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PRESS RELEASE

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Latest Spanish survey ship incursion is intolerable

The Government condemns the sustained incursion into British Gibraltar Territorial Waters (BGTW) by the Spanish state survey vessel RV “Ramon Margalef” yesterday and today and its dangerous navigation in our waters. The Government takes a very serious view of this development which represents yet another escalation of Spain’s campaign against Gibraltar on land and at sea.

The lengthy duration of the illegal incursion, which lasted about 21 hours, is something new. The standard practice has been for the Spanish navy and Guardia Civil to violate British waters and then leave. The latest serious development involved a Spanish state vessel remaining in British waters overnight and ignoring the warnings to get out issued by the Royal Navy. Indeed, the vessel came within 250 metres of the entrance to Gibraltar Harbour and sailed in close proximity to other ships at anchor in the Bay of Gibraltar. This led to a separate warning issued to them by the Gibraltar Port Authority on the grounds of safety to shipping.

There have been a number of incidents where a Spanish paramilitary launches have behaved in a reckless manner near British and American warships in the vicinity of Gibraltar.

It will be recalled that in May 2007 Spain requested the designation of Gibraltar’s territorial sea as if it were Spanish in EU environmental legislation. This was designated at the end of 2008. This act marked the intensification of Spanish pressure on British Gibraltar Territorial Waters when different agencies of the Spanish state proceeded to challenge British sovereignty on a regular basis. The upholding of the British sovereignty of our waters is the constitutional responsibility of the Government of the United Kingdom and of the Royal Navy in particular.

The Royal Navy responded to the incursion as did the Royal Gibraltar Police (RGP). The maritime assets of Gibraltar took action to disrupt the activity of the Spanish vessel, even though both the Navy and the RGP assets are considerably smaller in size and capability.

"The Government considers that the actions of the "Ramon Margalef" represent an intolerable intrusion into British waters and constitutes a clear violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). There has been close consultation between the Gibraltar Government, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Gibraltar Police throughout the incident," said a spokesman.