

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 63/2007

7 June 2007

The Opposition welcome that the Committee of 24 has now written formally to the British Government to ask them to facilitate a visiting mission to Gibraltar.

The Opposition has always argued that Gibraltar should be treated in the same way as the other territories on the UN list. In recent years there have been visiting missions to Tokelau, to the Turks and Caicos Islands and Bermuda. The latter two are British Overseas Territories.

The Chairperson of the Committee of 24 has said that nearly two months have elapsed since she wrote to the British Government and as yet there has been no response from the UK.

The Opposition has contacted Members of Parliament so that they question the British Government on their position and on why they have not answered the request from the Committee of 24.

The UK Government's position has traditionally been whenever the matter was raised with them that the Committee of 24 had never approached them asking to facilitate such a visit. This is no longer a valid argument.

In the UN seminar in 2003 held in Anguilla, itself a non self governing territory, the British Government representative said that the UK had no objection to facilitating visiting missions to any of its territories including Gibraltar. Spain reacted to this by objecting and arguing that any such visit to Gibraltar would constitute interference by the Committee. At a subsequent hearing of the Committee of 24 Opposition Leader Joe Bossano attacked the Spaniards and said it was Spain and not the Committee of 24 who were interfering, given that the Committee of 24 is perfectly entitled by the resolutions of the UN to send visiting missions to the remaining territories to assess for themselves their progress towards decolonisation.

At the meeting of the UN Committee of 24 that took place on 4 June 2003, when Gibraltar was being discussed, the UK representative told the Committee that the UK Government supported the sending of visiting missions by the Committee of 24 to United Kingdom Overseas Territories.

Subsequently, the move was initiated by Spain and its allies in seminars to make a recommendation that visiting missions should not be sent to territories where there is a sovereignty dispute. Notwithstanding the fact that this position was maintained in the Fiji seminar last year and repeated in the Grenada seminar this year, it is quite clear that the full Committee has ignored this recommendation by writing to the UK Government.

This is a very important development and a major setback for the position of Spain and therefore it is essential, now that the Committee of 24 has come on

board, that it should not be the British Government that blocks the move in order to keep Spain happy.

The Opposition therefore considers that there is absolutely no justification in the delay in replying that there has been up to now and that the UK Government must not be permitted to object to a visit by the Committee of 24 which would be backtracking on the position it had adopted previously.

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