



Date: 8th September 2025

## Transcript – The Chief Minister’s Address at the Conferment of the Freedom of the City of Gibraltar Sir Robert Neill KC (Hon) FRSA

Your Excellency, Free Men of the City of Gibraltar, Members of Parliaments, it's a real honour to have the opportunity to speak today at this installation. Because it was my privilege to move the motion in Parliament, which enjoyed unanimous support across the floor of the House, that Sir Bob should be a Free Man of the City of Gibraltar.

Moving such a motion is not done lightly, but it was done easily in respect of Bob, because we have, as you've indicated to everyone here, Bob, developed a close friendship. A close friendship which I know I am not the only one to enjoy with you in Gibraltar. I didn't know about the link with Ricky, and nobody would have held it against you, so you shouldn't have kept it so quiet.

But I know that your bonds of friendship with Gibraltarians are deep and they are beyond just the work that you have been doing politically. But that political work which Bob has done, which I'll go through in a moment in the context of the detail of how it has benefited Gibraltar, is also worth remarking upon for one reason. It is that the softly spoken approach that brings logic and persuasion to the equation is not to be underestimated in this modern time, when perhaps many might be persuaded that only the loudest get through. Bob has personified for me the ability to take Gibraltar's case and present it in a way which, although softly spoken, has been powerfully persuasive.

And today, coming to the detail of some of what Bob has done for Gibraltar, which is perhaps more high profile, we enjoy the benefits of the Gibraltar Authorisation Regime, which enables a Gibraltar business registered in Gibraltar and providing services in Gibraltar in a regulated space, to provide those services in the United Kingdom. Because Bob was present when I was asking Prime Minister Cameron to make sure that this continued in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 referendum. Bob understood the point, and at the Prime Minister's request, distilled that into a letter within an hour and it was in Downing Street immediately thereafter and being pursued not just by the Government of Gibraltar, but also by Downing Street, with the Treasury.

Bob, that is the most enduring, tangible benefit that you have brought to Gibraltar today. But it is not the only benefit that you have brought. I must say that when the Attorney General and I, with the Deputy Chief Minister, left the room with you and the Prime Minister, and I cynically said, do you think we should we should just write Bob a note with the points that we made. We hadn't got back to Gibraltar House to think about what to put in the note when Bob's letter, which improved on all the points we'd made, was already with the then Prime Minister.

But Bob's role and his aplomb as the leader of the APPG gave us a great weight in the United Kingdom and the conservative government, and the political change of complexion of the United Kingdom government would not have mattered if Bob had chosen to remain in Parliament, because the regard that there is for him in the United Kingdom, perhaps because of his softly spoken,



persuasive way, crossed the political divide and does so today to where I know Bob enjoys friendships and support in the Labour Party, in the Liberal Party, and in all of the other parties represented in the British Parliament. So I'm very grateful that Bob has agreed to continue helping us, despite no longer being a member of Parliament.

Sometimes one faces the cynicism of those who say, why do you spend so much time speaking to members of the British Parliament? Why do these members of the British Parliament come to Gibraltar? Well, I think in those who are represented here today and in particular in Sir Bob, you have the best explanation of why there is huge value in having friends in the British Parliament who understand the Gibraltar issue and who make it their own, as Bob has made it his own. Bob, you defy the cynics, and so it is a real honour on behalf of all the members of the Gibraltar Parliament to see this honour bestowed upon you today, to see your name on a very, very exclusive roll of freemen of the City of Gibraltar.

There is another one here, Sir Joe Bossano. He'll take you through the ropes of all of the secret handshakes later. On behalf of all of the people of Gibraltar, Bob, thank you for everything you have done and everything you will do for our people. Thank you.

ENDS