



**GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
PRESS OFFICE**

No.6 Convent Place

Gibraltar

Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057

PRESS RELEASE

No: 123/2011

Date: 3rd May 2011

Page 1 of 2

The Gibraltar Government condemns the provocative and unlawful actions by the Spanish Navy Corvette "Atalaya" in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters to-day, Tuesday.

The Spanish Vessel approached and contacted all merchant shipping on the Eastside of the Rock within BGTW and ordered them to raise anchors and to leave since they did not have permission to be in Spanish Waters.

The Gibraltar Port Authority directed all vessels to remain at their anchorage, which they did. The Gibraltar Port Authority repeatedly transmitted the following message to the ships being harassed by the Spanish Navy: - "You are anchored in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters and Spanish Warship P74 has no jurisdiction over these waters, please remain at anchor". None of the vessels left the anchorage.

This action by the Spanish Navy represents a direct and most serious challenge to British Sovereignty of BGTW, which the UK cannot permit or allow to re-occur.

The Royal Navy deployed a rubber Rib to confront the Spanish Corvette. The Spanish vessel warned off the RN boat. The larger RN boats 'HMS Scimitar' and 'HMS Sabre' were apparently unavailable to deploy for nearly an hour. By the time HMS Scimitar deployed, the Spanish vessel was departing BGTW.

A No 6 Spokesman said:-

"This most serious incident explodes the myth of Spanish Foreign Ministry briefings to the press that the current impasse in the Trilateral Forum is the fault of the Gibraltar side. Gibraltar has no desire to discuss Sovereignty with Spain, but certainly seeks to ensure in that no concessions are made on sovereignty and jurisdiction. There appear to be elements in Spain that are determined, for their own reasons to ensure that matters remain blocked.

There is no other credible explanation for to-day's unprecedented incident. It is absurd to imagine that co-operation could co-exist side by side with this sort of behaviour. Dual jurisdiction masquerading as co-operation is not acceptable. That is what the Chief Minister is guarding against and seeking to protect Gibraltar from.

The incident also vindicates the Gibraltar Government's position that, since upholding British Sovereignty is a UK/MOD responsibility, it is completely inappropriate to call for GOG to itself obtain bigger boats to place our police officers, custom officers and port department officers in the front line of physical confrontation with armed Spanish Navy and Guardia Civil Boats. Those who call upon the Gibraltar Government to do precisely this merely reveal the dangers that Gibraltar would be exposed to if they were in Government.

The Gibraltar Government does not believe that physical confrontation or gunboat diplomacy is the desirable way forward, but if Spain will not share that view, and persists with such incursions and usurpation of jurisdiction, then the UK must deploy appropriate vessels to assert and uphold Her Majesty's sovereignty of Gibraltar's territorial waters. The present position is leading to inexorable dilution and degradation of that sovereignty and cannot be allowed by the UK to continue.

It is not unacceptable that HMS Scimitar and HMS Sabre, being the Royal Navy's main assets in Gibraltar can only be mobilised at 1 hour's notice. Since most incidents last less than 1 hour this means that incidents go effectively unchallenged. The Government believes that given the frequency and serious nature of these incursions the MOD must review these unsatisfactory operational arrangements so that its Rib can be properly supported by its bigger boats in a timely manner."