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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Chief Minister's Address At HMGOG Reception Conservative Party Conference 2013**

Dear friends

What a summer it has been.

We in Gibraltar could have told the UN weeks ago that global warming is a reality - because it has been a long, hot summer in Gibraltar.

A summer of Gibraltar being in the eye of a media storm; and I don't mean our featuring on "Top Gear", "Gibraltar, Britain in the Sun" or "New Tricks".

It's been a summer of daily, lengthy frontier queues indiscriminately affecting the elderly, infants, pregnant women and workers.

Designed to advance Spain's stale purpose of bullying Gibraltar into surrendering on sovereignty.

Of continued daily incursions into British Gibraltar Territorial Waters by Spanish state vessels that begun in earnest in 2010 and even one instance of Guardia Civil officers shooting at an unarmed British jet-skier.

A summer of threats, rhetoric and downright lies from the Spanish Foreign and Interior Ministries about Gibraltar.

About our tourist industry.  
Our bunkering industry.  
Our online gaming industry.  
Our financial services industry.

All have been attacked and traduced by a Spanish government that should realise it has more to gain from working on its relationship with Britain, rather than putting it at risk.

And this because we created an artificial reef in British Gibraltar Waters designed to create a new marine habitat and that prevents one particular Spanish fisherman from raking the seabed and because we continue - and will continue - our coastal protection work of beaches on the eastern side of the Rock.

Yet all the lies peddled about these issues in the Spanish press have caused the Spanish people to be misled into seeing Gibraltar as some sort of parasite.

In fact, it has been clear to us in Gibraltar that some of the statements made by senior Spanish politicians in recent weeks have been liable to arouse feelings of distrust, rejection, or even hatred against Gibraltarians, especially among the less knowledgeable members of the Spanish public.

To such an extent that you will my sadness that last week a YouTube video showed a school play in which 3 Gibraltarians wearing Union Jack t-shirts are mown down with machine gun fire by Guardia Civil officers.

Appalling.  
Outrageous.  
Sad.

But if a picture is worth a thousand words, then that video conveys a million emotions that have been stoked and incited by people who in 21st century Europe should know better.

Thank goodness then for great friends like William Hague, David Lidington and - of course - David Cameron!

Their clear and unambiguous defence of Gibraltar and its people has been unimpeachable and has clearly caused the more reasonable commentators and political operators in Spain to think hard about the tactics being deployed against us.

And tonight, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar and - more particularly on behalf of the people of Gibraltar, I am here to honour these Conservative stalwart supporters of the people of Gibraltar and thank them for the clear statements they have made in defence of Gibraltar and its people.

Their staunch support may even have surprised some in Madrid who did not have the measure of the strength of the relationship between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom coalition Government.

That is what may enable us to move forward even in the face of such huge challenges as the ones we presently face;

Because Gibraltar and the United Kingdom remain in "lockstep" over how best to progress.

We both remain strongly committed to the Trilateral Forum for Dialogue established with the previous Spanish administration.

The Partido Popular resiles from that Forum.

And in light of that we in Gibraltar have agreed and embraced William Hague's proposal for "ad hoc" talks where necessary or desirable until the Trilateral can be re-convened.

Gibraltar and the UK will each have their own voice and be independent delegations at any such encounters.

We have proposed that the EU Commission should also be present in respect of matters which have been the subject of complaint by one of the parties.

And any decisions should be made by a consensus; with nothing being imposed on Gibraltar without our consent.

BUT these talks will obviously not involve any discussion of the Sovereignty of Gibraltar or its future.

In fact, it is now clear beyond peradventure that the UK will not transfer the Sovereignty of Gibraltar against our wishes and will - further - not even enter into a process of Sovereignty negotiations without our consent.

That veto is one we intend to exercise permanently to prevent a return to the Brussels process or to any bilateral forum that would involve any negotiation or discussion of our sovereignty, however often Mr Rajoy may seek the opposite in addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations!

And that really evidences the commitment of the British Government to our right of self determination and to the universal principle of consent, which must be the guiding principle.

I nonetheless sincerely hope it will therefore be possible for us to start "ad hoc" talks before too long to try to progress in areas of common interest and concern; having present at those talks such parties as may be relevant to the particular subject matter in question at any time.

In that respect, yesterday, two young ladies gave an example to the whole world.

Miss Gibraltar 2013, Maoura Kharbouch, qualified into the last 6 at the Miss World contest as "the people choice".

She was the contest the people of the world loved the most!

She could not have made Gibraltar prouder than when she spoke of kindness being "the words deaf people hear and the actions blind people see."

And when the top prizes were being announced, she and Miss Spain held hands in anticipation in front of a global audience.

They represented, in one image certainly worth a thousand words, the reality of the symbiotic relationship between the people of Gibraltar and the Spanish people of La Linea and the towns around us.

Friendship.  
Respect.  
Understanding.

And in particular, Gibraltar providing 10,000 jobs for cross frontier workers.

I know that if we could put the energy we put into being at loggerheads into working together, that figure could easily double or triple.

If only the belligerent headlines will give way to real dialogue for co-operation and great neighbourly relations.

So, I think it is hugely positive that members of Spain's ruling Popular Party are attending this conference, led by Snr Esteban Pons.

Positive because it will allow you to make clear to them that the British people never give in to bullying.

That the position of the Conservative Party in support of the Gibraltarians' inalienable right to self-determination could not be clearer and will never change.

Positive to allow you to make clear that the Conservative Party will never countenance a Joint Sovereignty proposal - as was promoted by Peter Hain in late 2002 - because the people of Gibraltar and of the United Kingdom are tied by an unbreakable bond that none should seek to untie against our wishes.

And statements saying that Spain and Argentina will work together on Gibraltar and the Falklands do not put fear in us; they put steel in our joint resolve to work together to defend our rights.

Because pressure at the frontier, which was the MODUS OPERANDI of the Popular Party even between 1997 and 2003, will not ever weaken us.

And even the current illegal ban - which distorts the single market - on imports of rock, sand and aggregate for our construction industry will neither slow or halt our socio-economic progress and our programme to build 1,000 new affordable homes in the next 26 months.

It is positive the Partido Popular are here at conference as it gives you a chance to ensure that the message goes back to the hierarchy of the Popular Party in Madrid that the relationship between the Tory party and the PP is damaged by the type of treatment being meted out to the good people of Gibraltar.

That, indeed, as Conservative ministers have said, the bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Spain will be damaged if the bullying, the lying and the rhetoric continue unabated.

So I ask any of you who happen to come across these Partido Popular colleagues to remind them of the clear and unequivocal words of Prime Minister, David Cameron, who set out the position of the Conservative Party and the UK Government when he said on our National Day:

"Gibraltar is British; let's keep it that way!"

Because the partnership between the people of Britain and Gibraltar is an unbreakable bond.

A partnership that grows stronger in adversity.

Even in relation to issues where we may initially have appeared to have competing interests, we can work together to produce mutually beneficial results;

As in relation to the Chancellor's proposed "Point of Consumption Tax" in respect of online gaming, where the world's top experts are in Gibraltar, the Silicon Valley and Las Vegas of the remote gambling.

The Gibraltar Betting and Gambling Association - some of whom are with us today - are engaging with Treasury and DCMS officials to offer their unrivalled, world-leading expertise to assist in delivering a better framework of enforceable rules that work both for Britain and Gibraltar.

And our partnership is working well politically too; as Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar is now fully engaged in the Balance of Competences Review being undertaken by the UK as we look forward to having our say too in a Euro-referendum.

It's been a long hot summer and it is getting a little hot in this room, so perhaps I should now give way to man who has earned the respect of the people of Gibraltar both in Opposition and in Government.

A true friend of the Rock and its people.

The Foreign Secretary, William Hague.