



**HM Government
of Gibraltar**

Ministry of Health, Care and Business

**Labour Party Conference 2026
Gibraltar Reception**

Liverpool

**The Hon Gemma Arias-Vasquez MP
Minister for Health, Care and Business**

28th September 2026

Good evening, and welcome to the Gibraltar Reception.

Let me begin with an apology on behalf of our Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, who is very sorry that he cannot be with you in Liverpool this year.

Many of you in this room will know him well.

He asked me to tell you that there are few events in the political calendar that matter more to him than this one, and that he will be thinking of the friends in this room this evening.

He sends his warmest regards, and his thanks to every one of you who has stood with Gibraltar over the years.

So, for this year at least, I am afraid, you have me instead.

This would have been Fabian's last Labour Party Conference as Leader of the Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party and as Chief Minister of Gibraltar.

After fifteen years as Chief Minister, he has indicated that he will be stepping down later this year, when our party will elect a new leader.

He has led Gibraltar through some of the most difficult and defining moments in our modern history, and the treaty we mark this evening will stand as a central part of his legacy.

I have said that I wish to put my name forward to become our next party leader and our next Chief Minister, with the support of my colleague, the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry, Nigel Feetham, who joins me here today.

If our party members place their trust in me, I very much hope to be back here next year to address you as Chief Minister.

I will try to be brief, which I am told is not always a tradition at this reception.

It is a tradition, though, that Gibraltar is here.

We have hosted this reception for many years.

Whilst you have been in opposition and in government.

In good years and in difficult ones.

We did not come only when Labour was in power.

And we will not stop coming whatever the political weather.

We come because this is where our friends are.

And we come as more than friends.

The Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party, which I am proud to be a part of, shares your values and, frankly, a good part of your name.

Today the Labour Party is in government in Gibraltar just as you are in government here.

That is a good thing and it is worth marking this evening.

I also want to congratulate the Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, on behalf of the Government and People of Gibraltar for his first conference as Leader of the Labour Party.

We look forward to working with his Government in the same spirit of partnership that has always defined our relationship with this party.

This is the first time we have gathered at a Labour conference with our UK-EU Treaty in respect of Gibraltar in force.

When the United Kingdom left the European Union, Gibraltar faced a real and serious risk.

Ninety-six per cent of our people had voted to remain.

We depend on a single land frontier with Spain, crossed every day by around fifteen thousand workers and many more tens of thousands of visitors.

A hard border would have hurt families, businesses and livelihoods on both sides of it.

From the framework agreed in 2020 on New Year's Eve,

Through the political agreement of June 2025,

To the signing of the treaty on 14 July this year,

The Government of Gibraltar together with the United Kingdom Government worked together for half a decade.

Together for one outcome:

A future that PROTECTS our sovereignty,

SUPPORTS our economy

And DELIVERS for our people.

On the 15th of July, that treaty entered into force provisionally.

Routine immigration checks at the land frontier have ended.

The last frontier in mainland Europe was brought down by socialists in Madrid, London and Gibraltar working TOGETHER in the interest of our respective people.

People can now, at last, do something as simple as just moving between Gibraltar and our neighbourhood with a fluidity that generations of Gibraltarians never knew.

Goods can now move with a certainty of outcome that does not depend on the colour of the political party in government in Spain.

I want to be clear about what this treaty is, and what it is not.

It is safe on sovereignty.

EXCLUSIVELY BRITISH sovereignty over Gibraltar, over our territory and our waters, is fully upheld and explicitly protected.

The military facilities that matter to the defence of this country remain OUTSIDE of its scope.

It is GOOD for business.

It gives our economy the certainty it needs to grow and to attract investment.

And it delivers for people.

For the nurse who lives in nearby Spain and works in our hospital.

For the Gibraltarian children who cross a frontier to visit grandparents.

For the young Gibraltarian starting a business who can now plan for the long term.

For the people of the whole region, who are now free to fall in love without an iron frontier between them.

And none of this happened by accident.

It happened because the Labour Government chose to make it a priority.

I want to thank Sir Keir Starmer, who brought this negotiation to a conclusion and saw the treaty signed.

I want to thank David Lammy, who as Foreign Secretary gave the negotiation the political weight it needed at the moment it needed it.

I want to thank Yvette Cooper, who as Foreign Secretary carried that work through its final stages and brought the treaty to signature.

And I want to particularly thank Stephen Doughty, who an MP first and then as Minister for Europe knew Gibraltar well and who never once lost sight of what this meant to ordinary people on the Rock.

The work now continues under new leadership, and we are fortunate in it.

I want to thank Ed Miliband, our Foreign Secretary, who now carries that responsibility forward and whose support we greatly value.

And I want to thank Lord Wood, our Minister for Europe, who was with us in Gibraltar this year for our very own National Day.

He was given a great Gibraltarian welcome, in red and white, and I hope he will forgive us if, from now on, we count him as one of our own.

And speaking of friends, thank you also to the brilliant Amanda, who I am delighted is here with us today, and who does such a magnificent job at chairing our APPG on Gibraltar.

I also want to recognise the officials, in London and in Gibraltar, whose patience and skill carried this work through many long nights.

They will not be named in the headlines, but they deserve our gratitude.

And I thank the Labour friends of Gibraltar in this room.

Members of Parliament, councillors, trade unionists and party members who asked the questions, made the case and kept Gibraltar on the agenda.

Many of you did so long before Labour returned to government, when standing up for Gibraltar won you no ministerial office and very few headlines.

Your support has been constant, and it has made a difference.

A treaty is not an ending.

It is a legal framework which creates an opportunity for a new journey for us together.

And a legal framework has to be made to work.

It offers us the chance to showcase what modern, progressive, Gibraltar can deliver in 2026.

The formal processes of ratification continue, and we will engage fully with them.

But in Gibraltar, we are focused on implementation.

We are making sure the new arrangements run smoothly at our port, our airport and our frontier.

And that residents, workers and businesses understand what has changed and what has not.

Our relationship with this country also goes far beyond the treaty.

As Minister for Health, Care and Business, I see it every week.

Gibraltarian patients receive specialist care in hospitals across the United Kingdom.

Our clinicians train here.

Our students study here, as I did, and as many of the young people now building Gibraltar's future have done.

Our businesses trade here.

These are human ties and they are strong.

I want to end, however, on something personal.

I am a product of the Gibraltar that a Socialist Labour government built.

I am a product of the policies of a socialist labour government in Gibraltar in the 1980's and 1990's.

I got a scholarship thanks to a socialist labour government.

That scholarship enabled me to study in the UK and then train to become part of the genre of young professionals that can shape the Gibraltarian economy of 2026.

My parents purchased a flat in the 1990's thanks to an affordable housing scheme developed by a socialist labour government.

If I am fortunate enough to lead my party and HM Government of Gibraltar I want to ensure that this legacy continues.

I want to ensure that we continue socialist policies to help the daily lives of the people of Gibraltar.

Just three weeks ago, in my capacity as Minister for Health, Care and Business, I opened a new care home providing FREE residential care for elderly Gibraltarians.

I was therefore very pleased to see UK Prime Minister announce his plans for social care yesterday.

This is a model we have had in Gibraltar for many years, and it is the right one.

Social care in Gibraltar is FREE at the point of delivery.

Like you, we are a government which cares first and foremost about the day-to-day reality of our people.

Our students, our young families and our elderly.

We are proud to be a government which looks to protect the ordinary citizen, in a climate where we protect what being Gibraltarian essentially is.

This is who we are as labour governments.

We look to improve everyday lives for our people, in all of the facets of their lives.

I am a product of a socialist labour government – and of that I am very proud.

I now have a responsibility to ensure that the generation which grew up with the benefits of the socialist policies of the 1990s continues that legacy, improving ordinary lives,

whilst reflecting what a Socialist Labour government needs to deliver in 2026.

Labour governments open doors.

They break glass ceilings.

They believe that governments exist to make ordinary lives better.

They are the values we are putting into practice in government in Gibraltar today in our hospital, in our schools and in the homes we are building for our people – at every stage of their lives.

Gibraltar has many friends in this room, and we do not take a single one of you for granted.

On behalf of the Chief Minister, the Government and the people of Gibraltar, thank you for your friendship, your support and your solidarity.

In government or in opposition, you have always had ours.

Thank you very much indeed.