



**HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
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STUDENTS ARE GRATEFUL FOR UN EXPERIENCE

Six local students have accompanied the Chief Minister on his visit to Washington and New York. The students were selected for this trip on the basis of an essay competition in which they were asked to write 500 words on the subject of "The United Nations Committee of 24 and the importance of Gibraltar's participation in it." Aysha Panter and Cristina Gonzalez from Westside, Thomas Blagden and Ryan Robba from Bayside and Tom Ramagge and Roger Cabral from the College. They have all enjoyed the trip of a lifetime.

Their reasons for entering the essay-writing competition were various. 'I'm genuinely interested in the work of the UN,' said Aysha whilst Tom felt that, 'I didn't know much about the UN but, having just started at the College, I wanted to get involved in everything that was going on.'

'The Headmaster came to the classroom and pulled Tom and me out of classes to tell us we'd been successful,' said Ryan. Meanwhile, Cristina said that 'If Aysha could have done backflips, she would have done them, she was so excited!' The time-scale was tight - indeed, Tom had less than a week to get himself a passport for the trip.

After a seven hour flight from London, the group found that many of Washington's main tourist sites were closed as a result of the US government's budget problems. But, having booked into the same hotel and having had breakfast with the Chief Minister, they soon 'felt like Royalty,' according to Cristina.

Their first official engagement was at the Council of Foreign Relations where the Chief Minister spoke to an audience of ambassadors, politicians and the media. 'And we were all impressed with the way that the CM spoke and how he handled the audience's questions,' said Tom.

One of the highlights of the Washington visit was a lunch with the Gibraltarian interns who are currently working in the city. 'It gave us lots of ideas of life as an intern - and we talked

a lot about University life, something they've already experienced but we are still looking forward to,' added Ryan.

After a short burst of shopping, it was off to the Washington Press Club. 'That was brilliant! There were press from all around the world, about 60 to 80 of them, and they asked some really in-depth questions. But the Chief Minister handled their questions really well.'

The group then caught a flight to New York and grabbed a couple of hours of sight-seeing around Times Square, Central Park and Grand Central Station before they accompanied Mr Picardo, Dr Garcia, Minister Licudi and Mr Gomez to the UN headquarters - which, everyone agreed, 'was the best bit of the whole visit to the States.'

So, how did they feel about the overall experience? 'Perhaps a little disappointed not to do more sight-seeing but we packed so much into 3 days.' 'I really enjoyed the meetings - especially the UN.' 'It's rare for people as young as us to see such important places - and at such an important time for Gibraltar.'

'People kept telling us that we are the future of Gibraltar so it was important we understood these things,' added Christina. 'It certainly opened my eyes to a lot of things,' said Tom.

'Not only did we feel like celebrities, we also felt that we had won all the prizes,' felt Aysha.

But Roger was keen to make the point that, 'We are all so grateful to the Government for giving us such a huge opportunity like this.'

As well as the Minister for Education, Minister Licudi, the group was led throughout the entire visit by Dr Joey Britto, the Director of Education. 'These young people have been excellent ambassadors for Gibraltar,' said Joey. 'It has made me very proud to see how they have conducted themselves in some very high-profile company and in some prestigious situations. They have been a real credit to Gibraltar.'

The Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia, whose office organised this project together with the Department of Education, said: "It is a manifesto commitment of the Government to bring young people to the United Nations and this is exactly what we have done. It has been a genuine pleasure to meet them after having read their essays. They are now keenly aware of the issues and challenges that Gibraltar faces at the United Nations. Making young people aware of these issues can only be a good and a positive development for the future. They have done Gibraltar proud through their behaviour and through the interest that they have shown."