



PRESS RELEASE

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Joint National Day Message from the Chief Minister Fabian Picardo and Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia

National Day was established on 10th September 1992 in order to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1967 sovereignty referendum. This year it will be extra special as we celebrate fifty years since that momentous event took its place as a turning point in Gibraltar's history.

On 10th September 1967, the People of Gibraltar were given the choice as to whether they wanted to retain their existing links with the United Kingdom, with democratic local institutions, or whether they wished instead to become part of Spain. This was the first time that the People of Gibraltar were given a say over the sovereignty of Gibraltar.

The Referendum generation voted overwhelmingly to remain British.

They did so in the face of increased hostility from Franco's Spain, with mounting pressure at the border and with little sympathy from an anti-British United Nations: the international body charged with decolonisation.

It was a time when emotions ran high within the community. Restrictions implemented at the frontier by Franco's Government in the years that preceded the Referendum had brought tensions to a boiling point. A vitriolic campaign against the UK and against Gibraltar and its people by the state-controlled media in Spain only served to bolster the already strong pro-British sentiment on the Rock.

Before the Referendum even took place, Madrid had already refused to issue new work permits to Spaniards seeking employment here; they only allowed Spaniards who already had work permits to access Gibraltar; they restricted UK passport holders to one border crossing per day; they deliberately delayed vehicles crossing the land frontier for up to ten hours; they refused to recognise passports issued by the Government of Gibraltar; they banned the overflight of Spain by UK military aircraft heading for Gibraltar and then extended this to civilian flights also; they withdrew all labour permits for Spanish female workers and stopped fresh produce from entering Gibraltar.

Spain's anti-Gibraltar campaign on the ground coincided with international antipathy at the United Nations in New York. The General Assembly considered that the Referendum violated its previous resolutions on the decolonisation of Gibraltar, refused to send observers to monitor it, and continued to insist on bilateral negotiations between the UK and Spain as the way forward.



The Referendum ballot took place against this background of tension and of hostility. The direct and immediate consequences of voting for what was then Option B, voluntarily retaining the link with Britain, were plain for all to see. Nevertheless, the vote was recognised by independent Commonwealth observers as a free and fair exercise in democracy, and praised voters for remaining calm and in good spirits throughout.

Despite the obvious threat of greater punishment from Madrid, the Referendum generation voted overwhelmingly to remain British. They did so in a brave show of defiance to the Spanish dictator and those in the UN General Assembly who had supported his sovereignty claim, but they did so too with a genuine sense of pride in their identity as British Gibraltarians.

That vote was taken in the full knowledge of the potential uncertainty and hardship that the result would bring. It was to lead to the closure of the land frontier, the ending of maritime links with Spain and the cutting of telephone communications. Safeguarding the sovereignty of Gibraltar in the hands of the people had a high price.

Gibraltar became a city under siege dependent on UK development aid and military spending.

Despite this, Gibraltarians worked hard to re-orientate the economy in order to withstand and even prosper under this final siege. Indeed, it was a time when local democratic institutions were reformed and strengthened under a new Constitution: a direct consequence of the British choice.

Our forefathers refused to sell our birth-right. They did not surrender to the bully next door. More than three hundred years of British rule have taught us not to give in to bullies.

Fifty years later, in 2017, our resolve to assert our British sovereignty and defend our right to self-determination remains as strong as it has ever been.

We continue to face some of those old challenges, and we will face them with as much strength and vigour as we did in 1967.

We also face new challenges, and we are ready to meet them head on.

That peaceful courage in the face of adversity is what makes us Gibraltarians determined to ensure that the future of our homeland is such as we and no others may decide. That is what we celebrate on Sunday.