

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 78/2006
20 June 2006

The Leader of the Opposition Joe Bossano met with the Minister of State at the Foreign Office Geoff Hoon MP this afternoon. Mr Bossano has had a long-standing relationship with Mr Hoon which goes back to the days when he was an MEP supportive of Gibraltar in the 1980s.

During the meeting Mr Bossano raised the question of the definition of any referendum to vote on the new constitution as making use of the right to self-determination, that the UK has always accepted that we enjoy. Mr Bossano made it clear that the United Kingdom should accept that such a vote would constitute the use of the right, it was not sufficient that it should be so in the judgment of Mr Caruana alone.

Mr Hoon thought that there were no other British Overseas Territories constitutions with a preamble containing a reference to self-determination in it. Mr Bossano assured him that there was, the one that had recently been rejected by the people of St Helena in a referendum. He promised to supply the Minister with a copy of the text.

Mr Bossano also raised a report in today's issue of El Pais which claimed that Mr Hoon had told his Spanish counterpart in Madrid yesterday that any referendum to decide on the constitution in Gibraltar would not constitute an act of self-determination. Mr Hoon denied having made any such statement to the Spanish Government and the Opposition fully accept the assurances given by Geoff Hoon.

In the process, the Opposition want to make clear that the statements by Senator Carracao last Friday shows how little he knows about the constitutional position of Gibraltar in relation to the United Kingdom. He says that Gibraltar would be better off under Spanish rule because we get very little from the United Kingdom. He does not seem to know that Gibraltar gets no financial assistance from the UK but that in fact the per capita income in Gibraltar is higher than for any region in Spain.

He also does not seem to know that none of the constitutions discussed with the Spanish regions confirm the right to self-determination for the people of those regions, whereas in the case of Gibraltar, London's position is that self-determination is fully applicable to Gibraltar except that the UK is constrained in promoting this right only to the extent that it cannot agree to independence without Spanish consent.

Thirdly, the level of self-government currently available in Gibraltar, and in most of the other British colonies, is far in excess of what is being offered to Catalunya or the other Spanish regions, so the advise of Senator Carracao to us should be the other way round. He should tell the nationalists in those regions to look at Gibraltar's constitution for guidance in their own aspirations.

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