



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

CEREMONIAL OPENING: 11 a.m. – 12.57 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 10th November 2023

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11 a.m.

[PRESIDING MEMBER: Hon. Sir J J Bossano *in the Chair, presiding over the resolution*]

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Mrs Justice K Ramagge *in the Chair*]

[CHIEF JUSTICE: The Hon. Mr Justice A E Dudley *in attendance*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO ELECTED MEMBERS

Clerk: Oaths of Allegiance of hon. Members.

The Chief Justice administered the Oath of Allegiance to the Hon. F R Picardo, the Hon. Dr J J Garcia, the Hon. N Feetham, the Hon. Mrs G Arias-Vasquez, the Hon. Prof. J E Cortes, the Hon. C P Santos, the Hon. Ms P A Orfila, the Hon. L M Bruzon, the Hon. Sir J J Bossano, the Hon. K Azopardi, the Hon D J Bossino, the Hon. R M Clinton, the Hon. C A Sacarello, the Hon. E J Reyes, the Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus, the Hon. G Origo and the Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

MOTION ON THE APPOINTMENT OF THE SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT

Clerk: Motion on the appointment of the Speaker of the Parliament – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Presiding Member, I have the honour to move the following motion standing in my name:

That Mrs Justice Karen Ramagge be appointed Speaker of the Gibraltar Parliament.

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Mr Presiding Member, before I start on the substance of the motion on the proposed new Speaker of this House, I want to reflect on the fact that you are sitting in that Chair in your capacity as the Father of the House, and every time that you do this job for us, you become more and more of a father. At 51 years a Member of this Parliament, I dare say that you may already hold the Guinness record for parliamentary representation of a people in a parliament. We have already had a barrister who has been a Guinness record holder in Gibraltar, and I am sure that we will soon find out whether you are, in fact, the Guinness record holder – certainly you are for Gibraltar – for the rest of the Commonwealth in parliamentary representation of your people. In making that reflection, I do not know how many times they have written you off, but they keep getting it wrong and you keep coming back to assist us in all of the administration of the affairs of Gibraltar, let alone in presiding over this Parliament when we do not have a Speaker. In that respect, I know that your energy, resilience and commitment are far from blunted and I very much welcome the fact that you are going to preside over this moment and then enjoy your time in the

lifetime of this Parliament with us. Few 84-year-olds can still fill any auditorium that they address: Mick Jagger, Paul McCartney and Joe Bossano. *(Laughter)*

I also want to reflect on the fact that Speaker Farrell has stepped down. I asked him to stay on, but he felt it was time for him to move on. I am very grateful to him, as I am sure all hon. Members who were in the last Parliament will be, for the diligent and gentle manner in which he discharged his role. He was always very helpful to all Members. Even when he was ruling against any of us, he was kind and gentle as he admonished us, but in doing so, he made some seminal rulings, which I am sure will be of great assistance to the new Speaker.

Still before moving on to the proposed appointment of a new Speaker, I want to welcome the new Clerk. It was his father who, as Clerk, baptised me as a Member of this House. I have very fond memories of Mr Reyes. I know that he has big shoes to fill in that respect – and no less in taking over from Mr Farrell, who was Clerk before becoming Speaker – and I know that he will discharge his function as Clerk with diligence and kindness to all of us in this place. He was my first Sir Humphrey at No. 6, and I remember those days fondly as he prepared me for Chief Minister’s Questions in this place.

Mr Presiding Member, it was Dominique Searle who coined the word ‘barristocracy’, although others might care to claim it. It was in an editorial in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* that he referred to those who were trained as barristers – not all lawyers are trained as barristers, but those who are trained as barristers – as being part of the baristocracy when they entered this place, and not just to be Members of the Parliament directly elected by our people, I venture to say, because the baristocracy has presided over the proceedings of this place also. We have had Sir Alfred Vasquez, who was a lawyer; John Alcantara, who was a lawyer as well as being a judge; Haresh Budhrani; and in the motion standing in my name, it is Karen Ramagge whom I now propose should become the Speaker of this place – the second judge to do so, and the fourth lawyer to do so, if the motion is supported by all Members, as I am sure it will be.

Mrs Ramagge has a distinguished record on the Bench that I do not need to remind Members of – or, indeed, the community – because, by being on the Bench, she has gone beyond the normal reach of the legal profession and has been seen by the whole of the community to have the gravitas and ability to hold the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, let alone the respect of a place like this Parliament. No one can know that better than the man who has just administered our oaths and sits to your right, Mr Presiding Member: the Chief Justice, who has had the benefit of having Mrs Ramagge as one of the Justices that sit alongside him on the Bench.

For Mrs Ramagge, breaking records and smashing the glass ceiling seem to have become something of a habit: the first woman notary public in Gibraltar, the first woman stipendiary in Gibraltar, and the first woman Supreme Court judge. It is an extraordinary record, to which it is right, in my view, to now add – with, I hope, the support of the whole House – the first woman Speaker in the history of Gibraltar’s parliamentary democracy.

The important thing in the context of appointing a Speaker is that it must be a person who holds the respect of both the House and the wider community. I have absolutely no doubt that Karen Ramagge will do that and would not tolerate a phone going off in the Gallery or in any Member’s pocket, as is often the case. There should be no embarrassment, because it happens often – not least, Mr Presiding Member, to you; you are, if anything, notorious for that on this side of the House. I have absolutely no doubt that Karen Ramagge will hold the respect of this place as she has held the respect of the Supreme Court.

Before moving the motion that stands in my name and to which I speak now, I consulted with the Leader of the Opposition and can report that there was immediate agreement for the proposal.

When you are a judge, you work according to some basic principles. One of them, in Latin, is *audi alteram partem*, which means you must listen to all sides. That is an important rule in this place, but it is governed by different rules as to when you listen to parties and which parties must be listened to. In my view, those rules have to be as respected as they need to be updated. I am sure that we will be able to work together across the floor of the House to update the rules, where

necessary, and that we will have an ally in our new Speaker, if she is appointed after the vote today, in the work that we may have to do in updating those rules. A fresh pair of eyes and a new perspective from somebody of the calibre of Karen Ramagge will, no doubt, be helpful in looking at our rules. In my view, and in the view of the Government, Karen Ramagge has the right level of ability and the right bearing for the job of Speaker of this Parliament, with the right mix of maturity and energy to lead the moderation of debate in a way that would enjoy the respect not just of Members of this House but also the wider community, to call and hold us to account when necessary. I call on all Members to support this appointment. I call, in particular, on all Members to respect the Speaker and her rulings when they come, whether they are against one or in favour of one; never to speak over the Speaker; to sit when the Speaker is addressing the Chamber or any Member; and, when the time comes, if the Speaker is addressing any of us, to sit not in meek submission but in respectful silence. We have to play by the rules in this place and we have to play by the rules of this place, because we have to show everybody beyond this place that the place that sets the rules for everyone else plays by its own rules and adheres to its own procedures.

Mr Presiding Member, I am sure that on this motion, on this candidate and on these principles we can all agree. That would be a good start for our Parliament, although, no doubt, it will be a peace that will break for only a short period.

I commend the motion to the House. (*Banging on desks*)

Clerk: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Presiding Member, I have never heard the comparison with you and Mick Jagger: we look forward to the rock concert as soon as possible.

We will wholeheartedly support the appointment of Mrs Justice Ramagge as the next Speaker. She has had a distinguished career at the Bar and then on the Bench, earning numerous plaudits for her judicial style and ability. This will be, as the Chief Minister has indicated, a new world for her, where she is not required to sit in judgement, a world with different rules and practices, often less tempered and more boisterous than the hallowed interiors of a courtroom, but we are sure she will keep the peace in those moments and give the appropriate guidance to Members to help the House navigate through its work, because, as the Chief Minister, rightly, said in his last remark, the peace will be broken fairly soon.

Mrs Justice Ramagge was Gibraltar's first woman judge and now will be Gibraltar's first woman Speaker. She continues to break through glass ceilings which we, on this side, absolutely welcome. The number of women parliamentarians has grown at a slow pace around the world – it is a matter of regret – and the number of women presiding over parliaments at an even slower rate. The Austrian parliament was the only one to have a woman Speaker before the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1997, only 42 countries had a woman preside over a national parliament at least once. The overwhelming majority of those countries were located in Europe or in the Americas. Here, in Gibraltar, Dorothy Ellicott was the first female member of the City Council in the late 1940s, originally with the AACR and then an independent Member of the Legislative Council in 1959. After leaving politics she was appointed a Justice of the Peace in the early 1970s. In fact, she did the parliamentary and judicial functions in reverse to Mrs Justice Ramagge. The Inter-Parliamentary Union notes that the under-representation of women is changing in the 21st century, although not fast enough. Between 2005 and 2015, the percentage of women in presiding officer posts in parliaments nearly doubled, going from 8% to 15%. On 1st November 2016, the number of women Speakers reached 53, which was a record at the time, making up 19% of the 277 top leadership posts in 193 national parliaments around the world. However, it did fall back, last year, to just 41 women Speakers. On this side of the House it is, we believe, high time that one of Gibraltar's distinguished women should take the Speaker's Chair, and so we welcome and fully endorse her appointment.

We would also like to take the opportunity in the debate on this motion, as the Chief Minister has indicated, to acknowledge the role and work of the outgoing Speaker, Melvyn Farrell, and

125 thank him for his work over the last four years. Mr Farrell served this Parliament in two distinct and distinguished roles over the years, first as Clerk and then returning as Speaker. That followed a long and distinguished career in the Civil Service itself. Our thanks to him for his public service and we all, on this side of the House, wish him well as he retires from that role. *(Banging on desks)*

130 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I now put the question, which is that Mrs Justice Karen Ramagge be appointed as Speaker of the Parliament. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed unanimously. *(Banging on desks)*

On the appointment of Madam Speaker, the Presiding Member took his place on the Government benches.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO MADAM SPEAKER

The Chief Justice administered the Oath of Allegiance to Mrs Justice Karen Ramagge.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Chief Justice, I remind myself that the last time I was before this Hon. House, I was Acting Chief Justice, robed, representing the rule of law and administering the Oath to the hon. Members in the new Parliament of 2015. I must say that I am slightly
135 disconcerted today at finding myself sitting next to the Chief Justice on a plinth when he is robed and I am not, and when I find myself holding the centre Chair. However, life has a strange way of putting us on the path that we are supposed to walk, and walk I will.

The Representation of the People Act, passed in the United Kingdom in February 1918, gave
140 women the right to vote, provided they were over 30 and either they or their husbands met a property qualification. That was followed in November of the same year by the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act, which allowed women to be elected to Parliament. Thereafter, in 1919, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act provided that a person should not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function or from holding any civil or judicial office
145 or post. Trails have been blazed since then. It is my humble opinion that my appointment today as the first female Speaker of this Hon. House blazes another.

Not very many of us women have the opportunity to be pioneers. Quite apart from the obvious, that we should have the ability to do so, we need also to have the opportunity, and when that opportunity presents itself we need to draw on the momentum and the courage to grab it with
150 both hands. I thank the Hon. the Chief Minister for moving the motion that I be appointed Speaker, thereby creating an opportunity out of a possibility. I thank the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition for supporting the motion, thereby contributing to the possibility becoming a reality. Indeed, I thank all hon. Members on all sides of the House for their endorsement.

It is, in my view, of positive value that I am not the only new kid on the block. This is a
155 Parliament made up of a significant number of 'freshers', if I may use a university term, and I am sure that will lay the ground for an invigorated forum.

When I was a young barrister, Judge Alcantara sat on the Supreme Court Bench and, although I felt his displeasure if my arguments were weak, there was, from the start, an underlying and enduring friendly and animated rapport between us. Judge Alcantara was, himself, a trailblazer,
160 being the first Gibraltarian puisne judge, or, more precisely, additional judge, as the position then was. It is an honour for me to follow his footsteps from Supreme Court to Speaker, and I send him my warm wishes.

For near on 14 years, I have been a judge of the Supreme Court, and for some three years before that I was Coroner and Stipendiary Magistrate. My life in that time has been one of public
165 service, and it is a privilege to be given the chance to remain within the realms of public service. I hope that my experience in the judiciary will benefit my service to the legislature.

170 The importance of Parliament in debating and enacting laws which provide for a progressive,
functioning and cohesive society cannot be underestimated, and coming from a legal background,
essentially implementing, although sometimes also making laws, it is with great enthusiasm that
I take the step away from a courtroom setting and plunge into the parliamentary arena. I use the
word 'arena' purposefully. Parliament should, rightly, be a place of debate, and there is no reason
why that debate should not be robust; it would make for a very grey political world if proceedings
were robotic. That said, any debate or exchange, however brief, long or lively, must be conducted
within the confines of the rules and traditions which protect both the integrity of democratic
175 accountability and the independence of Parliament as a separate institution from Government. I
place upon all of you the reasonable expectation that you will discharge your duties with the
honour and respect that behoves your privileged positions. In the event, however, that focus fails,
you may rely upon a prompt intervention from the Chair. Speaker Canepa said, in his address to
this Hon. House in 2012, that the Speaker has an almost sacred duty to the institution of
180 Parliament. That, so neatly and powerfully, encapsulates the extent of the Speaker's duty and the
importance of its honourable and impartial discharge. I shall endeavour to bring to this position
all the energy, dispassion, neutrality and objectivity which I gave to my previous position. The
greatest accolade I have been given as a judge is that I was fair. It is also the greatest accolade
which I will strive to earn as Speaker.

185 My thanks, on behalf of this hon. institution, go to Melvyn Farrell, who served this House, first
as Clerk and latterly as Speaker. We all owe him a debt of gratitude. He and I have known each
other for some considerable time, and I am fortunate to count him amongst my friends. Returning
from his travels, we have connected briefly, but I have not yet had the opportunity to seek his
advice on how best to discharge my duties. However, when we do meet in the coming days, I have
190 no doubt that his advice and the benefit of his considerable experience will make the task ahead
of me somewhat easier.

I would like to welcome Mr John Reyes as Clerk to this Hon. House. As the Chief Minister has
said, his father, Dennis Reyes, served this Hon. House as Clerk from 1996 to 2000, and I know that
following in his father's footsteps to the position of Clerk is something which gives him great pride,
195 and rightly so. I empathise with the sentiment: my own father would have been delighted with
this new turn in my professional life. In the short time I have known the learned Clerk, his wise
counsel and support have already proved invaluable, and I look forward to working with him.

I have recently met the back office staff. Ms Cathy Bishop is, like me, new to Parliament, so we
can learn the ropes together. Mr Kevin Balban and Mr Danny Garcia have, between them, the
200 considerable wealth of 34 years of experience in serving Parliament behind the Speaker's Chair.
That is a great asset for us all. Their guidance, which I have already claimed and which they are
generously willing to give, will be of immeasurable benefit.

205 Finally, I ask for the indulgence of this Hon. House as we move forward into this new term. This
setting where I am called upon to be a judge of sorts, without having the power to deprive liberty
for infractions, is new to me, and until I find my feet and become familiar with practice and
procedure, I will be on a learning curve. I call upon all of you for your guidance and your
understanding. I have no doubt that you will be effective teachers, but be advised, I like to think
that I can be a fast learner. I look forward to working with you for the benefit of a functional, fair
and forward-thinking Parliament. *(Banging on desks)*

**ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OF OFFICE
OF THE MINISTER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR JUSTICE**

*The Speaker administered the Oath of Office of the Minister with responsibility for Justice to
the Hon. N Feetham.*

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR
VICE ADMIRAL SIR DAVID STEEL KBE, DL**

210 **His Excellency the Governor:** Madam Speaker, Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition, hon. Members of Parliament, it is a privilege for me to be here, today, to open this House of Parliament in Gibraltar following the General Election of 12th October this year, 2023.

215 Allow me, first, to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your appointment. You bring to the role exceptional professional qualities that you have demonstrated consistently as a member of the Bar, as Stipendiary Magistrate and Coroner, and over nearly 14 years as a Supreme Court judge. You also bring, if I may, levels of humanity and empathy that I know will be of immense value as you oversee and manage the complex work of this House and look to guide parliamentarians in all their endeavours.

220 In paying you my respects, Madam Speaker, perhaps you will also allow me to recognise the manner in which your predecessor executed his responsibilities as Speaker, with impeccable dignity and integrity, and the gracious manner in which he administered the parliamentary process. I beg the House's indulgence in allowing me to extend to him gratitude and good wishes.

225 In looking around this House, I see many people who are well acquainted with and experienced in the ways of Parliament, not least the Father of the House, Sir Joe Bossano, who has served 51½ years as an elected representative of the people of Gibraltar, a unique and powerful example of extraordinary public service. I also see a number of newly elected Members on both sides of the House. To you, I offer my warmest congratulations on your election to this Parliament, and I wish you all possible success in the term ahead. As I said recently, democracy is government by the people, and the people of Gibraltar have elected their representatives to keep them safe and to care for their well-being politically, economically and socially. I also claimed there can be no nobler calling than to represent one's own and ensuring their well-being, delivering their wishes and protecting their futures and those of their children and their children's children. You have assumed great responsibility, but I know that you will do so with the good wishes and the confidence of the entire population of Gibraltar.

235 I consider it to be my personal good fortune to have been here in Gibraltar for a General Election, as it is an event not guaranteed during every Governor's term of office. It has been a fascinating, if somewhat exhausting, experience. I have been impressed by the demonstration of democracy in all its forms in the debates, in the manifestos, in the media and press reporting, and the very high level of public engagement. On the day of the election, I visited many of the polling stations and was present at the verification and witnessed at first hand the counting of the votes. The sense of responsibility and commitment of all those involved and the meticulous attention to detail at every stage contributed to what was an unimpeachable process embracing modern technology but overseen at every stage by exemplary levels of personal diligence. I pay tribute to the Returning Officer and every member of his team and that of the wider Civil Service, which delivered excellence in every aspect of the organisation and conduct of this election. Equally impressive was the palpable sense of pride and determination of the people of Gibraltar to play an active part in their democracy and to exercise their right to vote.

240 I pay tribute to all the candidates, but especially to those in this House today as Members of the Government or of the Opposition. Gibraltar's democracy is greatly enriched by both the fact and the manner of your participation in the electoral process. Your personal endeavour and that of your families and friends, and mutual respect shown by leaders and candidates and supporters alike, particularly when the results were announced, is to be applauded. Passionate debate can so easily challenge sensitivity, but dignity and generosity are fundamental elements of the democratic process, qualities which ultimately epitomised much of what is very good about Gibraltar. Please allow me also to recognise those who stood for election but were not elected to serve. That they do not find themselves in this House does not detract from the huge part that they have played in the democratic process. Furthermore, I pay tribute to those retiring Members of this House who have contributed so much over varying lengths of time to representing the

interests of the people of this wonderful community. Their contribution is a matter of enduring legacy and part of the history of Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar is committed to an extensive, continued programme of reform and progress for Gibraltar. The areas on which the King's Government will work are broadly divided into four areas. These relate to Gibraltar's position in the world, the economy of Gibraltar, its society and quality of life, and matters of health, care and justice.

In relation to Gibraltar's position in the world, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will concentrate resources in the delivery of a safe and secure treaty between the United Kingdom and the European Union on Gibraltar. In doing so, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will continue to work in partnership with His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom in advancing the cause of the recognition by international fora of the right of the people of Gibraltar to determine their political future and the political future of Gibraltar for themselves. This will involve continuing to present Gibraltar's case at the United Nations and working throughout the Commonwealth network, and beyond, to evangelise the cause of the rights of the people of Gibraltar at every opportunity. Additionally, a Ministry has been created and portfolio responsibility assigned for the development and enhancement of Gibraltar's business and institutional relationship with the Kingdom of Morocco, which will seek to further entrench the links of friendship, culture and business with Gibraltar's closest southerly neighbour.

In the further development of Gibraltar's economy, His Majesty's Government will continue to develop apprenticeship schemes and training, to ensure that young people are properly prepared to deliver the skills required by employers and to ensure continued full employment.

In financial services and gaming, His Majesty's Government will continue to ensure that Gibraltar is renowned for the establishment of and adherence to the highest regulatory standards. This will include ongoing work with the United Kingdom to ensure that Gibraltar will continue to enjoy privileged access to the United Kingdom market and services, in particular financial services, which is as much a benefit to the United Kingdom's consumers as it is to Gibraltar's economic operators. The strong relationship between His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar and His Majesty's Treasury in London will be nurtured and enhanced, and, in this regard, work will continue on de-listing Gibraltar from the Financial Action Task Force Grey List and ensuring that the jurisdiction remains off that list in the future.

Work will also continue to further develop the offer that Gibraltar makes to its visitors, including investment in cruise line servicing infrastructure, which will not just be limited to the cruise terminal but will also include refurbishment and enhancement of the retail hub in the city centre.

The Port will also benefit from continued investment, as His Majesty's Government seeks to further exploit the economic opportunities presented by the port services in Gibraltar, not least the opportunity for liquid natural gas bunkering to develop as fuel preferences change.

Consultation will occur frequently with unions and private sector employer organisations in all areas, beyond simply matters of industrial relations, as His Majesty's Government seeks to deliver economic opportunities for all sectors and for the benefit of citizens and, in particular, workers in the economy. Additionally, in the service of the economy and the private sector generally, reform will also come, in consultation with relevant unions, to the public sector and the Civil Service and to the administration generally, to deliver greater transparency and accountability to citizens and businesses in Gibraltar.

To further enhance and improve the quality of life of citizens in Gibraltar, His Majesty's Government will continue to invest in the protection of the environment, including in the delivery of a sewage treatment plant. Work will continue in the further improvement of air quality in Gibraltar, as well as in the addition of further green areas and the management of Gibraltar's coastal and fishing resources.

Investment will continue in education more widely, with a new College of Further Education, a new Jewish School and a full refurbishment of St Joseph's Upper and Lower Schools. St Martin's

School at the Wessex Campus will also benefit from further investment, as the number of children who require its services has grown and continues to grow. The maintenance programme for all the new schools will be enhanced to ensure that the fabric of the new school buildings delivered in the past 10 years is fully and properly maintained.

315 Investment will also be made in the delivery of new housing. This will include housing for sale and for rental in various categories, with a stated aim of ensuring that everyone on the housing waiting list at the time of the General Election will have been offered a home in the lifetime of this Parliament.

320 Supported employment will continue to be a priority for His Majesty's Government, as well as equality generally. Gibraltar will remain a place where all are recognised as different but equal.

Investment will also continue in the lifetime of this Parliament in the infrastructure of sport, wellness and healthy living to deliver a preventative approach to health care. In the policy area of health itself, work will be taken forward to repatriate patient services to Gibraltar and deliver value for money to taxpayers in the care provided by the Health Authority. Mental health services will be regarded by His Majesty's Government as no different to other matters related to physical health. The provision of healthcare will continue to be depoliticised, with clinical decisions being made by clinicians, and politicians holding the Authority to account on all aspects of its operations. Investment in elderly care generally and in dementia care specifically will continue, and His Majesty's Government will invest, in particular, in additional facilities for the Jewish Home and for specific modalities of care for the elderly of other religious denominations in Gibraltar. Investment will also be made in better provision for ambulance staff and additional vehicles, as well as in new police and fire headquarters.

325 All of these and many other policies are now the policy priorities of His Majesty's Government for the lifetime of this Parliament and will, no doubt, form part of the many debates and deliberations of this Parliament in the weeks and months to come in this, the heart of Gibraltar's thriving democracy.

335 Madam Speaker, all my predecessors who addressed Parliament at this ceremony in the past highlighted that they were doing so at times of great uncertainty in the world. Sadly, I fear that my voice will simply echo theirs, but for different reasons. Having emerged from the darkness of the pandemic, we remain shocked that war is raging on the border of Europe, in Ukraine. We have been similarly shocked by the awfulness of the war now unfolding before our eyes in the Middle East, and we pray for a swift resolution to that conflict. In Africa, old orders are being upturned and the economic balance of power seems to be in flux, not only between east and west, but also north and south. Across the globe, financial systems are under strain as each nation manages the difficulties of inflation, and people everywhere grapple with the cost of living. The development of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, and the necessity to address climate change are just two further areas needing our attention at a time when we are seriously questioning our own human capacity to manage the speed of change. Closer to home, the future of the Eurozone and Britain's relationship with it will remain in the spotlight, not least as we, here in Gibraltar, in partnership with the United Kingdom, work to secure a treaty with the European Union that will ensure the future prosperity of Gibraltar and the surrounding area.

340 Despite all these hurdles, there remains a wonderful bond between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom, which transcends challenge and uncertainty: one people separated only by geography. After nearly three and a half years here, I am left humbled by the loyalty and devotion that the people of Gibraltar offer to His Majesty the King and his Royal Family, and the confidence that they have in the United Kingdom to support Gibraltar when Gibraltar, on rare occasions, seeks such support. I am inspired that so many who come to settle here, from countries near and far, seek to become British Gibraltarian citizens. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that at the opening of this session of Parliament, and in order to underpin the work of this new Government and this House, I affirm, once again, the United Kingdom's commitment to Gibraltar. I trust that the practical, political and diplomatic commitment that the United Kingdom has extended to Gibraltar during the pandemic and throughout the negotiations to secure a treaty with the

European Union for Gibraltar, in the defence commitment to Gibraltar and in the repeated assurance by very high-ranking politicians of all parties in the United Kingdom, leave you in no doubt whatsoever of such commitment.

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Madam Speaker, as I will be drawn away from Gibraltar in the early spring of next year, may I use this opportunity to express publicly to all parliamentarians on both sides of the House, past and present, my heartfelt gratitude for the kindness and support provided to me over the last three and a half years. The Governor sometimes has to walk a difficult constitutional, political and legal line. I have been here during very challenging times, but they have been times throughout which each and every Member of this House, past and present, has lent me his or her total support, advice and counsel, and understanding when that has been needed. I am indebted to one and all, as I am to everyone in Gibraltar, for the immense kindness and friendship extended to me.

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In these turbulent times, the people of Gibraltar will look to their Parliament to represent their interests and to ensure and secure a prosperous future for their Gibraltar. I know that all in this House will work together across the political divide to ensure that this challenge is met. I wish Members of this House, in Government and in Opposition, all success in tackling their work and in fulfilling the responsibility which the people of Gibraltar have bestowed upon them.

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Madam Speaker, I have great pleasure in declaring this session of the House of Parliament open. *(Banging on desks)*

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Clerk: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Your Excellency, it is more than a privilege to welcome you back to this House for only your second address to us in the time that you have held the office of Governor; the first was on your arrival. The address you have just delivered is one on which we have worked collaboratively and collegiately, so that it is, in effect, the second King's Speech delivered in a British Parliament this week: one was delivered by the King himself at Westminster, the other is delivered by his representative here.

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I rise to welcome you, and to address the House as its leader and our nation as its Chief Minister for a fourth consecutive time, with a sense of the deepest humility. I am, of course, equally deeply honoured by the fact that only two other individuals have had such an honour before in the history of our nation's British democracy. As a cursory perusal of my last address on the Ceremonial Opening in 2019 will reveal, this is not a speech I ever wished or expected to deliver. The fact is that the conspiracy of circumstance sometimes delivers unexpected humbling destinies to each of us, however ostensibly successful they may, at first blush, appear.

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My party and our Liberal colleagues are all equally humbled by the trust and confidence of our people in having elected us once again to hold the highest political offices in this great land of ours. The socialist party that I lead, with its proud insignia of the GSLP, has now been returned to government on six occasions. We have formed the official Opposition on an additional five occasions. Of the parties contesting the General Election, that makes us undoubtedly, with our Liberal colleagues, the natural party of government in Gibraltar. With Sir Joe Bossano in our ranks, we also enjoy the great benefit of having, sitting amongst us, the most experienced parliamentarian in the Commonwealth. With just shy of 50% of all votes cast, we have been returned to office, once again, with a larger share of the vote than any other party after a fourth General Election win. In 2007, our opponents then formed government with 49.3% of the vote. We have achieved 49.9% of the vote now, and that says something.

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As I stand here now, for what will, if this Parliament runs its course, undoubtedly be my last address at a Ceremonial Opening as Chief Minister and Leader of the House after a General Election, it is incumbent on me to start with some element of reflection. I stood here, at this crease, just shy of 12 years ago, ready to lead a very different Gibraltar: a Gibraltar that was a part of the European Union with the United Kingdom, a Gibraltar very often at logger heads with the United Kingdom, and a Gibraltar which was failing to progress socially as the rest of Europe and

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415 the developed world had progressed. All that has changed. We have, as we all know, unfortunately
left the European Union with the United Kingdom, despite the sterling efforts of the now Minister
for Health when she led the 'Stronger In' campaign in 2016. We have turned a fractious
relationship with the United Kingdom into a real and genuine partnership; a partnership moulded
420 from complementing those and not undermining them. That enables us to be an undoubted net
asset to the United Kingdom, and it allows for our continuing and strengthened relationship with
the UK to be even more of a net asset, also for us, than ever before.

This is a Gibraltar which is not an embarrassment for the United Kingdom at any level, whether
regulatory, economic or social. This is a Gibraltar that punches above its weight, and not just
425 because of its obvious, continuing and indisplaceable geostrategic location: a Gibraltar that
punches above its weight because of how we do what we do, a Gibraltar that demonstrates that
it punches above its weight because of what we represent – a socially free and open society when
others are not, an economic success story despite headwinds that would have blown many others
off course, and a regulatory example in all areas from gaming to financial services, always acutely
430 aware that we have to retain pole position in all those respects in every iteration of the
development and progress that we will deliver in the lifetime of this Parliament.

On social issues, in the time we have been in office we have also, already, reduced the housing
waiting list greatly, although not as much as we wanted. We will, shortly, have delivered more
affordable and rental housing combined than any government in our history. COVID and Brexit
435 got in the way of our timetable for some developments, but we will get even that back on track.
We have understood that the health services are still not where they need to be post COVID, but
we have transformed primary care and children's primary care, with more to do in the area of the
provision of health services.

In the area of the environment, the improvements in air quality and in the quantitative steps
440 forward in the provision of green areas and cycle lanes are more than obvious. Indeed, it would
require a malicious deprecation of the magnificent work of John Cortes to suggest that Gibraltar
is anything other than a leader in respect for, and improvement of, the environment in which we
live, but of course, this has to be judged, if it is to be judged objectively and fairly, in the context
of our constraints as a 2.5 square mile peninsula that has to operate as an island economy.

In the provision of sports facilities, the Gibraltar of today is more than a million miles from the
Gibraltar of 2011. The Island Games of 2019 propelled us forward in those areas as we invested
huge amounts of taxpayers' money in the excellent sports facilities we have today at Europa and
Lathbury, at the pistol shooting range, the rifle shooting range, the clay pigeon shooting range and
the Lathbury pool. We were criticised harshly – talking about shooting – by some opponents for
450 not delivering quickly enough on the completion of those facilities, and yet we were criticised by
the same opponents for spending too much on those same facilities. Spend less and deliver better
and more quickly – now, that is a mantra laced with undeliverable nonsense, if ever there was
one.

Of course, such obvious hypocrisy has never stopped our critics from seeking to deploy obvious
455 contradictions to the service of their partisan interests above the interests of our nation and our
people as a whole. And yet, under our administration, Your Excellency has seen, in your time here
alone, the opening of three new schools. Each of these also features new sporting facilities for
students as well as for the community as a whole, adding even further to the sporting facilities
now available in Gibraltar. If that increase and surfeit of new sporting facilities alone were
460 something to call a legacy, it would be more than a magnificent legacy; yet, in education, these
three new schools represent only the tip of the iceberg of what we have delivered in terms of
change in the past 12 years. A total of 10 new schools have already been provided, a truly
transformational period in government not equalled in the field of education and in the field of
social progress by any government in the history of our democracy.

465 In education, not just magnificent new buildings for our brilliant teachers to impart knowledge
in, also transformative work done in the infrastructure of the education system itself: starting

school a year younger for all our children; remunerating our teachers better, to more accurately reflect the respect we must have for the teaching profession; but, perhaps most importantly, at last, bringing to Gibraltar co-education in secondary schools, and a University of Gibraltar – a long held dream which became a reality on our watch – as well as the outstanding Gibraltar International Bank, which is providing much needed capacity to the retail banking sector in Gibraltar as well as going beyond our shores and providing services in other Overseas Territories, too.

We are right to be proud of so many of our achievements in the past nearly 12 years in office. So much has been done, Your Excellency, that even our most scathing opponents, who have fought us tooth and nail in respect of many of the changes that we have delivered, now refer to these Socialist Liberal achievements, which they often voted against in this place, as progress that would be safe with them. We have changed so much in 12 years that we have even changed the minds, the opinions and the policies of those who oppose us. We have done so to such an extent that some of our opponents now talk about protecting our legacy as if it were theirs. That is especially significant in the areas of social progress: in civil partnerships and equal marriage; in GHA-assisted IVF that is creating life; in rights on immigration, nationality and residence; and in reproductive rights. In all of those areas, where Gibraltar was seriously failing, we have more than just progressed: we really have transformed. In fact, we appear to have transformed even our opponents, or, at least, so it would seem, based on their usually unreliable statements. Now, even those who voted against all of those progressive measures that we introduced appear to like to pretend that those progressive developments that they rallied against would be safe with them. That is to say our opponents now pretend that, having preached hell and brimstone when those progressive measures were adopted, they will not reverse them, even if they one day have the power to do so, that they will not undo things that they thought were so bad that they passionately argued and voted against them.

Where does that leave the alleged passions and ideology of those who broached such opposition to those measures when we were introducing them? What does it say about our opponents, about the seriousness or credibility of their future opposition to other aspects of what we may do or say going forward? What about their political principles, if any? Precious little, I submit. And what does it say about us? It says that we are ideologically clear in the direction of our travel, it says we have clear objectives for our people, and it shows that we are not progressive under one leader and conservative under another, as, remarkably, appears to be the case in other political groupings. What sort of politics is that? Labour under one leader, Tory under another? We, on this side, are not such an allegedly broad church, because frankly to be so broad is to be an ideological wasteland. We are not a group that comes together just because we are against our opponents. Therefore, for us, it is quite something to have changed the political landscape so much that even our opponents' positions appear to have been napalmed by their own desire to rub out their own previous policy positions. So, in reflective terms, both in terms of actual delivery for our people and in terms of dealing with our political opponents, not a bad innings at the crease these past 12 years, as the people of Gibraltar have judged by returning us to office once again. In reaching their judgement, our people will have looked back to judge us on our record, and they will have looked forward, also, to judge our plans for the coming term.

Your Excellency, at my request, you have kindly highlighted in your address the areas that I consider to be amongst the main policy priorities of my Government. His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has a manifesto that is dense with policies. Ours was not a plan to review or audit, with no plans for the future, with no vision of where our nation is going or should go, with nothing to inspire our people. No, ours was a 152-page policy blueprint for the further, continued development of Gibraltar and its people. Ours is now His Majesty's Government's route map for the lifetime of this Parliament. Given the four years we have, we will deliver each of the commitments contained in that manifesto. Where they are timed, we will deliver on time. Where they are not timed, we will deliver in the lifetime of the Parliament. Already, we are acutely aware that 48 months have already almost become 47 months, at most. Our manifesto at the election is

520 not a wish list, as our opponents have previously described their own manifestoes. Ours is a
commitment to our people to deliver – absent, of course, a global pandemic or a referendum on
525 exiting the world’s most successful common trade and immigration zone; those are the sorts of
things that can blow you a little bit off course. There are some things that even a hyperactive GSLP
Liberal Government cannot mitigate for.

Speaking of hyperactivity, it will not have escaped anyone that the big shoes that Albert Isola
525 left in financial services and gaming are being more than amply filled by Minister Nigel Feetham.
In this regard, his work with HM Treasury in London the week after the election and his work here
with the Financial Services Commission has shown he was more than ready to hit the ground
running.

Hyperactivity in the four weeks since the election has not been limited to the Department of
530 Trade and Industry, however. It will not have escaped notice that Minister Gemma Arias Vasquez
had already been working to be up to speed on potential ministerial responsibilities before the
election. No sooner was she elected, she was ready to take decisions and act, fulfilling our policy,
in Health, of putting the patient front and centre, listening to patients and continuing the process
of the repatriation of services to Gibraltar. Already, we can say that the catheterisation lab will be
535 operational in 2024, though I wince even when I say the words, and the larger Oncology Unit will
be opened Q4 2024 or Q1 2025.

We have already committed to events marketing our Port, to enable us to expand our port and
maritime services, delivering on one of the priorities that you referred to in your address, Your
540 Excellency. Additionally, in this respect, we have committed to a Gibraltar Day in Greece, in
January 2024, and are actively looking for new ways to engage with maritime operators.

Minister Arias Vasquez has already convened a Business Advisory Board and the Main Street
Retailers Association – both of which will meet for the first time next week – as we committed to
do.

545 Additionally, the Government will be starting a consultation with the medical profession on
the adoption in Gibraltar of measures akin to those taken in the United Kingdom and New Zealand
to consider preventing the sale of tobacco products to those born after 2009. Our consultation
will report in May 2024, so that a definitive announcement in this respect can be made in the
Budget for next year. However, we believe that it may be necessary to go further than the UK and
New Zealand. That is why our consultation will also seek the views of the medical profession on
550 whether or not it should also be illegal to ever sell vapes to anyone born after 2009. It seems clear
that vaping is better than smoking, but it seems equally clear that vaping involves its own
pulmonary dangers. The Ministry for Health is, therefore, already considering these issues and will
report to the Cabinet in good time for the next Budget.

Further hyperactivity has been reported in the areas of tourism and training. The ministerial
555 whirlwind that is the Hon. Christian Santos has already landed at the World Travel Market and has
already started work in earnest on apprenticeships and supported employment. The work to
consult on a facelift for Casemates and on the beautification of Chatham has already commenced
in the timescale we had committed to, as well as the go-ahead being given for works to start on
the areas between Coral Road and Landport Tunnel to improve the access point to Casemates.

560 Together with the Hon. Leslie Bruzon, a working committee has already been set up between
the Ministry for Sport and the Ministry for Tourism to develop further the work already done on
events-led tourism. Minister Bruzon has already started recruitment in relevant areas of the GSLA
and has started meeting with unions in the discharge of his responsibilities for industrial relations,
an area he knows well from his trade union background.

565 In Housing, Minister Orfila has ensured that counters have opened, as they have throughout
the public sector, within two weeks of the election, as I committed they would. Houses for lease
and repair are being identified. Housing is also working closely with other agencies in cases of
violence and abuse in the household, so that victims can be protected and alleged perpetrators
removed until relevant court cases are resolved. Work is also ongoing in my office on the location
570 of an additional 2,100 flats, to bring the total that we deliver in the lifetime of this Parliament to

3,000 new homes. These will include affordable, first-time buyer affordable and pensioner affordable homes, as well as pensioner and general rental homes.

575 It is not just the new boys who have hit the ground running. In Education, work has already started, under Minister Cortes, on planning the delivery of the new schools and on strengthening provision for special educational needs. We are also already working on the establishment of a credible mechanism for the delivery of hot school meals to all our children. John Cortes is already working on his new designation as Minister not just for the Environment but also for the Quality of Life and the development of the relationship with Morocco, which you also, kindly, highlighted, Your Excellency.

580 I announce today that the Select Committees on the Environment and on Disabilities will meet between the November and December sessions of the Parliament. That will ensure that we deliver on our commitment to have those two Select Committees start their work before the end of this calendar year. The Parliamentary Reform Committee will also meet on that same timetable, and Your Excellency will be pleased to know that I am asking the Deputy Chief Minister, the Hon. 585 Joseph Garcia, to chair that Committee.

The Hon. Dr Garcia will also be in charge of monitoring manifesto delivery across all Ministries – a good reason for all on this side not to slack! He has already travelled to New York to address the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly and will, next week, be in London at the Joint Ministerial Council of the Overseas Territories.

590 Undoubtedly, however, the greatest level of political activity will have been in one Ministry, and that is in the areas of activity being undertaken by the evergreen Sir Joe Bossano. The work of the Economic Development Ministry was not paused for longer than absolutely necessary during the election period and continues to seek to deliver projects on time in coming months.

595 With the Deputy Chief Minister, I have already continued contact on the negotiations for a safe and secure UK-EU Treaty on Gibraltar, as well as both of us continuing to engage in all areas of our responsibility. It is, as ever, all go with a GSLP Liberal Government.

When Dominique Searle edited the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, in an editorial in 2003 he also coined a phrase to effectively encapsulate the brutal nature of our British political system: he referred to the ‘cold steel’ of election night and its effects. It was that cold steel that denuded us, on this side, 600 of a friend and colleague in this election: Mr Daryanani. The fruit of his work in the lifetime of the last Parliament is now being felt in the increased cruise calls booked for next year and the year after. He will be missed greatly on this side of the House. I know that despite political differences, ties of friendship joined him also to Members opposite who will no doubt also miss him. Also much missed will be our retiring colleagues: Mr Isola, Mr Licudi, Miss Sacramento, Mr Balban and 605 Mr Linares. We were together in Cabinet in the cold days and nights of the winter of 2020 – the COVID winter – and we stared over the precipice together. We worked hard to stave off the dystopian possibilities – which stared straight back at us – if I may say so, with pride and humility in equal measure. Dystopia blinked first. COVID was dealt with, in Gibraltar, in a manner that we can all be proud of, and I thank my retiring colleagues for their help in that respect. On this side 610 of the House, we will obviously also continue to miss Neil Costa, who retired four years ago, and we will never forget Charles Bruzon, who sat alongside us here for far too short a time after our election success in 2011. We will, also, of course, in parliamentary terms, miss all other retiring Members.

615 Dominique Searle’s reference to the cold steel of election night is but a euphemism. The reality is that the result of the election is what Madam Speaker would more usually, in her previous environment, call a judgment. It is the judgment of the people that I referred to earlier in my address, and in that respect we have listened carefully to the aspects of the judgment of the people which required our attention, as well as to what was said by our opponents that may have induced that judgment.

620 For that reason, in coming months we will not fail to point out when our opponents are making baseless allegations against us, because the reality is that mud, however untrue, nuanced or manufactured, sticks. There is only one solution in that situation: to take the tough disinfectant of

truth and use it to wipe off the mud that has been flung and may have stuck. We will ensure that we address any suggestion that we were, somehow, misleading anyone on the fact or quantum of any relevant telecommunications invoice referred to during the General Election campaign. In doing so, we will show that the statements made by us were no more than the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We will ensure that we show that those parts of the election process that were not, in our view, handled with the necessary diligence and rigour from this place, are properly bolstered, if necessary, in legislation. This will relate especially to residence requirements and how those are objectively, properly verified by the electoral authorities, given the failure to do so during the course of this General Election. We will ensure that we demonstrate that it is not to play bargain-basement politics to enter into a commitment to resolve the massive structural problems created for many of our fellow Gibraltarians by a former government's development of affordable homes in the South District. It was a bit rich for our opponents, when the votes have been counted, to say to us – when we were following after them, understanding what they had promised to so many – that we were trying to buy votes. If the General Election in October ended up being an auction, as some on the losing side have suggested, we have the satisfaction of knowing that we were not the first to bid. Forensic reality will be deployed by us throughout this term to demolish the malicious rumour mongering relied on to tarnish hard-won votes and hard-fought-for reputations.

Whilst dealing with that, we will ensure, also, that we are delivering to our people in the traditional areas of housing, health, education and employment. We will work on international matters, but we will not do so whilst forgetting or not prioritising the domestic agenda of our people. That is why each of us on this side of the House has taken on specific responsibility for a different part of our geography in what we are referring to as constituencies, as well as Sir Joe covering senior citizens generally in lieu of a physical area of responsibility. In that respect, Members opposite should feel free to write to us on any matters which they believe we could help with. As Members of Parliament, we interact with each other, not with the civil or public servants in departments. New Members, in particular, should note that, as they should note that we will engage constructively to work with any constituent they put us in touch with who may have an issue we can resolve.

In this place, Members opposite will find us always convivial, supportive and engaging. What we will, nonetheless, be clear about is that this is the heart of our democracy and that we will defend that this is the place for the ultimate test of cerebral fitness, not for a jolly gossip at the taxpayers' expense. This is not a place to come unprepared, it is a place to be ready to deal with the issues. This is not a place for rumour, it is a place for rigour. It should be clear to all new Members, on both sides of the House, that to succeed in this place requires conscientious preparation. This is not a place for the weak of mind, the weak of spirit or those with a weak work ethic. We are elected to deliver the best possible government and alternative government to our people.

We, on this side, are elected to do. They, on that side, Your Excellency, are elected to challenge our doing and to hold us to account, but that challenge must come within the rules as they are, as they have been and as we may all agree that they should develop into being. This is not the place to bring the latest tittle-tattle one has heard in town without any serious checking of the facts: talk about that in a coffee shop, or in your law firms, but not here. This is not the place to come unprepared and think that one will not be pulled up on the issue in debate: do that at the dinner table, but not here. This is not the place try to make up new ways of getting up to say something when the rules do not allow it: do that in the barrack room or in the sixth-form debating societies, but not here. The consequences of a Parliament being allowed to become a place of mediocrity are too serious to countenance. We will uphold the highest standards on this side of the House, and I call on all Members to be up to that standard, on both sides. That applies as much to the substance of debate as to its form, and yet, despite that, Members opposite will always find us convivial and collegiate. Many of us have been in opposition and we deeply respect the work that a loyal opposition must do. Many of us are legally trained and we value the manner of the

675 adversarial system and do not mind the bruises that we may sometimes inflict on each other in
defending our respective clients' interests – although, in this place, where we have recently
debated issues related to conflicts of interest, we all, ironically, have the same client: the people
of Gibraltar. They are the masters here. We are their Government of the people and by the people,
and I urge all Members always to bear that in mind, in particular, when tempers fray, because, in
680 the end, we are all here, propelled into the core of our democracy, to do our best for our nation.
We can do so without insults and with a keen focus on the logic of our opponents' arguments. We
do not have to stray into unkind personal allusions, and that keen focus to which I refer should
never blind us to when our opponents may be right. Nothing in our ego or in our partisan interests
should ever stop us from agreeing with each other if the best interest of Gibraltar should so
685 require. No doubt, we will be able to agree on much across the floor of the House. I believe, for
example, that we will be able to agree, in particular, on constitutional reform, which we will have
to address with alacrity once we have tamed the issues that remain outstanding in the treaty
negotiations. In fact, the party names of all three parties represented in the election that we have
just been through and who have representatives in this place share on common name: Gibraltar.
690 That should be the guiding principle: Gibraltar, first and always.

Your Excellency, there has not been a day in the past 12 years that has not been taxing or
tough, yet there has not been a moment when I have not considered it the greatest honour of my
life to be the leader of the Gibraltarians. This is not, yet, my valedictory address, but it is close. It
is, of course, closer than ever before. In these 12 years, I have gained much – not least the 35 kilos
695 I have, since, also lost – but it is also true that I have lost much, too. In the balance of life, holding
the office of Chief Minister represents such an honour that it is right that personal sacrifice and
loss must be balanced and nuanced against the privilege of service. The gains have been greater
than the sum of the losses. For that, I thank all those who have been with me along the way, and
especially those who have stuck with me through thick, thin and thinner still. Not least of these
700 are my great team at No. 6, with whom I now have the pleasure to continue working – they are
the engine at the heart of Gibraltar's administration; when things go right, it is usually down to
their diligence and commitment – and my great personal protection team, who have been allies
and friends, in the past year more than ever before. I extend my personal gratitude to you for your
support and friendship. Your Excellency, I extend to you, also, my gratitude for your support and
705 friendship in your time here so far. We have only a few months left to have our first row: we had
better get on with it!

Your Excellency, in what is left of your time here, or after, the lifetime of this Parliament will
undoubtedly throw up its fair share of surprises. It will bowl us googlies, as every period does, for
all governments, everywhere. I do hope we have done 'Pandemic Parliament' and we are not
710 going to have to go back to that again, but I am clear in knowing that this will also be a time when
we are presented with opportunities to seize and choices to make. We must make those choices
and seize those opportunities looking forward. Life is not about looking back, it is about looking
forward. The world does not look back, it always spins forward. Nostalgia will be with us forever,
but the chance to leap forward may never come again, so with a brave heart, coupled with the
715 twin allies of cool analysis and steely determination, we are ready to finish the negotiation of a
safe and secure treaty between the UK and the EU. Our essential pre-requisite, of course, is that
such a treaty must *not* involve any cession of sovereignty, jurisdiction or control. Given that has
been the position that has repeatedly been put to us, there is every reason to remain optimistic
about a positive conclusion being deliverable once a government is invested in Spain. That appears
720 to be about to be resolved, and we believe it would be right to move forward to resolve all
outstanding aspects of the negotiation as soon as possible after that investiture.

Your Excellency, in concluding now, it would be remiss of me not to remind all those here in
the Chamber today, and beyond, of the wisdom of the words of His Holiness Pope Francis to both
of us, yesterday, in Rome. His Holiness remarked upon your explanation of the respect that
725 characterises and exists between people of all faiths in Gibraltar. His Holiness reflected on what a
treasure Gibraltar is, a model of religious and multicultural respect, a treasure to conserve and

730 preserve – in the words of His Holiness Pope Francis. Would that more of the world were like that, and would that in our deliberations in coming weeks, months and years in the lifetime of this Parliament, each of us will show each other, in this place, the mutual respect that our citizens have traditionally shown each other in this treasure that we call home. Gibraltar, first and always.

Your Excellency, I commend the opening of this Parliament to all hon. Members and look forward to our work now starting in earnest.

Clerk: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Your Excellency, I also want to welcome you to this House in your constitutional role as representative of His Majesty in Gibraltar. We welcome you to this Parliament and we thank you for opening the Parliament after the General Election.

740 On behalf of His Majesty's Opposition, I also want to welcome Madam Speaker to the House and to her new role, which, as I said in the debate on the motion, we are sure she will discharge with the distinction that her previous duties have indicated.

In finishing the welcoming remarks, we also welcome the new Clerk, who follows his distinguished father in that role, which we are sure he will fulfil excellently.

745 Madam Speaker joins us at a time when we have the highest number of women parliamentarians in our history. Even so, there is still a long way to go before we embrace real equality, not least by adopting working practices and creating facilities that encourage more of our citizens to seek to participate in the parliamentary process and aspire to become Members. This is as much up to this House and political parties as it is for people out there to offer themselves for candidature. We need to encourage participation and create the right climate to do so. It will improve our decision-making to have greater diversity in our Parliament. The UN has warned that at the current rate of representation of women parliamentarians, global gender parity in national parliaments may not be achieved until 2063. We cannot wait that long, and the issue of improving that prospect for Gibraltar is ripe for consideration by a Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform.

750 There are plenty of new faces in the Chamber – nine Members, 10 with Madam Speaker, 11 with the Clerk. That is a good thing for the regeneration of politics and for the injection of freshness into the political debate. On behalf of Members on this side, I wish all new parliamentarians the best of luck in their endeavours, on both sides of the House.

760 It is of note, however, that we have seen a number of political departures of Members who have made significant contributions to politics, and I want to acknowledge the work of those who, during the last few years, have worked for Gibraltar in either a ministerial or opposition capacity. The House will miss their contributions and it reignites the debate on whether some of those could not have continued to make their contributions to a better general debate in Gibraltar, in a larger Parliament, from the backbenches. From our own perspective, my special thanks to Elliott Phillips and Danny Feetham, who have both, in their own ways, made an enormous contribution to the GSD over the last few years: Elliott as a close, loyal friend, as well as a political colleague; Danny, as a former leader of the party and Leader of the Opposition, was tremendously helpful and supportive to me during the last Parliament.

770 Four years ago, when this House met for the Ceremonial Opening, we could not have envisaged that Gibraltar and, indeed, the world would be plunged into a global pandemic that affected how we lived our lives, subjected citizens to restrictions and affected our economy profoundly. Despite our deep differences with the Government on so many issues, I am glad we were able to work together for Gibraltar during those severe times. I express the hope that we do not have any new, dramatic or unforeseen challenge that needs to be dealt with in the next four years, but if one does emerge, the Government knows that when the crunch comes, we can be relied on to work together to see the Gibraltar we love through any crisis.

775 Like four years ago, we still have the post-Brexit deal to land. We were told before and during the campaign that the Government was close to reaching an agreement and could do so once

780 there is clarity on the investiture of a new Spanish government. That may now be clearer given recent developments, not least today. We will see how the possibility of securing that safe and beneficial agreement that we all want develops in coming weeks and months, and, if one does emerge, we will then be able to analyse it in this House, to see whether it does meet that test of being safe and beneficial.

785 We have recently emerged from one of the most intensive election campaigns that I have experienced in my 30 years in politics, with features that were as intense as they were ugly. The people delivered the closest election result ever, with the GSD having been a swing of a mere 150 votes away from forming government. For the first time since the introduction of the 2006 Constitution, the Government will have a majority of one seat in this new 9-8 dynamic. In fact, in this new 9-8 dynamic, I now lead the largest party in this House, given that there are seven GSLP
790 Members and two Liberals but eight Social Democrats. In everything that I heard from the opposite side in that speech, I would caution that it be tempered with a degree of humility as we go forward, when we were merely 150 votes away from being on that side of the House.

Stepping back from that electoral process and reflecting on that result, there are lessons for many people, not least ourselves – we *will* learn those lessons – but there are lessons, too, for the
795 Government. This was not a campaign that was fought on made-up issues which had duped people, as was rather ungenerously observed in its immediate aftermath and suggested today. I make the allowance that even though it was suggested in the immediate aftermath, sometime later and with a bit more reflection the Chief Minister adopted a more understanding tone that acknowledged the need to do things differently. Time will tell whether those issues are addressed
800 and whether they are resolved, but we will be there to hold Government to account on those issues and any new ones that arise, in keeping with the role given to us by the people of Gibraltar, a role that we will discharge seriously.

The issues that we campaigned on were not invented, nor have they magically gone away. They will not be airbrushed away with simplicity or with photo opportunities or a barrage of superficial
805 media spin. The result of the last – close – election was driven by the force of popular support because many people felt left behind, unsupported and not listened to by a government that failed to deal with their issues constructively and did not address the systemic issues facing this community. When we spoke about broken systems, it was because, in many ways, public services are deficient, inadequate and thoroughly ineffective at properly dealing with the modern needs
810 of Gibraltar. When we provided a voice for people with housing, health, social services or employment needs, that was real. For every issue we brought up, there were real people, with real concerns behind those points, expressing frustration at hitting political brick walls; young people bouncing from zero-hours contract to zero-hours contract, without real or dignified employment after years of trying; people who could see others jump over them purely because of who they knew, and not on their merits or an assessment of their needs; people who lacked opportunities or support.

Lack of fairness in systems, whether on jobs, awards of contracts or land deals, simply breeds a dismay that erodes confidence in political administration, and, in the end, what is lost is not just trust but a belief that things can be fixed. We cannot let that happen. The financial issues we
820 pointed out were also real. No amount of misrepresentation can obscure the unprecedented levels of debt and the basic fragility of public finances. Getting out of the public finances crisis, tackling the systemic issues affecting public services or reforming the way Gibraltar is governed will take courage and conviction. It cannot be done in piecemeal ways, and there need to be far-reaching and deep changes.

825 To the extent that Government heeds the message the public has given it, we will be there to support the work to make the necessary changes Gibraltar needs. To the extent that the Government fails to listen to the clamour for reform in some areas, we will continue our campaign for those changes and increase the volume. The closeness of the election provides an opportunity that a landslide never does, for a recalibration by the Government of its own way of doing things.
830 A landslide can, perhaps understandably, be seen to provide an endorsement of what went on

before, but a wafer-thin majority – majority, nonetheless, that it is – is not a ringing endorsement of how things have been done, it is an invitation to listen much more deeply to the voices of criticism. The Chief Minister said before the election that this was his last term. If that remains his view, I would hope that during the time he has left in office, he will act accordingly, having
835 reflected meaningfully on the result, and will put in place reforms that deal with all those issues that concern people, although I have to say, with some regret, that there were aspects of the speech today that indicated that the reverse will be true. If arrogance, rather than humility, becomes the calling card of this Government, it will be a *grave* mistake.

There are many aspects of the election campaign or its aftermath that deserve analysis and reflection, too many to dissect today. There are, however, a couple of features that impact on
840 governance which I want to highlight. It is entirely right, in a robust parliamentary democracy, that elections are fought on issues, with competing pitches of ideas, commitments or promises. It is quite different when tactics are adopted where the truth no longer matters in a win-at-all-costs attitude, or when there is an adoption of a bargain-basement style of politics which endangers
845 the constitutional safeguards which are there for good reason.

Section 45(9) of the Constitution says that upon the dissolution of the Parliament, the Chief Minister and Ministers in office at the time of such dissolution shall remain in office and shall discharge their functions until new elections are held, but such executive authority may not be exercised, save in the event of public emergency, to commit or bind the next successor
850 Government of Gibraltar to public funding or liability except in the ordinary course of the day-to-day affairs of Gibraltar. The spirit of that subsection of the Constitution is to prevent a caretaker government from entering into new financial obligations, unless they are absolutely necessary for the discharge of their duties while it remains the government until the elections are held. Such a clause is not there to provide cover to a government fighting for its political life, so that it can enter into new financial commitments during that period of dissolution with parties, bodies or
855 entities to curry favour or votes for the forthcoming elections. It is not there so that it can enter into new contracts or resolve non-urgent industrial claims, unless they come within the strict workings of that section. To the extent that that happens, it is a plain abuse of the spirit of that clause. It is time for there to be specific and clearer rules put in place, to give meaning and support
860 to that key provision and guide civil servants in advising Ministers on what can or cannot be done after the dissolution of Parliament. Especially in a tight election, any blurring of that restriction can be material in the outcome of it. The independence of Parliament as an institution and in the conduct of its democratic function of holding the Government to account has been a hobby-horse of mine for some time and something that I think needs to be improved. I have long been an
865 advocate of parliamentary reform, and we had an ambitious package of measures in our manifesto. I would hope that we can engage constructively with the Government on such issues in months to come.

Integral to the role of Parliament is its independence. Its role cannot be carried out without its staff. As such, the time has come for the recognition that the staff of this place cannot be moved
870 or removed without, at the very least, the agreement of the Speaker. If the post of Speaker is vacant, then there should be no move until a new Speaker is appointed and with his or her agreement. The unannounced, sudden transfer of the former Clerk of Parliament, days after the General Election, when he still had live functions as Returning Officer, was a matter of surprise, was odd and was to be regretted. Parliamentary staff should be in a special category in the public
875 service, so as to ensure the independence of this institution as a democratic check on the executive power.

At the Ceremonial Opening of Parliament in 2019, four years ago, when describing how we would approach the four years ahead, I said:

Our politics will reflect the core values of the GSD modernised for our times. It will be a mainstream, centrist, progressive vision of social democracy, protecting civil rights, fostering equality, enhancing conditions for working people, economically liberal and ensuring fairness, transparency, opportunity and value for money.

We will continue the work of regenerating the party further. We will seek to infuse young people with our new core message and represent all sectors of our society, as we have always sought to do. We will get out into the community, as we have been doing already but with efforts redoubled. We will cover every estate or district or representative association in our outreach programme. We will be there for everyone.

880 I believe that we have done that over the last four years, although there remains work to be done. We have given a clear message of that modern, inclusive vision for Gibraltar with a real programme for government, despite the sniping on the other side. We have gone out into the districts in a vigorous outreach programme and engaged with all sectors of society. The results of the work we have done over the last four years are there to be seen in the electoral result. That was no accident, but it was, this time, insufficient to make it to government – just.

885 That work must continue to further galvanise support and continue to inspire those who have already backed us. So, as I did in 2019, I reaffirm my commitment to that mainstream, centrist and progressive vision of social democracy, in keeping with modern times and faithful to our core values. That is the clear and undoubted path to follow. In our work, we will continue to promote civil rights, freedoms and equality. We will seek to improve the conditions of the underprivileged and continue to fight for fairness, transparency and opportunity for all. We will, as before, strive for value for money, because with that will come a greater opportunity to reinvest in public services and return money to the people. This is a vision for an expansive modern form of social democracy – one of opportunity, rights, liberties, fairness, meritocracy, respect, transparency, value for money, sustainability and quality of life.

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895 The people who voted for us can rest assured that we will continue with our work, robust but constructive. For those who did not choose the GSD on this occasion, we will be your watchdog in Parliament, too, and we hope that over the next term of this Parliament you will decide to back us when the next opportunity for change arrives. *(Banging on desks)*

The House adjourned at 12.57 p.m.