three local coroners and one based in the office of the Chief Magistrate on Saint Helena.

B. Economic and social conditions

44. Residence on Ascension is dependent upon employment and, consequently, according to the administering Power, the population of Ascension enjoys full employment (688 workers) or are dependants of employed persons. As at 30 September 2023, 34 inhabitants were non-working adults, 5 inhabitants were between 16 and 18 years of age and participated in youth training schemes, and 95 inhabitants were children under the age of 16. Residents of Ascension have no right of abode, although some have been on the island for several years and have children and grandchildren residing there, according to the administering Power. Services are mostly provided by the Government. A private-sector non-profit organization provides the water and electricity supply to most of the island, with the United States military base making its own arrangements. There are no commercial exports and little indigenous food production apart from a small hydroponics facility set up by the Government. The economy is somewhat fragile and is dependent upon the defence and communication organizations based on the island. Government activities are funded through, among other things, business levies, property tax, income tax and customs duties. The revenues raised cover the expenditure necessary for the provision of essential public services. There is a continued requirement to invest in the island's infrastructure, balanced with the need to maintain sufficient liquid reserves. The Government of the United Kingdom has provided funding for critical infrastructure in Ascension under its Conflict, Stability and Security Fund between 2018 and 2022 and under the International Programme Fund since 2022.

45. Since 2019, the entire Ascension exclusive economic zone has been designated a marine protected area, meeting a commitment made by the Government of the United Kingdom and contributing to its wider Blue Belt initiative. No large-scale commercial fishing or mineral extraction is permitted in the marine protected area, making it one of the largest in the world to offer such a level of protection.

46. Health services are provided through the fully functioning hospital in Georgetown. If treatment is not possible locally, cases are referred to the United Kingdom or South Africa. One gym, three swimming pools and other, limited sporting facilities are available to the community. Ascension began administering the first doses of COVID-19 vaccines in February 2021, and booster vaccines have been supplied by the Government of the United Kingdom at regular intervals since then.

47. The airport on Ascension is a military airfield with restricted civilian flight access. In March 2023, the runway fully reopened following a three-year repair project jointly funded by the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Since 18 November 2017, the Government of the United Kingdom has provided a direct monthly charter flight between Saint Helena and Ascension for Ascension's civilian population. In May 2023, the repaired runway was certified by the United States Federal Aviation Administration, enabling the island's civilian population to travel directly from Ascension to the United Kingdom by means of the South Atlantic Airbridge, under which a twice-weekly flights are operated using a military passenger aircraft. Essential sea freight links are maintained by the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, and periodic charters of civilian cargo vessels that service Saint Helena make calls at Ascension.

48. The school in Two Boats village provides education to all children from the age of 3 years to 16 years and, since 2021, has offered a limited range of A-level courses for school-leavers. A case management team for safeguarding children, whose members include a social worker and representatives of the police and the health and education sectors, is in place. The team meets to discuss individual cases and makes decisions on how best to proceed with specific safeguarding situations. A larger safeguarding board, chaired by the Administrator, meets quarterly to oversee the team and address the wider themes of safeguarding on Ascension. The employment of a full-time social worker has significantly raised awareness of safeguarding and has resulted in the implementation of new policies and procedures and in the delivery of training to better align the practices of Ascension with those of the United Kingdom. Success has been noted in the regulation and registration of childminders, whose provision of preschool childcare is vital because there are currently no such facilities on the island. Community education and engagement across the wide range of community members also increase safeguarding awareness and access to social welfare provision.

C. Environment

49. The island has the second-largest nesting population of green sea turtles in the Atlantic Ocean and supports 7 plant, 1 seabird, 11 fish and 27 invertebrate species that are endemic to the island. Other less studied groups are likely to contain unique species found exclusively on Ascension. The greatest threats to the biodiversity of the island are alien invasive species and climate change.

50. The Conservation and Fisheries Directorate has established a multidisciplinary team of scientists and managers based on the island to deliver the Ascension biodiversity strategy and action plan. Eight protected areas safeguard the island's terrestrial fauna and flora, and the entire 440,000 km² of the Ascension exclusive economic zone has been a marine protected area since 2019. In March 2021, after consultations with stakeholders, the Ascension Island marine protected area management plan was published, detailing how the area would be managed over the following five years. The marine protected area is home to threatened and endemic species, which have been relatively undisturbed by human activity. The plan is aimed at protecting entire marine ecosystems and the natural processes that support them and at respecting the cultural significance of the ocean to people living on Ascension. Large-scale commercial fishing is banned throughout the marine protected area, and no fishing of any kind, other than licensed research fishing, is permitted beyond 12 nautical miles of the island.

VI. Tristan da Cunha

A. Constitutional and political status

51. Executive authority for Tristan da Cunha is exercised by the Governor of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. The resident Administrator is appointed by, and reports to, the Governor. The present Administrator is Philip Kendall. The Governor is advised by the Island Council, comprising the Administrator, who is the President of the Council, eight elected members (including the Chief Islander and at least one woman) and three appointed members. Elections are held every three years. All registered voters over 18 years of age are eligible to vote. Under the 2009 Constitution, the Governor, after consulting with the Island Council, may make laws for Tristan da Cunha.

52. Tristan da Cunha has its own legislation, but Saint Helenian law applies to the extent that it is not inconsistent with local law, insofar as it is suitable for local circumstances and subject to such modifications as local circumstances make necessary. As a last resort, the laws of England and Wales apply. There are three special constables and one full-time police officer. The Administrator also serves as the Magistrate and coroner. There is no prison on Tristan da Cunha.

53. In its submissions to the inquiries mentioned in para. 6, the Island Council stated that Tristan da Cunha should become a United Kingdom territory in its own right and that it does not seek direct representation in the Parliament.

B. Economic and social conditions

54. The economy of Tristan da Cunha is based on traditional subsistence farming and fishing. Rock lobster is sustainably fished and exported. The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union has caused some problems for market access for its lobster, although there are provisions for the tariff-free import of whole lobster into the European Union.

55. Since 2007, Tristan da Cunha has enjoyed limited telecommunications. Internet access is available to the community, albeit at a very low bandwidth, through a Wi-Fi system.

56. In 2009, the Island Council set out broad strategies to secure the island's financial future. According to the United Kingdom, even with such reforms, the island would very soon become insolvent unless further drastic measures were taken. In 2011, a thorough review of budgets was undertaken, and strict rules on procurement and expenditure were introduced. According to the administering Power, external financial assistance with infrastructure projects and capacity-building will continue to be needed for a number of years.

57. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom funds the positions of resident doctors. To build capacity on the island, it also funds several expatriate positions, including three clinical nurses, a finance officer, a police advisor, teachers and a social worker. In addition, the Department sponsors annual dental and biennial optometrist visits as well as visits by other medical specialists. Funding for short-term visits by other specialists, such as veterinarians and auditors, is also provided. The Department also funds training both on and off the island. The training has been provided throughout the Administration, covering the following areas: fisheries, agriculture, tourism, post office services, public works and information and communications technology. Through a multi-year capital programme worth £12.8 million, new health facilities and harbour infrastructure were built, and a road project is due to begin in 2024. Further capital investment for future necessary infrastructure is currently under negotiation.

58. The island has one school, which provides children and young people between 3 and 16 years of age with an education. There are currently two expatriate teachers at the school. After 16 years of age, further education must be pursued off-island, which the Government of Tristan da Cunha has committed to providing for all who want to pursue further studies. Most students leave school at 16 years of age and tend to work in the Government or the fishing sector.

59. The disruption to transport links caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have largely ended, with transport ships returning to their usual schedule. The island received initial doses (in April 2021) and booster doses (in October 2022) of COVID-19 vaccines from the Government of the United Kingdom.

C. Environment

60. Gough Island and Inaccessible Island are both World Heritage Sites of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and Nightingale Island is a Ramsar wetland site.

61. Tristan da Cunha is successfully implementing conservation projects with help from its partners, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The projects run by the Overseas Territory Environmental Programme and Darwin funds include efforts to remove invasive species from uninhabited islands in the Tristan da Cunha group. There have also been projects to protect the rare Wilkins's bunting and eradicate invasive flax from Inaccessible Island.

62. Since 2020, 690,000 km² of the Tristan da Cunha exclusive economic zone has been a marine protection zone, which constitutes the largest no-take zone in the Atlantic. The marine protection zone will help to protect critically endangered albatrosses, rockhopper penguins, blue sharks and beaked whales, as well as other marine life and environments.

VII. Relations with international organizations and partners

63. According to the territorial Government, on 27 February 2020, the Economic Development Committee endorsed the recommendation that Saint Helena should formally declare itself to be a small island developing State and initiate the necessary steps to become affiliated with one of the United Nations regional commissions. On 24 March, the Executive Council approved the recommendation, subject to confirmation by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office that no entrustment from the administering Power was necessary.

VIII. Future status of the Territory

A. Position of the territorial Government

64. Information on political and constitutional developments regarding the status of Saint Helena is reflected in section I above.

B. Position of the administering Power

65. In 2023, two meetings of the United Kingdom-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council were held in London, on 11 and 12 May and on 14 and 15 November 2023, when the administering Power hosted the representatives of the Governments of its overseas territories.

66. In the communiqué adopted at the meeting held in May, the Government of the United Kingdom and the leaders of the overseas territories indicated that the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, applied to the peoples of the overseas territories. They reaffirmed the importance of promoting the right of those peoples to self-determination, a collective responsibility of all parts of the Government of the United Kingdom.

67. The Government of the United Kingdom and the leaders of the overseas territories stated that they would continue to explore ways in which the overseas territories could maintain international support in countering hostile sovereignty claims. It was also stated that, for those Territories with permanent populations that

so wished, the United Kingdom would continue to support their requests for removal from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

68. In the joint declaration issued on 14 December 2023, following the meeting held in November, the Government of the United Kingdom and the leaders of the overseas territories stated that the United Kingdom would support the democratically elected Governments of the overseas territories, if they so wished, in accepting additional responsibilities and greater autonomy, alongside accountability. The United Kingdom would take such steps in line with its sovereign responsibilities and international law, while ensuring that obligations were met under the Charter of the United Nations and relevant international conventions, as well as under the constitution of each overseas territory.

69. At the 8th meeting of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), on 10 October 2023, during the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, the representative of the United Kingdom stated that the United Kingdom had a modern relationship with all its overseas territories based on partnership, shared values and the right of the people of each Territory to choose to remain British.

70. He added that the overseas territories had a large measure of internal self-government, subject only to the United Kingdom retaining powers that enabled it to carry out its obligations under international law. The Joint Ministerial Council met annually to monitor and drive forward collective priorities for action, and the United Kingdom was committed to supporting the territories in achieving those collective priorities, including environmental protection, and to carrying out its responsibilities, including ensuring security. His Government provided financial and practical support to build local capacity and resilience, and various infrastructure projects were under way (see [A/C.4/78/SR.8](#)).

71. The Government of the United Kingdom supported the overseas territories throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The support included the funding and supply of testing kits, laboratory consumables, medical equipment, medical supplies and COVID-19 vaccines, including booster doses, and the provision of public health expertise. According to the administering Power, its support was in line with its enduring commitment to the peoples of its overseas territories.

IX. Action taken by the General Assembly

72. On 7 December 2023, the General Assembly adopted resolution [78/96](#) without a vote, on the basis of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples for 2023 ([A/78/23](#)) and the subsequent recommendation by the Fourth Committee. In that resolution, the Assembly:

(a) Reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of Saint Helena to self-determination, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and with General Assembly resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#), containing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;

(b) Also reaffirmed that, in the process of decolonization of Saint Helena, there was no alternative to the principle of self-determination, which was also a fundamental human right, as recognized under the relevant human rights conventions;

(c) Further reaffirmed that it was ultimately for the people of Saint Helena to determine freely their future political status in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter, the Declaration and the relevant resolutions of the General

Assembly, and in that connection called upon the administering Power, in cooperation with the territorial Government and appropriate bodies of the United Nations system, to develop political education programmes for the Territory in order to foster an awareness among the people of their right to self-determination in conformity with the legitimate political status options, based on the principles clearly defined in Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) and other relevant resolutions and decisions;

(d) Stressed the importance of the 2009 Constitution of the Territory and the further development of democratic and good governance, including the governance reform process;

(e) Requested the administering Power to assist the Territory by facilitating its work concerning public educational outreach efforts, consistent with Article 73 *b* of the Charter, and in that regard called upon the relevant United Nations organizations to provide assistance to the Territory, if requested;

(f) Requested the administering Power and relevant international organizations to continue to support the efforts of the territorial Government to address the socioeconomic development challenges of the Territory;

(g) Stressed that the Territory should continue to participate in the activities of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, including regional seminars, in order to provide the Committee with up-to-date information regarding the decolonization process;

(h) Also stressed the importance of the Special Committee being apprised of the views and wishes of the people of Saint Helena and enhancing its understanding of their conditions, including the nature and scope of the existing political and constitutional arrangements between Saint Helena and the administering Power;

(i) Called upon the administering Power to participate in and cooperate fully with the work of the Special Committee in order to implement the provisions of Article 73 *e* of the Charter and the Declaration and in order to advise the Committee on the implementation of the provisions under Article 73 *b* of the Charter on efforts to promote self-government in Saint Helena, and encouraged the administering Power to facilitate visiting and special missions to the Territory;

(j) Reaffirmed the responsibility of the administering Power under the Charter to promote the economic and social development and to preserve the cultural identity of the Territory, and requested the administering Power to take steps to enlist and make effective use of all possible assistance, on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis, in the strengthening of the economy of the Territory;

(k) Took into account the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals, stressed the importance of fostering the economic and social sustainable development of the Territory by promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion and promoting the integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supported, inter alia, economic, social and human development, while facilitating ecosystem conservation, regeneration, restoration and resilience in the face of new and emerging challenges, and strongly urged the administering Power to refrain from undertaking any kind of illicit, harmful and unproductive activities, including the use of the Territory as an international financial centre, that were not aligned with the interest of the people of the Territory;

(l) Requested the Territory and the administering Power to take all measures necessary to protect and conserve the environment of the Territory against any

degradation, and once again requested the specialized agencies concerned to monitor environmental conditions in the Territory and to provide assistance to the Territory, consistent with their prevailing rules of procedure;

(m) Requested the Special Committee to continue to examine the question of Saint Helena and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session and on the implementation of that resolution.

Annex

Map of Saint Helena

