



HM Government of Gibraltar

ADDRESS TO THE 4TH COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

**THE HON DR JOSEPH GARCIA CMG
DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER OF GIBRALTAR**

18th OCTOBER 2023

Madam Chair,

I appear before you as the newly re-elected Deputy Chief Minister of the Government of Gibraltar.

So I speak for the Government and the people of my country.

Exactly sixty years ago, the elected representatives of Gibraltar appeared before the United Nations for the first time.

We argued then for the recognition of our right to self-determination.

We called for the exercise of that right.

And we asserted our desire for a democratic decolonisation.

Sixty years later, Madam Chair, we are still here saying the same thing.

Nothing has happened.

There has yet to be meaningful engagement by the United Nations.

The UN has simply looked the other way.

This is not only disappointing,
it is unacceptable.

Gibraltar wants to engage with this Committee and the Committee of 24.

We want to achieve a decolonised status.

We want to be removed from your list of Non Self Governing Territories.

And the Administering Power has publicly said it supports us in working towards this goal.

Gibraltar recently marked those sixty years of coming to the United Nations with a public exhibition.

It covered the details of our interventions before this Committee and the Committee of 24.

Those interventions have always reflected our eagerness and enthusiasm to finally achieve a decolonised status.

Many of you represented here today were colonies once.

You will know why this is important.

You have experienced first hand the struggles of decolonisation.

For some of you, it was more painful than others.

Large former colonies like India, Australia, Canada and South Africa are now increasingly important players on the global stage.

Small nations like Grenada, St Lucia and Nauru have achieved decolonisation too.

Some of you are smaller than Gibraltar.

And many of you are a part of the Commonwealth.

We too are proud of our links with Commonwealth countries,
and with its organisations and institutions.

And we look to you

for support and guidance as we pursue our own journey on the path towards decolonisation.

All we ask, Madam Chair, is for the same route-map that others have already used before.

The people of Gibraltar cannot and must not be treated any differently.

That is why we would welcome a Visiting Mission from the Committee of 24.

That is why we again request that you engage formally with the government and the people of my country.

Madam Chair, the people of Gibraltar have inhabited the famous Rock at the entrance to the Mediterranean for over three hundred years.

Our distinct multi-cultural society has existed, for example, well before the independence of the United States.

Our ancestors settled in Gibraltar from other parts of the Mediterranean after 1704.

Traders and merchants began to arrive from Genoa, more than a century before the unification of Italy.

Sephardic Jews came from North Africa.

Workers came from Malta in the late nineteenth century.

Others arrived from the United Kingdom, from Spain and elsewhere.

A proud Hindu community migrated from India over the last century.

In the 1960s and 70s many came from Morocco and they too now call Gibraltar their home.

They are all part of who we are as a people. A people with a unique identity of our own.

That influx of immigrants has, over three hundred years, produced the Gibraltarian of today.

We are a separate and distinct people from the administering power.

A people with the inalienable right to self-determination under international law.

Madam Chair, you will know that our neighbouring state, the Kingdom of Spain, has long asserted a territorial claim to our country.

We reject that claim.

Spain seeks to redraw a European border to what it was before 1704.

This is a frightening notion.

It has huge implications that extend far beyond Gibraltar.

The truth is that we are no longer in the eighteenth century.

Today, people have rights.

Today, people come first.

Today, the wishes of the people must be paramount.

Madam Chair, while we reject Spain's territorial claim to our country, we also extend the hand of friendship to our neighbours.

Gibraltar's exit from the European Union has caused us to work together to solve shared challenges.

We want to protect and enhance the economy of Gibraltar and that of the region around it.

Gibraltar exerts a positive economic impact on the neighbouring area of Spain.

There are fifteen thousand people who live in Spain and work in Gibraltar.

Most are citizens of the European Union.

Some nine thousand are Spanish nationals.

That makes Gibraltar the second largest employer for the southern region of Spain.

We purchase some 1.5 billion dollars worth of goods and materials annually from Spanish companies.

Gibraltarians spend over 100 million dollars a year on goods and services in Spain.

There is a need to protect that economic interaction going forward.

That is why, together with the United Kingdom, Gibraltar has been working on a treaty to safeguard our relationship with the European Union and with Spain.

We are fully committed to continue that work after a new Spanish government has been formed following their own electoral process.

But make no mistake,

we will never surrender any part of our sovereignty.
Gibraltar belongs to its people.

Nonetheless, Madam Chair, there is still hope.

There is always hope that future generations may come to see Gibraltar differently,

through the prism of democracy and human rights,

rather than as a mere object of Spain's territorial ambition.

Because we live in a world where people cannot simply be handed over between kings and princes against their wishes.

This means that the freely and democratically expressed wishes of the people of Gibraltar must prevail.

We cannot be simply transferred from an existing colonial power to a new one.

That is not decolonisation.

That is recolonisation.

Worse still is the notion of replacing one colonial power with two of them jointly.

We have overwhelmingly rejected that already.

So Madam Chair,

This is the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

The UN cannot be all words and no action.

I urge you and your Committee to map out a path for the decolonisation of Gibraltar.

I call on the United Nations to move on their mandate.

And I assert that the people of Gibraltar must be the only ones to determine their own future.

In this day and age, there can be no other way.

Thank you for your attention.