



# **HM Government of Gibraltar**

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**HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR**

**ADDRESS TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON DECOLONIZATION (C-24)**

**THE HON GEMMA ARIAS-VASQUEZ MP**

**JUNE 2024**

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Madam Chair,

Distinguished Members of the Special Committee,

Let me start by congratulating you, Madam Chair, on your re-election to this important post in February.

I appear on behalf of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar.

This is the first occasion on which I have the pleasure of addressing this Committee.

I appear before you today as the first Gibraltarian woman to address this Committee.

And I do so with pride.

I am proud to appear here to tell you, Madam Chair, who my people are.

To tell you about our origins.

Our journey.

Our hopes.

And our ambition.

I am here to tell you about our aspirations as a people.

In short, to tell you about the wishes of the Gibraltarians.

And about how we will determine our future for ourselves.

I am here to remind you that I am not Spanish.

To remind you that I am not English.

To remind you that I am Gibraltarian.

I represent a separate and distinct people.

My People.

The People of Gibraltar.

I have two very young Gibraltarian boys.

I want to tell my 7 year old that his people's right to determine their political future is inalienable.

I want to tell my 5 year old that his people's right to determine their own future is sacrosanct.

And yet, Madam Chair, in 2024, this Committee has failed to deliver our removal from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Since the end of the Second World War, we have witnessed the decolonization of over eighty former colonies.

750 million people have exercised their right to self-determination.  
That is a considerable achievement.

And yet, I re-iterate Gibraltar has not come off your list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

There is no fluid dialogue by your Committee with the People of Gibraltar on the road to our decolonization.

But have no doubt:

The decolonization of Gibraltar must be completed.

We are now in the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

The truth is that your Committee has done nothing for Gibraltar in the first three Decades.

In a recent message to your Committee, the Assistant UN Secretary General highlighted the importance of “redoubling efforts to assist the Territories” so that they are better placed to pursue decolonization during this Decade.

Indeed, Madam Chair, you are rallying this Committee to “take innovative steps”.

So do so.

Madam Chair, do what you say you will do.

Be innovative.

Listen to us.

Get to know us.

We will demonstrate that we are a separate and distinct people.

Because we will not remain stuck in a time-warp while the world passes us by.

Madam Chair, this Committee must fulfil the mandate with which it has been entrusted by the General Assembly.

The People of Gibraltar encourage you in this task.

But in order for our decolonization to progress, this Committee needs to engage with us, the People of Gibraltar.

Sadly, no engagement exists.

And Madam Chair, let me be clear.

Without engagement there will be NO progress.

So there is a considerable gap between the values and principles of the United Nations, and the lack of action in our case.

The elected representatives of the People of Gibraltar first appeared here in 1963.

That is over sixty years ago.

In all that time, we have staunchly defended our right to self-determination.

Our very own Sir Joe Bossano who has appeared before you countless times is widely acknowledged within this Committee as an expert on the right to self determination of the people of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

And you should accept that the wishes of the people of those territories are paramount.

So to understand our wishes, there has to be contact.

There has to be engagement.

And there has to be continued formal interaction between Gibraltar and this Committee.

Because without such contact, you will fail in your mandate.

It is that simple.

Because for 320 years the People of Gibraltar have laid roots in their homeland.

We are a truly multi-cultural population.

A combination of nationalities, cultures and religions that makes up the people whom I proudly represent here before you today.

Madam Chair, Gibraltar will NEVER become a part of Spain.

That would involve the re-drawing of the territorial map of Europe.

More importantly, it would be contrary to our wishes.

It would be a subversion of the principle of self-determination of peoples.

It would be a travesty of the decolonization process.

And it would represent the recolonization of our country by a different colonial power.

Madam Chair, we are clear on what self-determination means to us.

We are clear that we do not want to be Spanish.

We have said so clearly, as a people on numerous occasions.

Madam Chair, the People of Gibraltar nevertheless wish to develop friendly, neighbourly, constructive relations with Spain.

We understand the synergies of the two, separate and distinct peoples of Gibraltar and the surrounding area.

And we want to work with them to ensure the prosperity of the region, whilst remaining firmly Gibraltarian.

There have been powerful symbols of cooperation in recent times achieved through dialogue.

During the COVID pandemic, thousands of Spanish workers were paid their salaries by Gibraltar during the enforced lockdown.

They were also vaccinated against the disease in Gibraltar under the Gibraltar Government's vaccination programme.

The vaccines were supplied by the United Kingdom.

For their part, the Spanish authorities kept the land border with Gibraltar OPEN and FLUID.

This permitted the movement of key workers, goods and materials during those difficult times.

Importantly we are now negotiating to try and secure a treaty to govern the future relationship of Gibraltar with the European Union.

This would be in the best interests of citizens and businesses on both sides of the border.

There were two, recent, high-level meetings in Brussels on the 12th April and the 16<sup>th</sup> of May.



Those meetings included the Vice President of the European Commission, the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom and Spain, as well as my colleague the Chief Minister of Gibraltar.

The negotiations are expected to continue at a technical level until after the UK General Election on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar remains fully committed to continue to work constructively towards an agreement.

We also have contingency plans to mitigate where possible the effects of a no treaty outcome.

The signatories to any treaty will be the European Union and the United Kingdom.

But needless to say, Gibraltar and Spain have been closely involved too as the parties most directly affected.

Indeed, the involvement of the Chief Minister and the Government of Gibraltar throughout has been essential in giving the negotiation legitimacy and the prospect of success.

Madam Chair, there is an important lesson for your Committee to take from all this.

The decolonization process that you have been entrusted to manage cannot work without the involvement of the very party which is most directly impacted.

The Government of Gibraltar wants to work with you to secure our decolonization.

We are the ones who represent the People of Gibraltar.

I am here to advocate on their behalf.

Silence and lack of engagement on your part is not a credible option.

The Plan of Action for each territory on your list requires the active participation of the elected representatives of the people.

Madam Chair, on behalf of the People and the Government of Gibraltar, I urge you once again to send a Visiting Mission to my country.

Come and learn at first-hand what Gibraltar is all about.

Let us introduce you to our people.

Let us show you our history!

Because these annual rituals before this Committee and the Fourth Committee alone produce NO feedback and lead to NO action.

And that is not good enough.

That is NOT innovative.

That is NOT progress.

The public information streamed by this Committee declares that decolonization is “a priority for the United Nations”.

Madam Chair, the time has come to show that you mean what you say.

Let us stop with the platitudes.

Because, Madam Chair, let me be clear.

The Gibraltarians are tired of your repeated failure to engage with us.

Your repeated failure to delist us.

You have talked the talk for too long.

It's time for your committee to walk the walk.

And the world is watching.

So do NOT let us down, again.

Thank you.

ENDS