

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION  
102/2007

8 November 2007

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Excellency

Just over 31 years ago I spoke at the opening of the third House of Assembly.

One of your predecessors, Sir John Grandy, reminded us of the constitutional progress of the previous 26 years, since the first Legislative Council had been inaugurated.

In reply I pointed out that in those 26 years our international status as a British Colony had not changed and expressed the hope that we would soon achieve the long overdue decolonisation of Gibraltar.

Last month the debate at the UN on our decolonisation finished up with the same annual text as the previous year, which calls for the issue to be resolved by a process of discussion with Spain. Such discussion in the spirit of Brussels, would require the issues of sovereignty to be discussed.

UK supported this route, but stated they would only embark on it if "Gibraltar" were content, for such sovereignty negotiations to take place.

Your Excellency, you yourself have highlighted this and pointed out that it bears repetition. I agree. So does our reaction to it.

The half of “Gibraltar” that has voted for this side of the House is not, and will not be, content for UK to enter into any such discussion of our unfinished decolonisation with the Spanish Government, now or in the future, anymore than it has been in the past. Our decolonisation, our international status and our sovereignty are matters exclusively for us and UK to discuss, and no one else.

In 1976 the scenario was that the UK, post Franco’s death, rejected all 3 UN options for decolonisation, then known to us, and said we should await developments in Spain. Within a year the process of seeking to reconcile us with Spain commenced with informal tripartite talks, even then, at ministerial level, in what soon became known as the Strasbourg Process which was followed by the Lisbon declaration in 1980, later restated as the Brussels Declaration of 1984. The spirit of which will again be reflected in the General Assembly UN text next month.

So what can we expect on this front in the next 4 years?

Not much, I fear to say, as regards bringing to a close the colonial chapter in our history once and for all.

UK has informed the UN that as a result of the 1999 White Paper the relationship with its Overseas Territories, Gibraltar included, has been

modernised to an extent that it can no longer be described as based on colonialism.

This however is not the same as saying that the territory is now enjoying a full measure of self government such that it is no longer covered by the provisions of Chapter 11 of the UN Charter.

Our position will therefore continue to be to seek that the UN identify where the present constitution falls short of what is required for this to apply.

Spain of course has made clear that any attempt to complete the decolonisation process, without their consent and involvement, will bring to an abrupt halt the tripartite dialogue.

So what is the importance of this dialogue?

For Spain, it is expressly stated, to be a way of creating trust in their good intentions so that a more propitious climate is delivered to enable the UN consensus to be put into effect.

For UK the scenario is not all that different, since they would only proceed if Gibraltar were content for them to go down this path. A result that for years the UK has told Spain could only come about by them wooing the Gibraltarians.

What about Gibraltar?

No one in Gibraltar has ever advocated the development of a hostile relationship with Spain. Gibraltar has been the victim of the hostilities not its initiator.

We are fully committed to Article 1 of the Charter which declares the purposes of the UN to be to develop friendly relations amongst nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self determination of peoples.

A principle that Spain has breached from the day it joined the UN.

In developing mutually beneficial cooperation it was a Gibraltar initiative to set up a joint forum for economic cooperation with the individual Campo municipalities and Ceuta, which ended in 1993 when UK stopped paying Spanish Pensioners and Spanish participants withdrew.

UK reversed this decision in 1997 and restored frozen pensions from 1993 and as confirmed this week has revalued pensions and paid lump sums to Spanish nationals who had received frozen pensions between 1989 and 2007. Had the UK not taken the decision they took in 1989 all pensioners irrespective of nationality and residence would have received equal value in pensions earned by equal number of contributions. Because of UK's changing interpretation of the law over the years it is the Spanish workers withdrawn from Gibraltar in 1969 by the Franco regime who have benefited most at the end of the day.

Clearly this and other policy issues which have been defended by us during the election campaign will continue to denote the policy differences between the two sides of the House in the life of this Parliament, as it is proper that it should.

In particular we shall be monitoring the provision of homes and jobs for young Gibraltarians. Those going to study abroad who have such difficulties in finding suitable jobs at home, those competing for jobs at other levels against ever increasing numbers of frontier workers.

The young people of Gibraltar are as clear about their national identity as my generation have always been.

We owe it to them that they should have priority in their homeland as happens elsewhere in jobs, homes and career prospects. Otherwise we shall be diluting the coherence of the Gibraltarian people.

In looking at the way our economy performs and the manner in which public resources are put to use we shall in this Parliament judge the results by reference to the policies we have defended in the Elections, which we firmly believe are the best for our country's economic and political future.

The Gibraltar economy has no future in being redesigned to make it a better fit for the economy of the nearby hinterland.

Gibraltar's degree of fiscal independence is the same as that of any other sovereign state and is as well placed as any other micro state to make

intelligent use of the opportunities available to achieve high economic growth.

We have no doubt therefore that our projected target of 1.2 billion pounds GBP for 2011/2012 is easily within our grasp if the correct policy initiatives are taken and the opportunities available to us are properly made use of.

We shall therefore be giving the monitoring of the economy the same degree of importance in this Parliament as we have done in the past.

Finally Your Excellency last year I made reference to the last visit of Her Majesty The Queen to Gibraltar in 1954, which of course I remember, as a schoolboy.

On that occasion the dictatorship in Spain immediately took offence and imposed the first reprisals against Gibraltar by preventing new Spanish workers entering our economy, as usual, picking on their own people to get at us.

However now we have a democratic Spain and a government that wishes to show us that we can trust them and has engaged in confidence building, to this end.

In addition as we have just seen that Spain sees nothing wrong in their monarchy visiting the Spanish enclaves in North Africa which Morocco considers affects its territorial integrity. Indeed the Spanish Government

has brushed aside the protests of the Kingdom of Morocco and made clear that this will not affect the excellent relationship between the two countries.

In our case therefore I think we can be justified in thinking that if our Queen were to visit us the Spanish Government would not react as Morocco has done. Even if it did, it would not affect the equally excellent relationship that exists between UK and Spain.

Thirdly to clinch the argument as it were, the new factor which has not been there in all the years that we have had an open invitation to Her Majesty to visit us is the new Constitution. In it she is now the Queen of Gibraltar as well as the Queen of UK and most of the independent commonwealth nations. As our own Queen, what better occasion than to visit us now that we have a newly elected Parliament under this new relationship. So I am sure that Your Excellency as Her Majesty's representative in our country can bring this argument to her notice and encourage her to consider such a visit in the not too distant future.

ENDS