



**ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF MINISTER OF GIBRALTAR
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FOURTH COMMITTEE**

OCTOBER 2017

Dedicated with sincere appreciation and affection to every one of the 12,138 of the Referendum Generation who voted to retain the link with Britain in the Referendum of 10th September 1967.

We owe you all a massive debt of gratitude.



REFERENDUM 50

Mr Chairman, Your Excellencies

The people of Gibraltar voted fifty years ago in a referendum organised by the Administering Power, the United Kingdom.

The Spanish Government of General Franco said that referendum was illegal.

The Spanish Government was wrong about that.

The Administering Power was rightly following the principles in the UN Charter and Resolutions of the General Assembly setting out the inalienable right of self-determination of the people of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

The simple question asked then was whether we wished to accept Spanish proposals for the transfer of sovereignty over our nation from Britain to Spain or, alternatively, to remain British.

Five decades ago we made our choice abundantly clear.

By 99% to 1% we chose to remain British.

That pioneering REFERENDUM GENERATION faced down the fascist Franco regime then in power in Madrid.

With just a ballot and a pencil, our people stood up to a bully's threats to ruin them by siege.

With just a single vote each, our people showed a dictator the raw power of democracy and fatally pierced the heart of the Spanish claim to our land.

With just their homeland and their children's future in mind, our people gave birth to a modern, democratic European nation.

A nation that is a proud part of the British family of nations.

The nation of Gibraltar that we proudly call home.

With a courage unprecedented in our history, the REFERENDUM GENERATION led us bravely into a new relationship with the United Kingdom.

Because from the moment that the result of that referendum was announced, Gibraltar remains British exclusively as a result of the free and fair of the choice of its people.

That is why we celebrate the result of the referendum every year on the 10th of September on our National Day.

Because now, exactly, half a century later, we would make the same choice by the same or greater margin.

Indeed, fifteen years ago we voted again in a referendum organised by the territory's elected Government that I now represent.

The choice in 2002 was whether or not to accept an offer of Joint Sovereignty between Britain and Spain over our nation.

Once again, the Kingdom of Spain insisted that our referendum was illegal.

No surprises there.

But the Spanish Government was wrong again about that also.

There were no rules that could prevent us from organising such a referendum to hear the voice of the people of our nation.

And the result was, once again, 99% in favour of remaining entirely British.

Indeed, that result emerged even though the United Kingdom itself challenged the legality of our 2002 referendum.

The UK opposed the holding of that referendum.

Even then, there was no repression by the UK of our right to vote.

No violence.

No attempt to stop us from voting.

No confiscation of ballots or ballot boxes.

In 2002, Gibraltar stood alone.

We voted to remain British against the shameful policy of the then United Kingdom Government which wanted to share the sovereignty of our nation with Spain.

And yet in each case, the referenda we have held have been celebrated in an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence and respect.

In keeping with British principles of respect for democracy and the rule of law.

Because those are the principles that govern every aspect of life in Gibraltar and our relationship with the UK.

We are a law-abiding community of wide cultural, religious and social diversity.

Our people respect each other.

As we respect our neighbours.

We respect the rules-based system of international law.

We respect and comply with our obligations as members of the international community.

That is why we comply with all international criteria on prudential supervision, transparency and exchange of information in the field of financial services.

As we comply with the rules provided for by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or the OECD on exchange of tax information and fiscal transparency.

Indeed, the OECD has given Gibraltar one of its highest overall ratings for transparency and compliance.

The OECD in fact gives us the same rating as the United Kingdom and Germany.

We are therefore in excellent company when it comes to our financial services' and tax compliance with international rules.

Gibraltar has, today, gateways for exchange of tax information with no less than 104 countries all over the world.

We have offered one to Spain who refuses to sign it with us because its current administration does not recognise the existence of our Government.

The Spanish Government is objectively and demonstrably wrong about that too when it says the opposite.

Indeed, the Spanish Government has been on the wrong side of history every time it comes to Gibraltar.

Because the failure of democratic Spain has been the failure to respect our choice in 1967.

A failure to respect our choice in 2002.

A failure to respect for OUR right to freely determine for OURSELVES the future of OUR land.

That is what the international rules-based legal order provides for in Chapter XI of the UN Charter, and Resolution 1514 (XV) of the General Assembly, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority (89-0, with 9 abstentions).

Yet that is what the Spanish Government insists it will not respect in relation to Gibraltar.

Although I must sincerely welcome the recent statements from the new Foreign Secretary of Spain, Snr Dastis, that they will not seek to use our departure from the EU to advance their sovereignty claim.

Additionally, I welcome his statements recognising that Spain's offer of Joint Sovereignty can only be applied with the consent of the people of Gibraltar.

We already rejected that concept in 2002 and we will continue to do so.

But we will also continue to tender the olive branch of cooperation to the people of Spain.

Because despite leaving the EU with the UK, we seek a strong future relationship based on mutual respect and with mutual economic benefit for all sides as we move forward toward our future outside the European Union.

Because we continue to seek friendship from our Spanish neighbours and all our European partners.

We are convinced that the way ahead is trade and friendship, co-operation and security, partnership and shared values.

And that is why we remain ready to work with the Government of Spain to cooperate on matters which will not compromise sovereignty, jurisdiction or control.

Because such compromises we will never even discuss, let alone negotiate, neither in private nor in public.

But the fact is that of the thirteen thousand cross frontier workers who come to Gibraltar every day to work in our economy, seven thousand are Spanish.

They are part of our success.

They are welcome.

And they and all others who cross what will become the international external frontier of the European Union must be able to continue to traverse that border freely each day when we leave the EU.

And threats by the former Spanish Foreign Secretary were not going to compel us to change our attitude to sovereignty.

Our views only become even more entrenched when we are threatened

You see, Mr Chairman, the people of Gibraltar will not be cowed by threats or cajoled by harassment to surrender or otherwise give up or sell the sovereignty of our homeland.

Nor will we be wooed or bought.

Not by seduction or sale will we be persuaded to transfer precious title to our nation.

Because it is neither about compulsion or persuasion.

Because we are not turned-off from choosing to hand over our sovereignty to Spain because the neighbouring town of La Linea is more or less run down.

Because many of us have family or good friends in La Linea, a town that has long suffered at the hands of the Government of Spain as much as we have in Gibraltar.

In the past, La Linea has been as much a victim of Madrid's all too frequent tantrums as Gibraltar.

So it is not what we see in La Linea that we do not like.

It is what we see in Madrid that we do not like.

We like it no more today than we did in 1967, or in 2002.

What we do like is our peaceful, Gibraltarian way of life.

We like our deep human relationships with neighbours north and south of us.

We like British respect for our right to choose, for our democracy and for the rule of law.

That is why we will never surrender our nation.

We will never surrender our right to choose.

We will never surrender our children's right to our land.

So, Mr Chairman I leave you with the enduring echo of the words whispered through the decades by the lips of the souls of REFERENDUM GENERATION:

“British we are and British we stay.”

That spirit will never die.

ENDS