



**HM Government
of Gibraltar**

**CHIEF MINISTER OF GIBRALTAR
ADDRESS
TO
THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON
DECOLONISATION
(C-24)**

JUNE 2023

*Dedicated to the children of Gibraltar.
Theirs is the future of The Rock, always.*

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Delegates, Members of the Special Committee on Decolonisation,

I appear before you today as the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, as the elected representative of its people's undying will and of our enduring spirit.

A people that stand undaunted against the tidal forces of history and politics.

And I come carrying a message forged in the crucible of those forces of our history, honed by the challenges of our present politics and bearing the hope of our beloved children's future.

Gibraltar first appeared before you in 1963, exactly sixty years ago.

For twenty-one years I have come here in different capacities to represent our people.

It was 12 years ago, almost to the day, when I first addressed this esteemed Committee.

I am here again, with the same conviction, the same passion, and the same unwavering belief in the right to self-determination of the Gibraltarian people.

For 12 years I have stood before you to assert that same message that I impress upon you today.

Just like every Chief Minister of Gibraltar before me in those sixty years.

That our right of self-determination is as inalienable as it is indisputable.

And the conviction that it is so thrives in every Gibraltarian and in every corner of Gibraltar, from the top of our iconic rock to the bustling waters that surround it and the airspace above and around it.

Because we are clear that the practical operation of the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity reflected in General Assembly Resolution 1514 can only lead to one conclusion.

That the Gibraltarians are the only masters of the destiny of Gibraltar.

Because we have the right to freely determine our political status and freely to pursue our economic, social and cultural development as specifically set out in that resolution.

Because our plea for self-determination does not stand alone, but is anchored in the principles of international law, which also require respect for the territorial integrity of Gibraltar during the decolonisation process.

Because resolution 1514 is international law, and it does not permit external interference with our right to self-determination or our territorial integrity.¹

And yet, despite having international law on our side, our path to decolonisation has not been an easy one and remains a work in progress.

The journey of the Gibraltarians, like that of many other peoples, has been far from smooth.

But through every tribulation, through every uncertainty, there has remained that one constant:

The indomitable will of the Gibraltarians to determine our own destiny, to shape our own future, to hold fast to our chosen, desired and cherished sovereignty and identity.

As I have declared before, and I declare again, as long as I am Chief Minister, as long as we are in Government, there will be no concessions on our sovereignty.

And although we are a thriving democracy this is not an issue in our politics.

Because our homeland is not, nor will it ever be, a bargaining chip on any negotiating table.

Indeed, we are currently navigating the complexities of the negotiations for a treaty between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Yet we do so with our eyes wide open, our resolve unshaken, our principles unbroken.

We seek, and will continue to seek, a treaty that respects our past, acknowledges our present, and secures our future.

A treaty that honours our unique history and position and does not compromise one iota of our sovereignty.

And we are negotiating from the application of the highest standards of transparency in inter-government relations.

The highest standards of outcomes on matters affecting sustainability and the environment.

And the most fluid movement of people and goods between us and the EU and Spain in a manner that delivers massive mutual benefit, securing our economic stability and growth and spreads prosperity to the people of the region around us.

We have not yet been able to finalise those treaty arrangements, although we keep working towards that goal.

¹ For a recent authoritative affirmation of the relevant legal principles, see *Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 2019*, p.95.

Brilliant teams of tenacious and committed officials from the EU Commission, the United Kingdom, Spain and Gibraltar have worked for more than 20 months to seek to deliver a treaty that will enable us all to win and none to lose.

A high hurdle that I am sure will not elude these genius negotiators and to which those of us who are politically involved have pledged to work maturely towards a successful conclusion.

Leaving behind the polarised confrontations of the past.

Not allowing nostalgia to shape the future.

Putting rhetoric to one side.

But conceding nothing which affects any of our respective positions.

And we do it not because it is easy, but because it is hard.

Hard but worth it.

To deliver for our children and our neighbours children in equal measure.

That is why this prize is one for which we will continue to fight alongside our European, British and Spanish colleagues.

But I am here before you today not merely to recount our trials and tribulations, but to keep alive the burning flame of my people's hope.

Hope, that despite the challenges, our aspirations will not be denied, because they cannot be.

That our voices will not be silenced, because they never will be.

And that our rights will not be undermined, because they must not be.

Hope that the arc of the universe does indeed bend towards justice.

Because there is one incontestable truth.

That the right to self-determination is not a privilege reserved for the large and the mighty.

It is a universal right, as applicable to the people of Gibraltar as it is to any other Non-Self-Governing Territory falling within Chapter XI of the UN Charter.

Indeed, the size of our territory does not determine the legitimacy of our people's aspirations.

In fact, this Committee has frequently stood up for small and relatively powerless territories and the aspirations of their peoples.

And that is why we respect the work of this important Committee, Madam Chair.

Because the Committee of 24 was created with a noble purpose.

To assist territories in achieving decolonisation.

And you have made significant progress.

But not with us.

I urge the Committee to engage with us and to fulfil your mandate.

So let me remind you today, as I did last year, that the worst form of colonialism would be to continue to ignore our voice.

To conspire in futile attempts to deny us our undiluted right to self-determination.

Do not aid or abet the recolonization of Gibraltar by a foreign power by failing to accept the obvious factual and legal truth.

That the Gibraltarians exclusively will decide Gibraltar's future.

This is our inalienable right under international law, and this Committee should acknowledge this and deal with it.

Please be very clear that the fire to fight for that recognition is a flame that burns brightly inside me.

Inside us.

And it is a flame that burns in the heart of every Gibraltarian of all partisan complexions and of all ages.

So let me tell you unequivocally.

We will not go away.

There is no 'question of Gibraltar' as you title this part of the session.

Spain gave away Gibraltar 300 years ago IN PERPETUITY by binding, international Treaty.

There is no question of asking for the return of what they have given away.

There is no legal or political right to ask for Gibraltar back now.

Just because a third party now asserts a bare claim to our territory, this does not mean that there is a 'sovereignty dispute' in relation to Gibraltar.

There is none, as the Court of Arbitration for Sport has confirmed.

The British offers to submit the claim for dispute resolution before the International Court of Justice were rejected.

Ergo, there is no outstanding dispute.

There is only the inalienable right of the people of Gibraltar to decide the future of our territory.

You either recognise it now or you recognise it in the future.

But recognise it you will.

Recognise it you must.

I already told you in years past that anyone who thought otherwise needed to “wake up and smell the coffee”.

Let me reiterate that.

But, given that an election is due in months in Gibraltar, if this is the last time I get to address you as the Leader of the Gibraltarians, let me do so in terms that cannot be misunderstood.

In terms that will stand as a summary of the oral history of my interventions before you.

Gibraltar belongs to the Gibraltarians.

FULL STOP.

And if anyone doesn't like it, they can LUMP IT.

Because that is NOT going to change.

There is nothing more to it.

And anyone who wants to argue otherwise will have to go through me and my colleagues and my compatriots.

Whilst I have breath in my body, whatever station I may hold in life, I will be there to fight for Gibraltar and the Gibraltarians.

As will every Gibraltarian.

For the Gibraltarians are as immovable as our Rock itself.

So good luck to any who think they can impose their own sovereignty on us against our wishes.

We will see them all off.

Because Gibraltar may be a geographically small territory.

But we hold within each of us the spirit of a great nation.

A spirit forged through the fires of evacuation and struggle.

Sustained by the bonds of community.

And inspired by the vision of our nation's bright future.

But we ask not for special privileges or favours.

We assert simply our right to determine our own destiny free from external interference.

And this is not just our aspiration.

It is our right, our duty, and it shall be our legacy.

Not because you give it to us or you recognise it in us.

But because we already enjoy it.

We already exercise it daily.

And we will continue to do so.

Only what we want and decide will happen in Gibraltar.

And let no one think otherwise.

Remember, As Chief Minister of Gibraltar, I represent a small, but resolute people.

A people who have long determined that their exercise of the right to determine their own destiny is factually, legally and politically unassailable.

And we are not going anywhere.

Thank you.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Ends