



PRESS RELEASE

No: 809/2019

Date: 14th November 2019

Chief Minister's Speech at the Ceremonial Opening of Parliament

Your Excellency,

It is always pleasing, satisfying and a great comfort to hear you restate the double-lock commitments of the United Kingdom to the Gibraltarians right to determine the sovereignty of Gibraltar and even any engagement on the negotiation of it.

Thank you for once again making that explicit.

It is worth repeating, not just for us, but also for any who may be listening or watching from beyond our shores.

And, as we established as soon as we were elected for the first time eight years ago, the speech that Your Excellency has kindly delivered a moment ago, is now in the nature of the Queen's speech at Westminster.

We established that it is now a statement drafted in the closest consultation with the Chief Minister of the day in a manner designed to reflect those parts of the manifesto of the party returned to Government that will be the legislative agenda of the incoming administration in this Parliament.

But what is more important than what your speech here is, Your Excellency, is actually what your speech here is not.

Your speech here now is not in the nature of the speech of the representative of an administering power instructing Members on what we are to do, what the defined domestic matters we are able to manage are, or the finances we have available to run Gibraltar.

And that is the surest sign of the maturity of our relationship and of our continued constitutional development.

These are exactly the things we must reflect on in the work of the Constitutional Reform Select Committee that we will be re-establishing to consider how our foundational document should continue to develop our further political emancipation.



For these are exactly the Constitutional conventions we should have established in the first part of the twenty first century for the commencement of a parliamentary session in a territory which the United Kingdom itself tells the United Nations should be removed from the list of non-self governing territories maintained by the Committee of 24.

It is exactly what the representative of a Constitutional Monarchy should be doing in a democracy where the Parliament is the instrument of the will of the People as determined in a free and fair general election.

And as a result of that free and fair election it is an honour for me, today, to join the cast of only two other Chief Ministers in our history to address our chamber of elected members on three successive occasions.

And since the first moment we were returned to Government eight years ago and I was elected as Chief Minister we have ensured, that the Government we represent is styled as Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, which is exactly what it is.

And, indeed, Your Excellency, given we are Her Majesty's Government it would be churlish not to record today our best wishes on his birthday to the heir to the throne of the United Kingdom and Gibraltar, the Prince of Wales, an undoubted friend of Gibraltar.

A special friend – the Heir Apparent – amongst many friends that Gibraltar enjoys throughout the United Kingdom and beyond.

And with the support of our friends throughout the world and the United Kingdom, we have been able to prosper and grow even in the face of some of the worst political aggression our nation and our people have suffered in the recent political history of Gibraltar.

As ever, we have not just survived, we have thrived.

Because our cause is a just one and our path is a righteous one derived from doing the right thing, acting entirely properly and protecting our nation.

That is what has been the touchstone of the Gibraltarians through the ages.

In particular it has been the touchstone by which our forefathers faced up to the challenges of the age of the evacuation.

The touchstone that guided the generation that selected the toughest of the choices presented to them in the first referendum.

The principles that guided the closed frontier generation to stay the course, do the right thing and hold their nerve for the benefit of those that came after them.

They thought about the future.

They thought about the next generation.



The thought about us instead of just about themselves.

That is how their quest was won.

That is how they built this city on rock and toil.

We have much to learn from that attitude.

And we will not allow the honest labour, genuine hard work and sacrifice of past and present Gibraltarians to be traduced or to be mischaracterised or misrepresented.

We will not allow our people to be libeled or defamed by those whose politics today are derived from the politics of those who inflicted so much pain in the past on people on both sides of the frontier.

Because it is clear that even as we celebrate 100 years since the end of the first world war, 75 years since Victory in Europe and 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the hard right is alive and kicking in Europe.

And we will work in every available forum to ensure that we take on anyone who seeks to use innuendo or lies to misrepresent our people, our journey and our reality.

Because we are a Government that was elected to deliver social justice – and we have.

And that pursuit for national social justice must be matched by a crusade for international justice for our people.

And we will not hesitate to seek out such justice for our nation in every forum within our grasp.

Because it is a truth etched in the arteries of time by Dr Martin Luther King that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.

And the memory of the people of Gibraltar is long, our stamina in-exhaustable and our case unanswerable.

So I say to all who would slander or smear our people, our motives or our identity:

You stand in the way of the truth and legitimacy of the our people at your peril.

We are fierce friends to those who want to work with us – but we will be fearless foes of those who seek to denigrate us.

For we will never give up our rights to our land.

We will not let down our ancestors who are buried here on our sacred ground.



We will not surrender the land of our children and our children's children.

We will not be cowed by the cheap and empty rhetoric that insults us.

And if you stand in our way, history will sweep you away like any other one of the many hurdles we have already surmounted.

A footnote to the history of our common success as a people.

And our commitment to social justice, Your Excellency, has been felt not just in our performance in the international dimension by our battle for emancipation.

It has been felt also in positive progress for many at a national level.

This is an area on which we have led from the front on equality in every respect.

Whether on the civil partnerships for all sexual orientations including heterosexuals.

Or on equal marriage.

Or on matters of nationality, which also go to the equality agenda.

On each one we are the ones who have unblocked generations of social intransigence.

And we will continue to do so.

Not by being over radical in an attempt to grab a headline.

But by being conscientious.

By bringing people and society with us.

And by acting properly and in keeping with people's modern rights.

I emphasise, Your Excellency, that we have unblocked applications for British Nationality which had been allowed to fester since the early nineteen eighties.

We have made huge progress, in particular in relation to our Moroccan and Indian communities.

We are now looking only at small numbers of pending applications for nationality.

Because equality is – but is not just – about matters relating to elimination of discrimination in respect of gender and sexual orientations.

Equality is about social justice as much as fair wages, a fair housing policy and fair taxation.



And on each of those areas, Your Excellency, our arguments and our programme for Government have been preferred now for the third successive time to those whose arguments have been more negative than constructive.

Because our people do not think politics or elections should be uninspiring arguments about balance sheets.

Our people have shown repeatedly that they are not going to swallow successive iterations of our opponents versions of project fear.

Our people would not have their electoral choice tainted by repeated, unimaginative arguments about stretched finances, impending bankruptcy or opacity when the reality around them tells our people a palpably different truth.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, we will be tabling a new facility agreement entered into with Natwest for £75m to replace the borrowings in place for £100m with Barclays Bank that matured in October.

A demonstration of our continued work to secure always better borrowing terms for our community than those we inherited from the former administration that most Honourable Members opposite represent.

All of this will be dealt with in detail at the first meeting of the Parliament after today which the government intends to call for December.

Because for three successive general election wins, means that on three successive occasions our people have preferred our vision for the future of our nation and our prudent management of the public finances.

Our views – and those of the former administration - on the corporate financing of capital projects have prevailed and have been preferred repeatedly, despite being the lynchpin of the arguments against us.

Three times people have rejected the personalised attacks that some have deployed masquerading as legitimate opposition.

Three times the scaremongering hasn't worked, on debt, the public finances generally or even, dare I remind the house, LNG.

Because an election is a moment of political catharsis, where the general body of electors clears itself of the unwanted and rings in the new.

Those who have lived by the sword of unwarranted allegations have fallen by the sword of the electorates rejection.

Your Excellency, I will not be foolish enough to give my opponents advice on what to do to defeat us - but it should certainly be clear to them that the tactics used to date have not advanced their cause.



Our commitment to the publication of Government company accounts is unprecedented and will deliver a transparency unheard of before in our democracy.

Our publication of statistics online is also without precedent. The public have access now to more than ever before.

It ill behoves those who published less data to complain that we do not publish enough data.

We will nonetheless be reaching out to work with Opposition colleagues in this Parliament.

But it must be clear that in doing so we will be seeking their views, their involvement and their assistance where appropriate in the context of none of the groupings opposite us representing more than a quarter of the electorate.

And so as we will consider humility our watchword as we govern for all our people, it would be important that the Opposition should meet our humility with a similar sentiment.

Because this is a Government which was clearly elected by more than double the votes of our nearest rivals.

This is a time for Government to act and deliver and we will.

Our opponents have to hold us to account and I ask them to do so with energy and enthusiasm.

But they also have to construct an alternative vision for our people.

That is as essential an ingredient in our democracy as criticism.

Holding to account is not a credible or legitimate political licence to criticise without constructing an alternative.

For the sake of our nation's democracy, I hope that they will.

The people of Gibraltar want and have chosen a strong and positive vision of where Gibraltar is heading.

They want to know where their Government is going to take our nation.

They do not want a dissertation on the proper accounting treatment of an asset, a liability or a disbursement. They know our experts are expertly dealing with those things.

Because that is not a vision for our future and for our nation.

That is a myopic presentation of detail that raises no interest in those who want to secure our prosperity and who want to see a socially just agenda dominate the political life of our nation.



And in order to continue our commitment delivering social justice and equality, the Government has republished the bills that fell off the agenda at the time of dissolution so that we can continue where we left off.

We have committed to the wide legislative agenda you have already kindly set out, highlighting our key commitments.

Because our creed is that we believe in the men and women of Gibraltar.

That is why we are committed to dealing with the gender pay gap, with abortion and with any glass ceiling issues that may be raised with us.

Mr Speaker, if any member of the public points us to a glass ceiling affecting any sector or any group, our calling is to shatter through it, with legislation from this House if necessary.

We believe in our young people. We already proposed voting at age 16 and we will be putting this issue on the agenda for parliamentary reform and in respect of the coming referendum on abortion.

We believe in the LGBTW agenda and every single member of this House must too.

And we must all evangelise those equality issues.

We must all evangelise real equality.

And if anyone here is going to evangelise for any other agenda, for a traditional or non-secular agenda, that retains discriminations in our laws then let them be honest and say so.

But they will have to take us on those issues.

They will have to take me and my colleagues on those issues.

Because this is our creed.

This is who we are.

This is who we advocate for.

And in doing so, Mr Speaker, we have advocated for minorities in our community as we have advocated for all of us, the Gibraltarians in the process of our departure from the European Union with the United Kingdom.

Indeed, in the closest working relationship with colleagues in Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom, we have advanced greatly in preparations for all permutations of our departure – or non departure – from the European Union.

Hard Brexit.



Soft Brexit.

No Brexit.

We are ready for all of them – including a potential new referendum.

And in respect of Brexit, it is clear that the lifetime of the last Parliament was dominated by the infamous ‘B’ word.

At the last ceremonial opening, I spoke about the commitment of the then Prime Minister to include Gibraltar in the franchise of the referendum to come.

Since then, with the Deputy Chief Minister, all other Ministers, the Attorney General and the Financial Secretary, we have been immersed in every aspect of our potential departure and future relationship with the EU.

It has literally been an assignment for ‘every waking moment’.

And our reward for that hard work and that commitment has not just been our return to Government and the confidence of our people – although it has undoubtedly been that also.

Our greatest reward has been to see our economy continue to grow and our nation continue to prosper when so many considered that Brexit, or worse, the uncertainty it created, should have led to our economic performance suffering considerably.

In fact, the opposite happened.

Our preparation at home.

Our collaboration with the United Kingdom.

Our relentless endeavour.

That is what has delivered a dividend of enviable economic growth.

It has enabled us to deliver an enviable agreement for continued access to the United Kingdom in services after we leave the European Union.

This has been described in the notes to the Queen’s Speech in Westminster last month as being an arrangement that is unique to Gibraltar amongst the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

A huge achievement delivered by working hand in glove with UK colleagues.

This has enabled us to deliver a Double Taxation Agreement between us and the United Kingdom.

This has been a prize that has eluded us for years.



And our hard work has done more.

It has enabled us to deliver an International Tax Treaty with Spain which clarifies the application of the existing laws of each of our jurisdictions to citizens with cross border interests.

A treaty that three Chief Minister's agree contains no concessions on sovereignty to Spain.

Sir Joe Bossano's analysis on the politics of the treaty is clear.

Sir Peter Caruana's analysis on the law of the treaty is clear.

And my own view on the politics and law of the treaty, informed by the advice of both the former is well known to the House.

This treaty and the Memoranda of Understanding and Protocol to the EU Withdrawal Agreement have been negotiated trilaterally between the UK, Spain and Gibraltar and bilaterally between Spain and Gibraltar.

I cannot emphasise the latter enough.

A truly remarkable achievement also.

And this variable geometry of talks – also including discussion with the EU Commission – is what has resulted in our being included in the Withdrawal Agreement between the UK and the EU in the event that Brexit were to occur with a deal.

By any measure, Your Excellency, this is undoubtedly a success to be shared by UK British and Gibraltar British diplomacy and politics.

A success that sets us up for many more years of growth, prosperity and success based on the creation of a superhighway for business between Gibraltar and the UK and to the Commonwealth beyond.

A new 'twin track' for business to run on the tram lines established by the common law and the rule of law which are the core principles we share with the UK and the Commonwealth.

And for this, the DTA between us and the UK will be the 'superconductor' that drives our business safely, openly and transparently to new destinations.

Some of these new destinations will undoubtedly be in the old Empire.

And they are now within a moment's reach – literally at light speed - as we ride the modern fibre conduits that stretch around the world and land and reach out from this Rock of ours around the globe.



And some of our key destinations now will be the places from where we have received people who are today an integral part of our multicultural society.

We continue to believe that we are presented with great opportunities to pursue the strong links of those of our fellow Gibraltarians whose ethnic origin enables them to easily navigate other cultures.

We have great opportunities to pursue now in Morocco, where we have already augmented our activity and will do even more in coming months and years.

And in India, where so many of our great entrepreneurs come from, not least the energetic new Member on the government benches, Minister Daryanani.

And as we continue our work to build bridges around the world, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will always reach out a hand of friendship and co-operation to the government of the Kingdom of Spain also.

As I stated at the last Ceremonial Opening, we will continue to seek to establish non-sovereignty dialogue with the Government of Spain on matters of mutual interest and which will improve the lives of people on both sides of the frontier.

That need not change because we will not be in the European Union and will be more important for our citizens if we are not.

But to be meaningful and successful, such dialogue must be based on the principle of mutual respect; something which we believe was preserved under the mechanisms of the Trilateral Forum for Dialogue and which was reinforced by the variable geometry that underpinned our negotiations in respect of the EU Withdrawal Agreement.

And nationally, as we face our third consecutive mandate, we will not fall into the trap of being isolated in an ivory tower or a gilded cage in office.

We will not even allow the unleashed demons of Brexit to isolate us as it necessarily did in the lifetime of the last Parliament.

We will work even harder than in our first two terms to reach out to our people.

We will work harder now, not less so, to nurture and maintain the trust and confidence of our people.

That is why I was so pleased yesterday, Your Excellency, to have spent the morning meeting members of the public – as I have done since I was elected – but with the twist that yesterday I held those meetings at the Plater Youth Club at Tankerville.

I will be holding further such meetings in other areas around Gibraltar as well as continuing to meet members of the public at No6 Convent Place.



Additionally, today I can also announce that the Cabinet will also meet outside of Convent Place once a month in locations around Gibraltar to enable us to also be available as a whole Government to members of the public.

I will be making a more detailed announcement on the timings and locations for these meetings in coming months.

And as those months roll into years and as this Parliament reaches maturity, I have been very clear on the election trail Your Excellency, that nothing will ever be the same in Gibraltar.

We are already planning to deliver our manifesto commitments, which we see as our obligations to the public.

We are planning timelines and finances to deliver in the forty eight month timescale.

But if we judge our ability to deliver and change our nation based on our last ninety six months in Government, there is every good reason to be confident that we will deliver that much heralded Green Gibraltar in the time available.

So I want to be clear today, Your Excellency, that there will be radical change delivered by the Government I lead in coming months.

On climate change, on sustainability, on the protection of our natural environment, we are out of time.

Soundbites sound hollow to those of us who want to deliver real change.

But Green Gibraltar is an omelette that we cannot make without breaking eggs.

And break eggs we will for the greater and more important objective that is at stake.

So much has changed already.

So much more will change in coming months.

In 4 years we will live in a healthier, cleaner more prosperous Gibraltar.

In a Gibraltar where the provision of health care services will be linked to the prevention of ill health by the prevention of pollution, by the promotion of exercise through walking and cycling.

Already yesterday we have seen such initiatives starting to roll out.

A new social model that will succeed only when we the citizens understand that we need to enter into a new social contract with each other and with our institutions of government.

And from this place, we will drive that grand new bargain, that green new bargain between us all.



That is why, in 4 years nothing will be the same.

Because things cannot stay the same.

Because everything has to be better.

Our services have to be more efficient.

Our lifestyles have to be more sustainable.

Our personal lives have to be less selfish and our objectives more communal.

That is why the age of entitlement is the past.

That is why the age of sustainability and responsibility is now ushered in and must be embraced across the partisan divide.

Indeed, Your Excellency, I believe we are now at a stage in our development as a people when we ALL have to ask ourselves a variation of the JFK question: How can each of us contribute more to the growth of the nation and not how the nation can be milked, squeezed or abused further for our personal gain.

Indeed, in coming months I believe all our people will understand that it will be politically unacceptable to pursue the cause of those who want to jump a queue, obtain an unfair advantage or get something for nothing.

It is also a time for our people to genuinely value what we have.

The abundance we enjoy must be understood in the context of the Europe and the world in which we live today – and not in the splendid isolation of what more everyone would like.

As we start that work as a Parliament and as an Executive, Mr Speaker, I want to welcome the new Honourable Member of this House, Minister Daryanani, and the returning Members.

The faces on the opposite benches are all returning, none are new - although some return after a longer interval than others.

The Leader of the Opposition is new to the Parliament, although he was a Member of its forerunner, the House of Assembly.

Knowing all the characters as I do, I believe that we can deliver a sharply more convivial atmosphere in coming months and years.

I am sure we would all welcome a less barbed atmosphere, however robust our exchanges on the issues might rightly be.



The first test of our ability to work together even on issues on which we may hold different views will come quickly as we seek to agree with the Opposition the question to be put in the abortion referendum which will be held on the 19th of March next year.

We have already passed the law that permits abortion in certain, defined circumstances.

The question will be about the commencement of an Act that we have already passed.

In that respect, I also look forward to working toward the more effective functioning of the Gibraltar Consultative Council, that can bring a new, cross party approach to resolving challenges facing our nation.

I must also lament that one former Member has chosen not to return to this Parliament, the Honourable Neil Costa, who was a magnificent Minister and Parliamentarian for the past eight years.

He will be in parliamentary terms much missed, although he continues to be a supportive part of our political extended family.

Your Excellency, to do its work effectively, this Parliament must meet often. We established, when other refused to, that there should be monthly meetings for questions, with the Chief Minister facing questions where possible the third Thursday of each month.

We maintained that rhythm until the last 18 months due to the weight of the work on Brexit negotiations.

We intend now to revert to that rhythm that we had established, starting in December.

I very much look forward to that work with colleagues across the floor of the House.

Your Excellency, this will be your first and last speech on a Ceremonial Opening.

It is my third and likely my last speech on such an occasion also, so long as this Parliament is able to run its 48 month life.

Like any other person, my duty is to my family and to my country and to my party in that order.

I am clear that my family, my country and my party have given me everything that I have and have made me everything that I am.

I will work as hard as I am able to not let down any of those.

The first I have in mind though are my family, my children and my wife.

I will not embarrass any of us further by straying into the emotional – but that will be the key consideration for me in making personal political decisions in coming years.



A lot will however also depend on how the Brexit negotiating timetable moves.

But politics at the top in the age of 24/7 social media is a worthwhile but unforgiving endeavour.

It is right to mark at least a notional end point in one's journey.

I have done so already and I will work to be able to depart this post at the end of the lifetime of this Parliament.

Finally, Mr Speaker, since the last ceremonial opening, we have lost colleagues along the way.

One was a Member of this House, Juan Carlos Perez, who I want to mention today.

I know that he was very highly regarded by Members on both sides of the House.

Mr Speaker, today, the 14th of November, is Children's Day in India.

What a fitting day to commence the lifetime of a Gibraltar Parliament that boasts its first elected Member and Minister of Indian descent that is made up of an Executive committed to deliver a Child Friendly City.

Your Excellency, I commend the opening of this Parliament to the House and trust that our work will now start in earnest in a spirit of parliamentary solidarity and conviviality.