



PRESS RELEASE

No: 676/2019

Date: 16th September 2019

Closure of Airport Damaged Gibraltar's Reputation

Yesterday's closure of the airport due to a shortage of Air Traffic Controllers undoubtedly did considerable damage to Gibraltar's reputation. HM Government of Gibraltar is extremely disappointed by NATS' failure to deliver on its obligations and by the resultant negative impact on Gibraltar's image. It is ironic that Government has just announced a major PR campaign in London in which we claim that 'Gibraltar is open for business.' Not yesterday, it wasn't!

By forcing the airport to close, NATS failed to honour its contract with MOD and caused three flights to be cancelled or diverted. Obviously, this resulted in hundreds of passengers, both inbound and outbound, being severely inconvenienced.

The Government understands that yesterday's problems resulted from a member of staff reporting sick. When other off-duty controllers were then asked to cover this absence, no-one was willing to do so. With an insufficient number of staff on duty, there was no other course of action than to close the airport.

The Government regrets that NATS has no provision in its Controllers' contracts which obliges a stand-by Controller to report for work in these circumstances. The Government also regrets that Gibraltar airport's Controllers were clearly not being as cooperative as they could have been.

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo, said, "I urge NATS, MOD and the unions to resolve any outstanding issues and to update their procedures so that there are no repetitions of yesterday's disgraceful failure.

"As we transition through whatever Brexit brings us, it is absolutely essential that Gibraltar and its airport are always open for business."