

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Guardia Civil's latest defiance of the Royal Navy and the Royal Gibraltar Police is an intolerable provocation. It is clear that only firm and decisive action will put an end to the incursions which have led to an increase in tension in the Bay. This follows reports of a number of incidents this week which involved more incursions by the Guardia Civil into the territorial waters of Gibraltar.

The Opposition understands that on Wednesday there was a serious stand-off between the Royal Navy and a Guardia Civil patrol boat that refused to leave Gibraltar waters when asked to do so. The Guardia Civil launch performed dangerous manoeuvres, circled the Royal Navy patrol boat and cut across its path at high speed. They are also reported to have used abusive language over the radio in the presence of two RHIBS from the RGP and Customs which were also at the scene.

The Opposition consider that the behaviour and actions of the Guardia Civil and other agencies of the Spanish state have become increasingly provocative as time goes on. It is obvious that it is only a matter of time before there is another serious incident like the one that took place six months ago when armed civil guards entered the Port of Gibraltar and landed on our soil brandishing their weapons.

It has become increasingly evident that the weak response to this incident at the time has only served to fuel the disrespect of the Guardia Civil towards the authorities in Gibraltar. It is hardly surprising that the Guardia Civil behave as if they could break our laws with impunity given that this is exactly what happened the last time when those who committed an offence in our territory were not arrested, charged and taken to court. Instead they were released after a sequence of events which included a telephone call from Spain's Minister for the Interior to Mr Caruana and another from Mr Caruana to the RGP.

The Guardia Civil is an armed paramilitary force and as such its continuous incursions into our waters cannot be taken lightly. The fact that its officers stop and question fishing boats and pleasure boats in an area where they have no jurisdiction is an affront to British sovereignty. This also happened earlier this week when they were seen on Tuesday inspecting the documents of a Spanish pleasure boat inside our waters and also approaching Spanish fishing boats on our side of the Bay.

The policy of the Spanish Government is that Gibraltar has no territorial waters. The Guardia Civil are acting in accordance with the policy of Madrid and in the process continue to flout international law and responsible standards of behaviour at sea. The Government stated at the time of last year's budget that they planned to increase the

capability of Gibraltar's maritime resources in order to deal with the threat. It is now a year later and they have still not done so.