

## **STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 95/2006**

### **10 August 2006**

It has come to the attention of the Opposition that on Saturday morning a Special Branch Officer, on instruction from his superior, stopped the entry into Gibraltar at the La Linea frontier of Abdel Ratali, The Chairman of the Moroccan Community Association, who lives with his family in La Linea.

Mr Ratali, who is currently unemployed, had been provided with a 5 year Visa Waiver running from 2004 to 2009 at the time of his previous employment. Although the Visa Waiver stamp in his Passport makes no reference to its validity ending prematurely on becoming unemployed, the Immigration Department says that since the basis of its issue was employment in Gibraltar the law requires its cancellation when the person becomes unemployed.

The incident occurred in the knowledge that Mr Ratali has an offer of employment and that his Employment Contract has been with the Employment and Training Board ('ETB') for some time awaiting approval of his Work Permit. There is no clear reason why the ETB is taking so long in approving the permit, taking into account that Mr Ratali has been working in Gibraltar for over 20 years. Mr Ratali is well known for his views in defence of the Moroccan Community and the treatment he is being subjected to is without precedent.

A month ago, when the ETB had the contract already in its possession, it was suggested that the decision on the Work Permit was being held in abeyance because the Immigration Department wanted to speak to Mr Ratali about his Visa Waiver. The Immigration Department, for its part, adopted the view that the decision on the Work Permit had nothing to do with them and that the ETB was free to approve or deny the permit. However, the Immigration Department say that they would have no difficulty in re-issuing the Visa Waver once his employment contract is approved by the ETB.

It seems obvious that if there is no hidden agenda the sensible course of action would have been for the Immigration Department to hold off taking action until the ETB decided whether to approve Mr Ratali's contract or not. The employer who has requested the permit to employ Mr Ratali has been appraised of the facts and is being sympathetic to his predicament and has not given the job to someone else, not withstanding the obstacles being placed in the employment of Mr Ratali, for which the Opposition is grateful.

The impression given by the treatment of Mr Ratali is that he is being subjected to this kind of pressure because of the stand that he has taken on a number of occasions in defence of the Moroccan Community and it would be totally unacceptable if this indeed turned out to be the case and the law was being applied selectively in this way.

ENDS

