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Opposition housing comments are the height of political hypocrisy

It is the height of political hypocrisy for the Opposition to accuse the Government of not having started the construction of any new housing estate when we have only been in office for eleven months and it took the GSD more than seven years to embark on affordable housing developments of their own in a meaningful way. The Opposition therefore continue to measure the performance of the Government against different yardsticks from those used to measure their own performance when they were in office.

The Government considers that the latest statement on housing by Opposition spokesman Edwin Reyes is beyond belief. Mr Reyes should know that, apart from Bishop Canilla House, the GSD did not construct any new housing for the people of Gibraltar in their first two terms of office. Indeed, in his own speech after the count which followed the 2003 general election in the John Mackintosh Hall, Mr Caruana acknowledged the failure of his Government to deliver on the housing front from 1996 to 2003.

He said "...we also know that we have received a small electoral reprimand and wake-up call which I fully accept in relation to some of our shortcomings and delays in housing..."

It is therefore incredible, against this background, that Mr Reyes should have the audacity to complain that the Government has not started any new housing projects after only eleven months when they did not do so for seven years!

Moreover, the first of these projects at Waterport Terraces suffered delay after delay in a manner which caused considerable hardship to many prospective purchasers who had to put their lives on hold as a result. It will be recalled that the housing estate was originally scheduled to be completed in three phases between January and June 2007. These original completion dates, as everyone knows, did not materialise and the dates were pushed back several times. Despite this, Mr Caruana is on record as having said at the time that the GSD Government "has never made any promise, nor even a commitment, to any purchaser about any completion date."

It is also a bit rich for Mr Reyes to complain about people on the housing waiting list when it was precisely the lack of action on the housing front on the part of his Government that saw the waiting list increase from about 200 people in 1996 to well over 1000 while they were in Government. The existing housing problem was created precisely by their inactivity during their first two terms in office. Instead of preaching about affordable housing, about building flats and about meeting targets, the Opposition should show some humility and shoulder the blame for the mess that they left behind.

Mr Reyes' claims are all the more ridiculous because the Government has already announced four housing projects, of different types, over the last few months. It is obvious that the Opposition continue to behave as if they are operating in a vacuum and as if they had never been in Government before with a track record of their own which can be scrutinised as well.

The Government has manifesto commitments to deliver on housing and on a wide range of issues. The publication of the progress of our list of commitments may not matter to the Opposition because it shows we are implementing our programme of Government, but it certainly matters to the general public who are the ones who put us in office.