



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
Ministry for Health & Environment
Joshua Hassan House
Secretary's Lane
Gibraltar

PRESS RELEASE

No. 822/2012

Date: 11th December 2012

**DR CORTES PROVIDES PROOF THAT OPPOSITION CRITICISM IS
BASELESS**

In the latest of his tiresome press releases on the monkeys, Selwyn Figueras is stooping lower than ever, and presenting misinformation like never before, as he desperately tries to dig himself out of a hole of his own making.

The question of the macaques is a complex one, dealing with wild animals which have acquired certain behaviour, largely due to the way they have been treated in the past, and will take time to resolve.

In his latest statement, Selwyn Figueras attempts to question the professionalism of Dr John Cortes, a professionalism which was never ever doubted even by the GSD Government when they were in administration. At the time, Dr Cortes worked tirelessly on the macaques, voluntarily and without pay, often using his own private time.

Mr Figueras mentions three past initiatives to export macaques but tries to blame Dr Cortes for the fact that they were not successful, despite the latter's hard work.

Tunisia

In his statement, Mr Figueras makes the preposterous implication that Dr Cortes deliberately failed to complete negotiations to export macaques to Tunisia. In fact, it was thanks to Dr Cortes' contacts and reputation that the approach was originally made to GONHS from the University of El Kef in Tunisia through Rabat University. The Government of the time was interested, and agreed to support Dr Cortes who travelled to Tunisia to assess the sites together with experts from Gibraltar and Morocco. The areas were deemed suitable. However, despite repeated attempts by GONHS to initiate the move, the Tunisian authorities never confirmed the request and so the transfer did not take place. The Government of the time was well aware of this as on 19 October 2006, in a letter to a senior Government official, Dr Cortes wrote:

"Following the visit to Tunisia in May 2006 it was determined that two groups would be exported by spring 2007. This is still the intention, although our

Tunisian contacts are being quite slow in moving the matter which apparently requires Presidential consent.”

This consent was never forthcoming. Attempting to blame Dr Cortes for this is outrageous.

UK Safari Park

In 2011, there were discussions with a UK Safari park. Mr Figueras states that these were “by the GSD (not GONHS)”. He seems to want to make the distinction to try and take the credit for the fact that they were being held, but perhaps not the blame for their not bearing fruit. This belies the spirit in which these discussions were held. There was nothing political about them. The Government of the time, GONHS and the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic were working together on this. Indeed, Dr Cortes, this time at his own expense, visited the park in question to assess the suitability of the area that was being assigned to the macaques and to try to increase the number of macaques they would accept. GONHS and the GVC were also assisting in trying to sort out the logistics of the exercise. At the time of the elections, these discussions were not complete, and costings, which were expected to be high, had not yet been finalised. Following the election, Dr Cortes, now as Minister, held further discussions with the local representatives of the Park, discussions which have not yet been completed one way or the other.

“Other” African country

Contacts with Morocco on possible exportation have been ongoing for many years. During 2011 there were some contacts made via a local business representative to some Moroccan authorities. These did not prove fruitful at the time, a fact that cannot be blamed on anyone.

Discussions continue at present on all fronts. The most significant and outrageous statement by Mr Figueras, however, is that there is ‘absolutely no issue of the GSD Government failing to heed advice given to them’.

There is plentiful evidence in correspondence from both GONHS and the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic going back many years that advice and requests for resources went unheeded.

A few extracts of reports and letters are given below.

Extract of a letter from the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic to the then Chief Minister, October 2007:

“... the following has been advised;

1. Stopping the feeding of the macaques by the general public, this ‘trains’ the animals to expect food and this leads to bite incidents on a regular basis.
2. Eliminating the common practice by tour operators who encourage the macaques to jump on tourists’ shoulders. There is obvious risk to the

- general public as well as the macaques as a result of this type of unnatural interaction.
3. Upgrading of the sites, all the sites are derelict and rundown. The current condition of the sites does not allow proper cleaning —resulting in faecal and/or urine surface contamination. Infectious agents can be shed in the macaques' faeces and urine.
 4. Provisions in the Nature Reserve of adequate facilities for the general public to wash their hands and to have any bite wounds tended to.
 5. An interpretation centre and signs around the monkey sites educating the general public about the macaques--- their behaviour, ecology, history and conservation status as well as the potential for cross-species disease transmission.
 6. Site attendants/wardens who can multitask and supervise tourists as well as give some general knowledge on the macaques.”

Extract of a letter from the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic to the then Minister for the Environment, October 2006:

“Unfortunately, there has been a chronic neglect over the last seven years and although funds are promised every year this money is either redirected to other areas or not used for some other unknown reason. It is my view that this is resulting in all the problems that we are encountering today with many monkeys roaming into town.

“If Government is not prepared to fund the infrastructure required for the regeneration of these sites, then Government should understand that there will be no change from the current situation and if anything the problems currently encountered are likely to worsen as the population of roaming packs increases with the passage of time.”

Extract of letter from Dr Cortes while GONHS General Secretary to Government, October 2006:

“I should point out that during contract discussions back in 1999 we requested sufficient resources to allow site supervision and more hours of monitoring of the monkeys. This was not agreed by Government, which substantially reduced the funds available. We predicted that despite our best efforts, given the resources provided, there could be occasions when the situation would not be to our satisfaction....

“We accepted the contract in good faith, understanding that more funds were not for the moment possible, and expecting similar good faith in return. We hoped in addition that on discussing the contract renewal, our difficulties would receive sympathetic attention and that these limitations would be addressed. Sadly there have been no discussions on a new contract. Had there been, perhaps some of the problems that are perceived now would have been realised and resolved. Nevertheless, we have continued working, again in good faith, with full trust in the Government to eventually return this goodwill.”

Extract of report to Government by Dr Cortes when GONHS General Secretary, October 2006:

“However, the matter cannot be forgotten once the reduction of numbers is achieved and complaints from the public cease. The following still have to happen, in order of importance:

- illegal feeding and intimate macaque-human interaction be stamped out
- if possible, site supervision be introduced by persons knowledgeable enough to be able to talk to visitors and interpret the monkey’s behaviour and biology; such supervision could be extended to include attendance at roaming groups
- feeding and watering sites be improved
- possibly a later second feed be introduced, largely of grain”

(of these points, only the last was introduced, four years after the report was submitted)

Extract of letter to Government, March 2006:

“The main point here is that it is not the number of monkeys that creates these problems, but their conditioning to associating humans with rich foods.

“Until this problem is taken seriously by Government and the law enforcement agencies, no matter how few monkeys there are, there will be incidents like the ones you describe. There is plenty of historical evidence to support this.”

Extract of letter to Government, dated 8 December 2005:

“We have repeatedly pointed out to Government that the ape situation has to be radically changed and that the present tolerance of bad practice and law infringement must cease. Absolute implementation of our recommendations is essential if the incidents described by the GTB are to be avoided. This would require law enforcement with Police support.

“The kind of problem we are experiencing here is not unique to Gibraltar. It happens with long-tailed macaques in Bali, bears in the USA, and dingoes in Australia. Where wild animals are encouraged to be fed by humans, they will respond in the same way.

“Given the resources and genuine backing GONHS would of course warden the sites, as we have often said in the past. However, at this point in time we cannot accept any responsibility whatsoever for the actions of the monkeys. The responsibility lies squarely on those who have not acted on our recommendations in the past.

“I think it is important to note that, while at the moment Government does not accept liability for injuries and damage caused by the apes, the above

arguments, that is the lack of action on clear recommendations, could eventually be represented as negligence possibly making Government liable in Law.”

Mr Figueras should refrain from continuing his spate of unjustified attacks, as he could end up being even more embarrassed than he already is.