



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

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COMPLETE DISTORTIONS FROM SPANISH MINISTERS ON TOBACCO

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will reply in detail in the coming days to the statements made by Spanish Foreign Minister, Snr Garcia Margallo this afternoon.

In the interim, the Government will immediately deal with the remarkable and untrue statements made both by Snr Garcia Margallo and the Spanish Minister of the Interior who have both said that "Gibraltar does nothing to control tobacco smuggling."

This is completely untrue and a distortion aimed at further misleading the Spanish public about the reality of Gibraltar.

In fact, Gibraltar is one of the only states in the world that actually restricts the purchase or possession of tobacco by people within Gibraltar under the Tobacco Act.

The present Government has also introduced new anti-smoking legislation which came into effect last autumn. It is practically identical to the UK law which prohibits smoking in enclosed public places.

The Chief Minister himself has also put initiatives into place in order to reduce the amount of illicit tobacco activity in the vicinity of the frontier. In these zones, the Royal Gibraltar Police and Her Majesty's Customs have increased powers to search and arrest persons in possession of tobacco.

Moreover, the idea that the Gibraltar authorities do nothing to control offences related to tobacco is entirely false and can be demonstrated to be untrue.

The following data demonstrates that the RGP and HM Customs have acted and continue to act in relation to tobacco offences:

(i) Arrests

In connection to tobacco, the Royal Gibraltar Police and Customs have arrested the following number of persons in direct tobacco related offences:

2011 - 350

2012 - 325

(ii) Searches

In relation to tobacco offences, the following numbers of persons have been searched in the last years:

2011 - 928

2012 - 984

In connection to (i) and (ii), nearly 80% (between 76% and 80%) involve Spanish nationals as suspects.

(iii) Seizures

The following quantities of tobacco have been seized in the last few years (in numbers of cigarettes):

2011 - 1,729,111

2012 - 2,489,133

2013 - 3,703,000

The abovementioned statistics show that the Gibraltar Authorities act in a forceful way against those persons who contravene the Tobacco Act and that the actions of the RGP and HM Customs are producing more and more effective results.

At the same time, the importation of tobacco products into Gibraltar has risen well below 10% between 2012/2013 (comparing the first six months of each of the years). This hugely contrasts with the alarming and untrue statements made by the Spanish Government that tobacco imports had somehow risen by 213%.

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