

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 137/2006
6 November 2006

During the course of the debate on one of the Opposition amendments in the House of Assembly to the Referendum motion, the Opposition sought to introduce a paragraph in which was reflected the UN definition of self-determination as the people of a colony deciding the future status of their homeland.

The amendment was originally resisted by the Government and the argument was used that there was no such definition and that if it was being implied that voting to retain the existing Constitution was the exercise of the right to self-determination this was not the correct interpretation of the UN position.

In response the Opposition pointed out that during the debate on a motion in the past, Mr Caruana himself had argued that he had seen some UN papers which said that the UN accepted voting to remain a colony as a valid exercise of the right to self-determination.

Indeed a recent case in point was the vote by the people of the Non-self-governing territory of Tokelau. In Tokelau the people voted against a new Constitution that would have brought about full self-government by free association with New Zealand. They therefore remain on the UN list.

Following this decision by the people of Tokelau, the UN issued the following statement:

“The Secretary General has taken note of the results of the referendum in Tokelau and respects the decision of its people against moving to self-government in free association with New Zealand. A United Nations team deployed to monitor the vote has concluded that the referendum was credible and reflected the will of the people.

It is important that the people of Tokelau have had this opportunity. The Secretary-General commends the Government of New Zealand, the administering power, and the Special Committee on Decolonization, whose commitment to the principles enshrined in the 1960 United Nations Declaration on Decolonization made possible the referendum.

The United Nations will continue working to ensure that the people of all remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories have such opportunities to exercise their right to self-determination.”

There are two important points to be made in relation to this. First that the UN says it will continue working to ensure that the people of all Non-Self-Governing Territories exercise their self-determination. This includes the people of Gibraltar who in the exercise of their right to self-determination on 30 November will freely determine whether they wish to proceed on the basis of the proposed new constitution or to remain with their current one, as has been done by the people of Tokelau.

This shows the nonsense that is constantly being repeated by the Spanish Government in general and by Mr Moratinos in particular when he talks about decolonisation and the act of self-determination as if they were synonymous and interchangeable terms.

The people of Tokelau, in their referendum, have exercised their right in an act of self-determination but have chosen not to be decolonised at this point in time on the terms that had been agreed with New Zealand. The fact that this is their choice does not diminish their right to self-determination nor make the referendum an internal matter.

The agreed text to the motion approved by both sides of the House, makes clear that an act of self-determination is the people deciding the future status of their homeland which can lead to the emergence of a new international status or the retention of the existing status for their homeland.

Each alternative, voting for the new Constitution or voting against and staying with the existing one, is an equally valid exercise of the right to self-determination.

ENDS