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**PRESS RELEASE**

No: 466/2012

Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2012

**Government Statement following Guardia Civil actions on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> July**

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has received confirmed reports that officers of the Guardia Civil vessel Rio Ceden boarded and took control of a Gibraltar registered vessel in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters and then forcibly conveyed it and its occupants to Algeciras at high speed and without navigational lights. They subsequently confiscated perfectly legal equipment aboard the vessel. The individuals aboard the vessel were not suspected of being involved in any illicit activity of any kind.

HM Government of Gibraltar condemns the actions of the relevant Spanish Civil Guards without reservation.

Official reports received by the Government state that the Guardia Civil even turned off the navigational lights on the Gibraltar vessel that they boarded and on their own vessel as well in an attempt to avoid detection. This points to the fact that they must have known that they were acting in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters where Spain has no jurisdiction.

It is important to recall that the Civil Guard commenced these illegal incursions in 2009, unrelated to any fishing dispute and that they have continued at regular intervals ever since. Indeed, at one point Spanish Civil Guards even entered the Port of Gibraltar and landed on our soil. This has been the case regardless of who was in Government in Spain or in Gibraltar.

The reality is that these incursions have been allowed to go on by others over so many years that they have almost become the norm.

The view of HM Government of Gibraltar is that this latest incident, as indeed all the others, are totally outside international law and the bounds of acceptable neighbourly behaviour. Such actions amount to a clear and premeditated escalation of the continuing breaches of the sovereign integrity of our waters and territory which have been occurring repeatedly for more than three years.

This belligerent act of provocation by the para-military armed forces of Spain, akin to the actions taken by them previously in respect of merchant shipping and pleasure craft in our waters, cannot be allowed to go by unchallenged.

In this instance, to add to the gravity of the situation, two Gibraltarians, British citizens, were illegally detained and forcibly transferred from Gibraltar to Spain across the international dividing line in the Bay of Gibraltar. This criminal false arrest and illegal detention continued for almost two hours.

All civic and political groups in Gibraltar will want to unite to roundly condemn these criminal acts by Guardia Civil officers, declare them unacceptable and call upon the United Kingdom Government to make good on its repeated position - most recently and clearly set out in the White Paper on the Overseas Territories - to defend the territorial integrity of Gibraltar by all means at its disposal in a reasonable, measured but effective way.

The time has now come for action, not simply written protests from London to Madrid.

The United Kingdom needs to ask itself how it would act if these events had been perpetrated by Argentine paramilitary forces in the oil and fish rich waters around the Falkland Islands or in the areas around the coast of the British Isles.

If necessary, the UK should further bolster the resources available in Gibraltar to defend the integrity of British Gibraltar Territorial Waters whilst at the same time use the full resources of its diplomatic arsenal to ensure that Spanish officials appreciate that the actions of the Guardia Civil officers involved are bankrupt of all legitimacy and are counterproductive in the extreme.

For its part, as has already been made public, the Government has already acquired new vessels for the RGP to assist in law enforcement activities. Two of these are the vessels that have already been delivered and other, larger vessels are in the process of being ordered and delivered in stages in coming months.

This will in effect mean that within 7 months of being elected the new Government has already started to transform the types of assets available to the RGP so that it can act in such circumstances - whereas previously the only assets available to them had principally been vessels confiscated by the courts. Other law enforcement agencies will also soon see the maritime assets at their disposal transformed to better enable them to assist in such circumstances as well.

The Government has a manifesto commitment for the establishment of a marine base on the east side for law enforcement use. This will also be an important part of the transformation that is being undertaken in the national resources being made available to deal with similar problems in the future.

Guardia Civil actions such as these are not only invasions of our territorial sea which must be repelled by the Royal Navy, they also amount to criminal acts of unlawful detention, trespass and false imprisonment which are amongst the most serious known to law. This now requires action by the United Kingdom designed to deliver maximum protection of the sovereignty, jurisdiction and control of the British Gibraltar Territorial Waters in every material respect.