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'Understanding Self-determination, Devolution and Independence in the 21st Century'

An international symposium on self-determination will take place at the Garrison Library this Thursday 16th and Friday 17th October.

The aim of this conference is to look at the historical backdrop underpinning the concepts of self-determination, devolution, and independence and to explore these notions across a number of different examples.

These examples will cover British Overseas Territories to include Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, Turks and Caicos; Scottish devolution, Catalan independence and political aspirations in the Basque Country.

Each case is very different. The British Overseas Territories are on the United Nations list of non self governing territories and there are clear legal principles relating to the exercise of self-determination in this context. The others are part of existing nation states. It will be very interesting to learn more about these situations.

Gibraltar has certainly defended its right to self-determination and continues to do so, but at the same time, recent moves towards separation in the United Kingdom and Spain add to the debate surrounding the right of people to decide their own future.

The recent referendum in Scotland and the forthcoming Catalan bid for independence (without forgetting Basque separatism) are realities that present dilemmas to resolve as these moves challenge the traditional yet relatively modern concept of the nation state. An in-depth academic and legal discussion of these issues is therefore very topical and relevant at this moment in time.

The conference has been organised by Dr Jennifer Ballantine Perera, the Director of the Garrison Library together with the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister.

Commenting on the matter, Dr Ballantine Perera said:

"We are looking at generating a scholarly forum where these issues can be considered across a range of perspectives and areas of expertise. We have to this end invited a

number of guest speakers, amongst which are historians, academics and legal figures from Europe and the USA, and their contributions to the proceedings will serve to situate Gibraltar related research within a much wider context."

For his part, the Deputy Chief Minister, Dr Joseph Garcia said:

"Despite it being an established legal principle of the international order, the actual politics of self-determination can nonetheless be a matter which provokes serious debate. Gibraltar for example, has, as is well documented, defended the right to self-determination of the Gibraltarians over very many years. Indeed, the Chief Minister and I were doing precisely this at the United Nations only last week.

The Falkland Islanders with which Gibraltarians share a colonial heritage as a British Overseas Territory, are also staunch defenders of that right.

I very much look forward to an interesting and lively academic debate on the subject of self-determination, devolution and independence and want to thank Jennifer and the Garrison Library team for their hard work."

The symposium is open to the general public free of charge. Those wishing to attend should register by contacting the Garrison Library on 20077418.

Registration by email is also possible on j.ballantine@gibraltargarrisonlibrary.gi or chris.tavares@gibraltargarrisonlibrary.gi