

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 89/2006

31 July 2006

The Opposition have found out this morning through adverts in the local media that a Referendum Register is in the process of being compiled. The Opposition condemn the Government for both the manner in which they have gone about it and for the decisions that they have taken unilaterally on such a fundamental matter.

The advert says that the Referendum Register will be based on the 2003 Register of Electors. It will be recalled that the 2003 Register of Electors was highly deficient and that there were a large number of people who were left out. For the Government to use this Register as a base for the Referendum list of voters does not make any sense and is asking for trouble.

The Opposition note that the category of persons who will be eligible to vote in the Referendum is to be exactly the same as those who can vote at a general election. This means that any qualifying person who stepped off a plane six months ago can vote.

The Opposition believes that this franchise undermines the very concept that what we will be doing in the Referendum is exercising our right to self-determination. While this franchise may be acceptable for a general election, it is totally unacceptable that it should be extended to the Referendum.

The Referendum has already been described by the United Kingdom Government and by the Gibraltar Government as an act of self-determination. In United Nations decolonisation terms, the right to self-determination can only be exercised by the colonial people.

It is relevant to note that the franchise for the 2002 Referendum was extended to British belongers of Gibraltar who had been resident here for ten years or more. The Referendum held then was to accept or reject the principle of sharing the sovereignty of Gibraltar with Spain. It has not been explained why the qualifying criteria for this Referendum should be any different from what it was for that held in 2002.

The Opposition cannot accept that anyone with only a few months residence can be granted the right to self-determination and participate in the decision on the option to be selected to decolonise Gibraltar. This totally undermines the argument that the Referendum would be an act of self-determination. We urge the Government to review the qualifying criteria, failing which the Opposition will be reviewing its own position on the Referendum as a whole.

ENDS