

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

116/2008

21 October 2008

The Opposition is surprised at the conditions reportedly laid down by the Police to the organisers of the Waterport Terraces demonstration. The details are contained in a “Facebook” reminder circulated by the organisers.

The organisers claim that to have been told by the Police that there are four things they cannot do:

- (1) No obstructing pedestrian traffic;
- (2) No shouting, whistles, air horns or megaphones;
- (3) No banners that insult the Government or the Chief Minister and no swearing;
- (4) No booing or jeering at the Ministers or Chief Minister as they arrive at the House of Parliament.

There have been innumerable demonstrations outside the Parliament over the years and the Opposition has never heard of some of the restrictions that have reportedly been laid down for this one.

It goes without saying that when people demonstrate they should exercise restraint in how they vent their

feelings and they must do so within the law. However, the law has only been interpreted in this restrictive way since Mr Caruana came into power, and anyone who knows him will not doubt for one moment that his own personal attitude to this will have influenced the actions and the behaviour of the Police who never previously interpreted the law in this way.

This disturbing tendency to curtail the civil rights of protestors extends to placing restrictions on whether they can blow whistles, hoot the horns of their vehicles or on what they say on their placards. People will recall that a single protestor was prevented by the Police from displaying a placard on the day that the Spanish Minister of State for Foreign Affairs visited Gibraltar in December 2006.

While what demonstrators cannot do is provoke a breach of the peace, if they protest it is because they are unhappy about something and they can hardly be expected to do so in melodious terms or in complete silence.

Being booed in politics is something that you risk when you stand for election. People have historically always been perfectly entitled to boo or shout if they so wished, so long as they did not insult or slander anyone. It is incredible that citizens are free to boo Gordon Brown and boo George Bush but that they

cannot now boo Mr Caruana if they so wish. This is unheard of in any democratic society.

ENDS