



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
PRESS OFFICE
No.6 Convent Place
Gibraltar
Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057

PRESS RELEASE

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RGP INCIDENT WITH SVA LAUNCH

The Government considers that the incident on Wednesday evening involving an SVA launch (Servicio de Vigilancia Aduanera) assisting navigators of RIBs, which are prohibited imports in Gibraltar, to evade the jurisdiction of the RGP, is truly lamentable.

The details which have been reported to the Government by the RGP (and which the Chief Minister has seen video evidence of) show that the RGP was informed that the Spanish SVA had stopped a small RIB with three occupants off Europa Point. RGP officers asked the SVA the reason for stopping the vessel but were refused information. Moments later, the RIB was untied by the SVA and the RGP crew proceeded with a document check of the occupants of the RIB. After the RIB was cleared, the RGP informed the SVA of the correct protocol but the SVA Commandant replied that protocol was not followed by the RGP in Spanish waters.

While this conversation was taking place, two large RIBs (which were suspected of being prohibited imports) came round Europa Point towards the Bay and, as they passed, both the RGP and SVA commenced a chase. Although RGP Officers repeatedly ordered the occupant of one of the RIBs to stop because he was within British Gibraltar Territorial Waters, they were ignored and obeyed signals from the SVA vessel to go towards them. As the vessels came alongside, RGP officers successfully managed to tie up one of the RIBs. Two SVA Officers then jumped on board the vessel while another freed the RIB by cutting the RGP line. The RGP vessel also came alongside and RGP Officers boarded to effect the arrest.

At this point, one of the SVA vessels started moving off with two RGP Officers on board. An argument ensued and one of the three occupants in the second suspect vessel boarded the stopped RIB to try and assist. The RGP Officers on board the suspect RIB drew batons, fearing for their safety. The SVA vessel then started to move towards Algeciras and the RGP Officers returned to the RGP vessel.

Gibraltar Defence Police (GDP) RIBs also arrived to assist the RGP crew but, when the SVA Officers saw this, they released the detained RIB and ordered both suspect vessels to head towards Algeciras. The RGP vessel lost use of an engine, was unable to chase and, despite efforts by the GDP, the Spanish vessel got away. All Gibraltar based boats

rendezvoused when the incident was over. The RGP has established that the main incident occurred within British Gibraltar Territorial Waters.

The Chief Minister has had confirmation that the British Government has made a written diplomatic complaint to the Spanish Government about the actions of the SVA launch navigator. Separately, the Gibraltar Government will be seeking clarification of the actions of the Royal Navy vessel "Scimitar" which, although in the area, did not assist the RGP officers engaged in the events.

Chief Minister Fabian Picardo said: "Incidents like this one, in which the SVA vessel has contributed to these RIBs evading the jurisdiction of the RGP, are lamentable in the extreme. The only people celebrating incidents of this type are the drug and people traffickers who will relish seeing law enforcement agencies in dispute with each other and not concentrating their efforts on preventing law breaking. The video evidence demonstrates what happened and where it happened. RGP officers involved in this incident must know that they have the full support of the Government and people of Gibraltar. I am taking this up at the highest levels, myself."