Deputy Chief Minister
Hon. Dr Joseph Garcia, MP

Address to Year 12 and 13 students of Bayside School,
Westside School and the College of Further Education

09.15 – 10.45 Bayside School
11.15 – 12.45 Westside School

CPA Presentation on the Commonwealth
CPA Roadshows for young people
Wednesday 8 January 2020

Good morning everyone and welcome.

I would like to extend a very special welcome on behalf of the Government of Gibraltar to our friends from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. You have heard this morning from the Acting Secretary General exactly what it is that the CPA does.

The Government, your Government, fully supports that work. Indeed, our Parliamentarians, both from the Government and from the Opposition benches, are active participants in CPA events.
We fly the Gibraltar flag. We represent our Parliament and our country. And we do so with pride. Because in the CPA the small countries are equal to large ones.

I have been asked to address you on the relationship that Gibraltar enjoys with the Commonwealth. In doing so, I will dwell on the past and also look forward to the future.

You know that in just over three weeks we will leave the European Union. The EU flag will be lowered and replaced by the flag of the Commonwealth. That simple act carries a serious political message.

Clearly, Brexit will serve to frame this discussion here today and will obviously colour the context of what I have to say. In 2019 we marked 70 years of the foundation of the Commonwealth in 1949. Gibraltar is proud of our long and historic relationship with its institutions and organisations.

The Gibraltar of today, a modern, cosmopolitan city and vibrant trade hub, is deeply rooted in our rich history. I make no apologies as a historian. Our history has made us who we are today: a culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse People who are proud to call themselves Gibraltarian.

Like many of our friends across the Commonwealth, Gibraltarians boast a unique cultural identity. We have lived on this Rock for more than three hundred years. We are a British Overseas Territory, a modern nation in our own right.

We are one of many in this modern, forward-looking family of countries and territories brought together by shared experiences, by language, by culture, by traditions and by way of life. And we have a clear willingness to use this to our advantage as we carve out our own destiny. Our own place in the World. Because it is, indeed, those values that define us.

That is as true for individuals as it is for governments, institutions and the people that we have the privilege to represent. And those values are, inevitably, shaped by our experiences of the past and our hopes for the future.

We Gibraltarians are well known for our resilience, for our entrepreneurial ability, for our courage, for our determination, for our ability to turn any potentially bleak situation
into a new opportunity for growth, development and trade. That is what our history has shown.

As we begin to look outside of the Continent, we want to continue to do business with those who share our core values of fairness, openness and transparency.

Our main market today is the United Kingdom. That has been guaranteed post-Brexit. And we will now also logically look to our friends in Commonwealth family. It is good to see that they look to us also.

The High Commissioners to the UK of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and India have all come here since the 2016 referendum. They want to learn about our ambitions and listen to our concerns. For Gibraltar has long played an active part in the organisations and institutions of the Commonwealth.

My colleague the Minister for Equality Samantha Sacramento is on the regional Steering Committee of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians.

Steven Linares, the Minister for Housing, is an alternate on the Board of the Commonwealth Local Government Association.

The Minister for Economic Development Sir Joe Bossano is actively involved in the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation.

Indeed, until recently the CEO of our Postal Services was also the Chairman of the Conference of Commonwealth Postal Administrations.

We have participated in every Commonwealth Games since the first one in 1958. Indeed, Gibraltar bid to host the Commonwealth Youth Games here in 2021. The games were awarded to Trinidad and Tobago. We will try again in the future.

Gibraltar joined the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council in 2017. This is the trading and business arm of the Commonwealth. The Council has agreed to open an office here in Gibraltar. This will happen shortly. That will open the door to new commercial contacts with the countries and territories of the Commonwealth.
Elsewhere, the Royal Gibraltar Regiment has deployed soldiers to Kenya, Cyprus and Sierra Leone over the years. They also served on a month long deployment to Canada as part of a large multi-national exercise. Members of the Regiment were deployed last year to Gambia where they provided training and mentoring for the Gambian forces’ UN deployment to the Darfur region of Sudan.

All of these are Commonwealth countries. All these are Commonwealth connections.

And Gibraltar was proud to have made a small effort to assist those Caribbean Commonwealth territories affected by the hurricane in 2017 with aid, with supplies and with vehicles. These were specifically Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Dominica. Again this demonstrates the importance of being part of the family.

Also in 2017, we were delighted to send young people to the Commonwealth Youth Parliament in Jersey for the first time. Indeed, at the end of last year, two more young Gibraltarians participated in the Commonwealth Youth Parliament that was held in Delhi, India. They were selected through an essay competition. These opportunities will be available to you also.

Gibraltar was represented at the Civic Forum, the Women’s Forum, the Business Forum and the Youth Forum around the last meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government that took place in London. We are not a member state. We are the Overseas Territory of a member state.

The view of the Government is that provision should be made for Gibraltar, and those Overseas Territories who wish it, to be represented at the actual Heads of Government meeting in the future. This could be achieved through the creation of a new status of Participating Guest or through some new kind of Affiliate or Associate Membership.

The Heads of Government next meet in Rwanda in June. It is true that different Commonwealth organisations have different structures. In some, Gibraltar is a full member equal to everyone else. In others, the statutes have been amended to accommodate British Overseas Territories.
Following proposals from Sir Joe Bossano, for example, the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, created a new category of Affiliate Membership.

When I last met the Secretary General of the Commonwealth in London we discussed finding a place for the Overseas Territories in that Commonwealth structure.

Some years ago, we initiated a policy of taking young people from your school age group to visit the EU institutions in Brussels.

Last year, for the first time, we changed the focus and the group went to London instead to visit the UK institutions and those of the Commonwealth. This included the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council and indeed our friends in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

I want to thank the CPA for hosting our students. There will be an opportunity for more of you to participate in another such visit later this year.

2020 will bring challenges of course, as we leave the European Union. Whilst these challenges may be new, the sense of a collective responsibility in turbulent times, and of collaboration to create mutual prosperity is not new to any of us. For decades, we have been there for the Commonwealth family and the Commonwealth family has been there for us.

In 1915, during World War One, Gibraltar provided a safe haven for injured servicemen from Australia and New Zealand who arrived here on hospital ships from the conflict in Gallipoli. In 1940, Jamaica hosted two thousand Gibraltarian civilians who were evacuated there after the outbreak of the Second World War.

In the 1960s, Australia passionately defended the right to self-determination of the people of Gibraltar at the United Nations in New York. And when the United Nations refused to send observers to the referendum that was held here in 1967, it was the Commonwealth that agreed to do so instead. That team of Commonwealth observers was headed by New Zealand’s then Ambassador to France. The Observers included Kenya’s Ambassador to West Germany and Jamaica’s Assistant Attorney General. Another example of what it means to be a part of the family.
The irony cannot be lost upon us that only a few years later the UK stood accused of turning its back on the Commonwealth. This came in 1973 when both the UK and Gibraltar joined the European Economic Community. It was to be a dramatic turning point in the relationship with the old Empire.

But the world has moved on since then. The Commonwealth too. Its member countries have since entered into strategic alliances or trade agreements of their own. Yet our links with the Commonwealth, in better or worse times, have survived. The networks that we have managed to develop between us have not only endured. They have thrived. Some might refer to this as soft power networking.

I consider it to be something more. A deeper relationship that embeds centuries of shared experience, decades of cultural understanding, years of projecting the same values, the development of a strong sporting tradition, the sharing of expertise, and the formation of economic partnerships.

The Commonwealth is, indeed, a consensus-based international organisation. The lack of a rigid institutional structure, however, could be one of its greatest strengths. The Commonwealth cannot, and should not, attempt to replicate the European Union.

There are some who are critical of the Commonwealth’s lack of a formal structure and question the absence of powers of enforcement. I do the opposite. I point precisely to the Commonwealth’s history of enforcement. This has sometimes given effect to agreed economic sanctions.

It has even led to the suspension of certain member states. I point also to the excellent work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, represented here today. The positive discussions at Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings, and the intricate webs of networks that exist at ministerial and diplomatic level.

I point to the vibrancy of these relationships, and the dynamic nature of the work that we are able to do together. And I do not suggest for a minute that all this is set in stone.

We can, and should, develop those networks further still. The Government of Gibraltar is immensely proud of our young delegates to the Commonwealth Youth Parliament and the Commonwealth Youth Forum. It is vital that our young people have a voice
and a clear role in shaping the future of our relationships. After all, 60% of Commonwealth citizens are under the age of 30. We want to know what you think. We want your help in shaping new opportunities. New opportunities for Gibraltar in a new order.

With new technologies that reduce distance and make time irrelevant. Many of you, in the years to come, will have jobs and contribute to our economies and societies in ways that we cannot even imagine today. Brexit is the spur to enhance our Commonwealth connections. To develop, strengthen and mould them to our mutual advantage. The opportunities that the future will bring are yours to shape. Because that future is yet to be written.

Thank you.

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