

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 161/2006
18 December 2006

The Opposition understands that a Gibraltarian who has frequently and regularly on many occasions on National Day and when talks with Spain have taken place demonstrated his opposition to any concessions being made was in the area of Princess Caroline's Battery on Saturday.

He was carrying a banner which read: "No to joint airport" and "No to concessions in exchange for lifting of restrictions". The Gibraltarian was on his own in order to make a point when the motorcade went past carrying the dignitaries who had arrived in Gibraltar on board the Iberia flight. This motorcade was provided by the Gibraltar Government at taxpayer's expense.

Before the motorcade arrived at the location, a police vehicle stopped next to the man and told him that he could not stay there and had to leave that particular location.

The person pointed out to the police officer that he was not creating a disturbance or carrying any offensive or insulting language on his placards. He was told by one of the three police officers that no placards or demonstrations were permitted on that day.

The police have, in the judgement of the Opposition, absolutely no power to interfere with the freedom of speech or of expression of any Gibraltarian citizen. It is a sad day for democracy and freedom in Gibraltar.

Our human rights and individual freedoms were supposed to be expanded upon in the new Constitution, which has yet to come into force. However these fundamental freedoms are also contained in the 1969 Constitution. It is totally unacceptable that a Gibraltarian is not permitted to express a view, which the majority of us share, so as not to give offence to Spanish officials and politicians.

Indeed, it is incomprehensible why even they should take offence since the Government of Gibraltar claims that is the position that has been put to the Spanish Government directly in the negotiations. Namely that this is not a joint use airport and secondly that no concessions have been given in exchange for lifting the restrictions, except that the United Kingdom has paid the Spanish pensions.

The Opposition considers it to be a very serious matter because it affects such a fundamental issue as the right to free speech which the new Constitution is supposed to enhance and not restrict.

Since the new constitution has not yet come into force, the police have to answer for their actions to the Governor under the 1969 constitution, and if they were acting under instructions it should be made public under whose instructions they were acting.

The person concerned should be given an unreserved apology for the actions of the police. The man in question told the policeman who stopped him that if he had not been on his own he would not have moved and would have had to be arrested. Being on his own, with three police officers present, he did the wise thing and left the site.

As he moved further down from Princess Caroline's Battery, the same police car stopped him again and asked for his name. The police have no right to ask for his name since he had not committed an offence, and they should not interfere with people who are peacefully going about their business.

ENDS