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**PRESS RELEASE**

No: 667/2013

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> September 2013

**"Ad hoc" talks does not mean four sides says Government**

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar does not share the view expressed by Spain's Minister of State Gonzalo de Benito regarding the structure for "ad hoc" dialogue that is currently under discussion between Gibraltar, the United Kingdom and Spain.

The Foreign Secretary William Hague made it clear to Mr Margallo - in writing and in agreement with the Government of Gibraltar - that his proposal for "ad hoc" talks was not for four parties (the UK, Spain, Gibraltar and the regional authorities in Andalucia) to meet alongside the EU Commission. The Foreign Secretary specifically emphasised that the proposal is for parties that are relevant to issues being discussed to be present at any such discussions. In some instances that might mean two parties meeting, or three. In some instances that may mean four or more parties. There is no fixed number and no question of the parties always being four.

It is therefore misleading for Mr de Benito to continuously refer to four parties and to give the impression that these four would meet all the time with other relevant entities joining in as and when required.

It is also important to recall that it is Madrid that has turned its back on dialogue with Gibraltar until now.

The Trilateral Forum was already in existence when the present Spanish Government was elected and all they had to do was put items on the agenda and agree to a meeting. The concern raised by Spain that sovereignty discussions could take place under this Forum is a complete red herring because the Gibraltar Government has specifically repeatedly said it has no intention of discussing sovereignty with Spain, in the same way as the Spanish Government has no intention of discussing it with Gibraltar. Therefore on that basis Spain could simply have renewed the Forum with the UK and Gibraltar rather than terminated it. Moreover, the policy decision taken by Madrid not just to abandon the Forum, but to also turn the clock back and undo the agreements that were arrived at under it, raises even more serious issues.

The statements by Mr de Benito yet again make clear that the length of the frontier queues has a political genesis. This helps to demonstrate beyond doubt that the measures at the frontier are politically motivated and therefore unlawful.

A spokesman for the Government of Gibraltar said: "Madrid made a serious error of judgement in abandoning the Trilateral Forum. The present situation stems directly from this decision that they took as a Government at the end of 2011 when the Partido Popular was elected into office. It predates the so called "fishing dispute" and the creation of a reef to protect the marine environment. The absence of dialogue and formal communication between Spain and Gibraltar has meant that there is no framework in which issues can be discussed and a better understanding of each other's position on those issues can be arrived at."

#### NOTES TO EDITORS:

HMGoG understands that an FCO spokesperson has said: "The proposals made in the Foreign Secretary's letter are for ad hoc talks that avoid any labels. This means that parties that are relevant to issues being discussed can be present at any discussions. There is no question of the ad hoc talks always involving four parties plus the EU Commission – i.e. a de-facto quadrilateral."