

Mark Simmonds MP
Gibraltar Day Reception
London, 15 October 2012

Introduction

- It is a pleasure for me to attend my first Gibraltar Day reception as a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, and I am grateful to the Chief Minister and HM Government of Gibraltar for inviting me briefly to address you.
- It is wonderful to see so many Gibraltarians, and friends and supporters of Gibraltar here this evening
- I include myself among Gibraltar's friends and supporters, but I am also here as Minister responsible for the Overseas Territories.
- While David Lidington remains the Minister with primary responsibility for Gibraltar in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, I also have a strong interest.
- I shall be chairing the Joint Ministerial Council between British Ministers and Overseas Territories leaders this December, and am very glad that HM Government of Gibraltar will be represented this year.
- I should mention that David dearly wanted to be here, as he has been over the last couple of years, but has had to travel this evening to an important meeting of the EU General Affairs Council and therefore cannot be with us.

Special relationship

- Gibraltar's annual reception in London is now a well-established celebration of the successful and lasting relationship between Britain and Gibraltar.
- This is entirely fitting. Gibraltar has a special place in the affections of the British people. And it shares with us and our Monarchy a long and proud history spanning over 300 years.
- However this year has been a particularly special one and has witnessed a series of memorable events and celebrations that reminded us of our special ties:

SPEAKING NOTES

- In April the Royal Gibraltar Regiment performed Guard Duties at Buckingham Palace and fired a 62-gun Royal Salute at the Tower of London on Her Majesty the Queen's 86th birthday. I'd like to welcome the Regiment back to London this evening.
- Their Royal Highnesses the Earl and Countess of Wessex visited Gibraltar on behalf of the Queen, as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.
- Gibraltar's flag was flown by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Gibraltar National Day for the first time: a sign of Gibraltar's unique identity and bond with Britain.
- Georgina Cassar became the first ever Gibraltar Olympian. I was proud to watch her compete as part of Team GB in the rhythmic gymnastics here in London in what has been a remarkable summer of sports.

Sovereignty

My Government fully recognises the wish of the Gibraltarian people to be and to remain to be British.

- This is reflected in our clear and consistent policy on sovereignty. We have re-stated this policy in the current session of the United Nations General Assembly and I will re-state it again this evening.
- We will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another State against their wishes. Furthermore, we will not enter into any process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content.

Conclusion

- These are challenging times. The response of some governments has been to batten down the hatches to weather the storm. But this Government will not allow our country to turn in on itself. We recognise that we are stronger if we work *together* with our close friends.
- So my message this evening is that we should celebrate our bonds. But we should not just look backwards. We should look ahead at the challenges we face – be they economic challenges, resource challenges or challenges to our sovereignty – and look to one another for support and partnership.