

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
78/2008 5 August 2008

The Opposition does not agree that the changes to National Day introduced by the Government are consistent with the meaning of that day and the reason for which it was created. We therefore fully commit to restoring National Day to its intended purpose when in Government.

The purpose of National Day was not just to get the United Kingdom to recognise our right to self determination but to proclaim to the world as a whole, and in particular to our neighbours, that we are a people in our own right, that this land is ours and that we have our own, distinct national identity.

The fact is that Gibraltar is still a British Overseas Territory in the same way as all the other territories awaiting decolonisation. The UK position is that none of them should be considered colonies any more by the UN irrespective of the modernity or otherwise of their constitutions.

Notwithstanding this, the issue of whether we have been decolonised or whether we are still to be decolonised should not in any way affect the fundamental objective of holding a National Day.

Our national identity exists irrespective of whether we are seeking to exercise our right of self determination and after we have exercised that right.

Therefore, regardless of ones view on this issue, even if the UN accepted our decolonisation tomorrow, the Opposition believes that it is particularly inappropriate to consider that the celebration of our national identity as a people and of our status as a nation, should be downgraded to become the responsibility of the Mayor as if this was a municipal or civic issue which it certainly is not.

National Day is for all our people, irrespective of their party political views, to proclaim to the whole world that we are the nation of the Gibraltarian people. This is manifestly a positive political assertion and one which cannot by definition be considered a civic event. This is a day for political unity; not a day for an absence of politics.

The proposals to have the Youth Concert the night before is divisive and detracts from the festive feel of the day itself. Further, to hold the main event in John Mackintosh Square which manifestly cannot hold the same number of people as Casemates is wrong and not in consonance with the needs for the event.

On the first occasion when National Day was held at John Mackintosh Square in 1992 it was intended to be a one-off event on the 25th anniversary of the 1967 referendum. The organisers did not anticipate that the people would come out in large numbers dressed in red and white. The move to Casemates was a response by the organisers and the GSLP Government as a direct reaction to the public mood. The Opposition considers that the celebration of our identity that the people wanted then in 1993 is what they want now in 2008.

The Government's decision to hold that celebration at a smaller venue, to make it non-political and "municipal" serve only to downgrade its importance. We are totally opposed to this.

ENDS