

CHIEF MINISTER'S ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE OF 24 - 404/2022

JUNE 13, 2022

Madame Chairperson,

May I start by congratulating you on your re-election to the Chair of this prestigious committee.

The first Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Sir Joshua Hassan, called for the right to self-determination before this committee fifty-nine years ago.

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, bar a short interruption, has now been appearing before this Committee for thirty consecutive years.

And we will always ensure that the voice of the Gibraltarians is heard in this Committee whilst we remain on your list of Non-Self-Governing Territories - despite the distance we must travel for a short hearing.

We make the long trip to deliver this short speech because the people of Gibraltar want only respect for our exercise of our right to self-determination.

We want only to be decolonised like many of the countries in this room were decolonised.

We want only to exercise the same right that you all exercised.

To that end, for thirty years, Madame Chairperson, we have repeatedly asked the Committee to visit Gibraltar.

But it has not.

For thirty years, Madame Chairperson, we have repeatedly asked the Committee to take us off your list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

But it has not.

Over those thirty years, Madame Chairperson, our determination has not been blunted at all by an apparent lack of progress on either of these fronts.

And it will not be.

For the Gibraltarians will continue to come here, to fight our corner and defend our homeland for as many years as are necessary.

For whilst there is a claim to our land, and whilst there is an attempt to stifle our voices and deny us our inalienable human right to determine the future of our land for ourselves, we will be here.

Fighting and stopping any such attempts.

I want that to be my introduction today, Madame Chairperson.

Because everyone in this Committee and everyone who seeks to intervene in the work of this Committee must know this.

The Gibraltarians are the most committed, the most indefatigable and the most unbeatable of the agents in play in respect of the matter of Gibraltar.

Sir Joe Bossano, who this committee recognises as an expert on the right of self determination of the people of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, has demonstrated that to you.

Sir Joe is a remarkable man, leader and Gibraltarian.

He was 83 on Friday and he keeps fighting.

There is only one Joe Bossano.

But, make no mistake about it.

There are 32,000 more Gibraltarians with the same grit, the same determination and the same commitment that he has to defend our homeland.

So we are not going to go away until you delist us.

We are going to keep fighting to ensure that you delist us.

We are going to keep showing you why there can be no valid argument in international law not to delist us.

But in expressing to you the passion that we feel for the defence of our homeland, and our insistence in asserting our right to self-determination, we are not seeking to exclude cooperation with our neighbours, despite our differences on key, fundamental issues.

We are a mature people.

Confident in our own identity.

Aware of our rights.

Aware of the challenges on our horizons.

And aware of the need to work with those around us in a spirit of maturity and diplomatic and economic cooperation.

And going forward, we will work in amity and cooperation with our neighbours, to the north and south.

We will work to facilitate the lives and trade of those who want or need or wish to cross our borders as fluidly and securely as possible.

But we will do that whilst continuing to defend what is exclusively ours.

Indeed, it is in the nature of international diplomacy that we can and must cooperate maturely on matters despite other differences.

The very nature of the United Nations is to seek to work on what unites us despite what divides us.

And so we are committed to always seeking pragmatic solutions to issues that do not compromise our fundamental positions.

That is why we are working closely with the United Kingdom, with the European Union and with the Kingdom of Spain on a Treaty which will safely and securely set out the parameters for our future relationship with the EU.

That is why we are also ready to address issues which have marred the relationship between Gibraltar and Spain in Memoranda of Understanding which can address those issues in parallel to such a UK/EU Treaty.

In fact, in earlier sessions of this Committee, you and your predecessors have heard about our differences on tax matters.

Yet those are now resolved in a new Tax Treaty between us, the first since 1713.

That treaty has addressed the absence of mechanisms for direct cooperation between the tax authorities of Spain and Gibraltar created by our reluctant departure from the European Union.

You have also heard about our differences on tobacco matters.

Yet those are now resolved in a unilateral commitment from Gibraltar to maintain a fixed price differential between our prices and Spanish tobacco prices.

We will also maintain and narrow that differential going forward if we reach agreement on a UK / EU Treaty.

Our good will is there.

It has to be said, that we have seen some of the same from our Spanish counterparts.

There are reasons to be optimistic about solutions coming down the track.

What we will never accept, however, is the notion that we, the Gibraltarians, are mere bystanders in the decolonisation of Gibraltar.

Or the notion that we are not a genuine 'people' in our own right with the inalienable right of self determination.

That notion, sowed here by the pre-democratic government of Spain, is based on a false premise.

Given the time constraints, I am attaching to the written version of my speech an authoritative and prize-winning article by a brilliant Gibraltarian Cambridge University Fellow of International Law, Jamie Trinidad, which debunks every aspect of that false notion.

Do not allow anyone to build any further castles in the air based on that nonsense.

That is why we will never accept that the United Nations should determine, year after year, that the international legal status of our land should be the subject, not of our decision, but of dialogue between the administering power and a third party.

Because, let's be clear about one other thing.

Just as Sir Joe Bossano already stated in the seminar in St Lucia, decolonisation is and always has been about people.

The people of the Non-Self-Governing Territory.

This Committee therefore has power and jurisdiction to do one thing and one thing only:

To protect OUR rights as a people - and OUR rights only.

That is THE binding principle of international law here in play here.

The right of the people of ALL Non-Self-Governing Territories to self determination.

That is the inalienable human right in play here.

You have no power to accept or promote a solution which relates to the transfer of our land above our heads.

That would be to breach binding international law.

And it will not happen, anyway.

The United Kingdom has told you it will ONLY act to respect our wishes.

The United Kingdom will NOT transfer the sovereignty of Gibraltar against our wishes.

Indeed, the United Kingdom has repeatedly stated that it will not even commence a process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content.

For that reason, suggesting that a process of inter-state dialogue should commence contrary to our wishes is a non-starter.

It is unhelpful and counterproductive.

In fact, that much has been acknowledged by the Spanish Government at the highest level.

Former Spanish Secretary of State for Europe, Snr Luis Marco Aguiriano Nalda stated that Spain understood that if they raised the issue of the sovereignty of Gibraltar, the UK and we, the Gibraltarians, would close our files and leave.

Those wise words by Snr Aguiriano show that Spain knows that there is no question of a dialogue over our heads ever starting, let alone succeeding.

In fact, your only mandate, Madame Chairperson, is the very opposite of that.

It is to work every day to defend the freedom of choice of the people of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

To work every day to defend the freedom of the Gibraltarians to choose our political future for ourselves.

But, Madame Chair, we are now in the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

Your Committee needs to engage with Gibraltar.

You need to do more to delist us, and soon.

Because Gibraltar is OUR land.

It is OUR home.

And only OUR choices will determine its future.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson, for listening.

I am available to answer any questions distinguished delegates may have and I wish that the time left on that clock is that which you have left to delist us.

ENDS