



**GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR**  
**PRESS OFFICE**  
**No.6 Convent Place**  
**Gibraltar**  
**Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057**

<b>PRESS RELEASE</b>
----------------------

No. 387/2011

Date: 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011

**CEREMONIAL OPENING OF PARLIAMENT**

Please find attached the speech that the Chief Minister, the Hon. Fabian Picardo made during the ceremonial opening of Parliament

Your Excellency

Mr Speaker

It is undoubtedly a great honour to respond on behalf of the Government to Your Excellency's address on the occasion of this second Ceremonial Opening of our Parliament.

As we continue to develop constitutionally it will not have been lost on anyone that the speech delivered by Your Excellency has tinges in it of the style of address by Her Majesty at State Openings of another Parliament.

That is how it should be in an emancipated environment where the Crown in Parliament gives effect to the will of the people as determined in General Election.

Our relationship with the Crown is therefore clearly not just modern – it is evolving into the tailor made option that we as a people are entitled to carve for ourselves in the world.

A niche which will set in stone our desire for British sovereignty to continue in perpetuity alongside the recognition of our international rights as a people.

The fact is that nothing we have achieved as a people has been easily won.

And therefore the fact that we may have to stand our ground – unmoveable as our Rock – in the face of nations determined to usurp our rights and re-colonise our future will not dampen Gibraltarian spirits one bit.

As Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar we will therefore embark on a campaign to defend our international political rights and our territorial rights in such fora as may be necessary.

The social, economic and political development of this great nation of ours will therefore progress apace as we take our place in the international community.

In doing so Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will stretch out a hand of friendship and co-operation to all our neighbours.

We will seek to continue talks with our Spanish neighbours to the North on matters of mutual interest and which will improve the lives of people on both sides of the frontier.

None of that willingness to co-operate should be interpreted by anyone, anywhere as any diminution of the position of all previous and I am sure future Governments of Gibraltar that our People will never succumb to political harassment or economic pressure to abandon our rightful path of political development and our fundamental human right to determine the future of this land and sea of ours.

We will continue to be less than impressed by those whose arguments are based exclusively on a 300 year old treaty.

We will much prefer to rely on the modern treaty that is the Charter of the United Nations, Article 1 of which explicitly sets out that the purpose of the UN is to develop friendly relations amongst nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self determination of peoples.

For that reason, I warmly welcome your statement as Her Majesty's representative repeating the commitment that the United Kingdom will never enter into any arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against our wishes nor - and this is equally important - enter into a process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content.

It could not be otherwise - because having entrusted the United Kingdom in our Constitution with the administration of our external affairs - those matters must be dealt with only in keeping with our wishes.

And given that continuing bond with the Crown, I am delighted that this incoming Diamond Jubilee year will see a visit to Gibraltar by the Earl and Countess of Wessex. Whilst we continue to await a visit from Her Majesty herself, we will warmly welcome Prince Edward and Princess Sophie to Gibraltar, 57 years after Her Majesty's last visit.

Your Excellency, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will also be seeking to establish a more permanent structure for bi-lateral relations with the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco, our emerging North African neighbour.

Many Moroccan men and women travelled to Gibraltar in the 60's to help us to maintain our economy alive and Britain's military interests viable when General Franco ordered the closure of the Frontier with Spain.

Today, many of those people still live amongst us.

We survived and prospered during and after the blockade and we can prosper further by developing links with our Southern neighbour for the mutual benefit of our people.

Your Excellency has already highlighted a number of matters that relate to our agenda for Government.

The manifesto with which we fought the General Election set out our programme for Government in great detail.

Already we have started the process of delivering on our commitments:

- A Minister has been appointed with responsibilities for commerce which will include small business specifically as part of his brief;

- A Minister for Equality has already been appointed;
- The reform of the Town Planning process is underway. This week will see the Town Planner appointed as Chairman of the Development and Planning Commission and a sub-committee is being set up to deal with minor works applications more efficiently.
- The King Report into the future of GBC will be published later this week;
- We are preparing for the publication of our first Command Paper, which will allow for wider consultation on all legislation at a “pre-Bill” stage;
- And perhaps most importantly, we are in the process already of drafting the terms of reference for the Independent Commission on Democratic, Political and Electoral Reform. I will be consulting the Leader of the Opposition shortly on the proposed terms of reference and the proposed composition of the Commission.

One thing that will happen straight away is that I will be seeking to convene monthly meetings of this Parliament and to publish, insofar as is possible, a Parliamentary Timetable to indicate to the public and the press when things will happen in this place.

I am sure I will be able to count on the goodwill of those opposite to make our first faltering steps into a more mature Parliamentary process as positive as possible for us all and the general public in particular.

Another innovation at a practical level will be that the cameras that accompany us today will I hope not be leaving us for four years until the next ceremonial opening or the date on which we receive your successor here.

We will soon be commencing a process to open up all the proceedings of this place to the public – both on the public broadcaster, in consultation with GBC, and online.

I have already put at the disposal of the House the Government’ IT resources so that “@parliament.gi” email address can be set up for all members and a WIFI network should be available shortly in the House and its precincts for use of members, staff and reporters.

I am also happy to report to the House that since the 9<sup>th</sup> December we have held four meetings of the Cabinet of Ministers which I chair. We have started as we mean to go on: taking decisions collectively.

Your Excellency, the General Election and the run-up to it is necessarily a bruising political time.

It is right that we should hold each other to political account and test our respective policies and ideologies in a robust and strenuous fashion.

We must never, however, fall into the trap of denigrating the contributions those of us who come to politics make to our community a better place.

The Hon the Leader of the Opposition held the post of Chief Minister for almost 16 years and I salute his contribution to public life over the past twenty years since he was first elected.

We have disagreed on many things – and where we have agreed our political system has not always called for us to say so.

The fact that we come from rival ideologies need not condemn us to denigrate each other's person.

The Hon Mr Bossano, Minister for Enterprise and Labour has been in this House since the year I was born and has massive contribution to public life and trade unionism over the past forty years must also be recognised by even his political opponents.

Suffice to say that the People have recognised it in his return to ministerial responsibility.

I say these things Your Excellency because we owe it to ourselves to pursue the Westminster style of Government and Opposition in a manner that – although ideologically gladiatorial – does not spill over into the personal invective.

I will not cast aspersions on others in saying that I therefore wish to promote a more convivial politics.

I genuinely hope that we will be able to progressively adopt a new style of politics across the board and across the floor of this House and not fall into the trap of the much easier and much less worthy practice of playing the man or woman and not the ball.

For that reason the fitness or otherwise of any person to be in this chamber today or to hold any post on either side must never be a matter for comment by us here - it is the People who have decided who is fit to do what job for the next four years – and it is only the People who have the right to make those judgements.

In that context, I sincerely hope that we will be able to put the cut and thrust of debate into its proper Parliamentary context under Mr Speaker's eagle eye and attentive ear, so that we will be able to start work together on the review of the functioning of our Parliament and our democracy in a more positive and convivial way, as parliamentarians first.

I agree with my predecessor that we must review all aspects of our voting system, including eligibility rules, our postal and absentee voting system, our electoral registration system, whereby a new register has to be created each time. We also have to consider whether we should now have an Electoral Commission in our modern Constitutional context. We can no longer avoid these issues. We need to reform and modernise the way this House conducts its business and that will be the role of the Independent Commission and then of this Parliament.

Your Excellency, Mr Speaker, an 82% turnout in an election where voting is not compulsory is a lesson in democracy for many allegedly greater counties.

It also gives us in this place the legitimacy necessary to do together the legislative business of the People and to require the Parliamentary accountability that they demand.

90 years after it begun democracy goes from strength to strength in Gibraltar.

I think I can speak for members on both sides of the House when I say that we are proud of the way in which our people have once again embraced their civic right and civic duty to vote in such huge numbers.

It is our right also to note the hard work that falls on the Clerk – in his guise as Returning Officer – and all his staff when the franchise exercised in such numbers. We will no doubt all be testing his patience and that of his staff in the coming four years. An apology in advance.

Finally Your Excellency, I welcome back to the House all those who return from the last Parliament and those on both sides who are new to it. I am happy to say I have seen personal friends elected on both sides. I also take this opportunity to wish a Parliamentary farewell to those who by choice or by the cold steel of election night have not returned to this place.

As Chief Minister I follow in the footsteps of some great Gibraltarians and hope I shall not let them or our people down. Sir Bob, who we have recently lost was such just a Great Gibraltarian. He will be sorely missed by us here – where he discharged functions as Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition and Speaker.

I very much look forward now to the work we will do together for our Gibraltar, because Gibraltar must always come first, before parties and before self. That is our duty in this place.