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PRESS RELEASE

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GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY BRIEFED THE OPPOSITION

HM Government of Gibraltar notes the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in a recent GBC interview in which he suggested that he and the Chief Minister should get together to 'try and agree a common message that we can take to Spain and...divide speaking engagements' between them.

It is important to note that this Government invited the previous Leader of the Opposition to travel as part of the Gibraltar delegation to the UN's Committee of 24 but the invitation was declined because the GSD policy has consistently been not to attend C-24 sessions.

It would also be useful for the Government to emphasise that, since his appointment, the Leader of the Opposition has already had a number of briefings by the Chief Minister at No 6 Convent Place and to stress that both the Chief Minister and his Ministers frequently share privileged information, 'behind the Speaker's Chair' with their opposite numbers in the Opposition – something that was not previously so common.

Furthermore, the Chief Minister has frequently spelled out his intention to establish a body similar to the UK's Privy Council in which the Opposition and others can be briefed confidentially on matters of national importance. The Government has consistently sought to move away from unnecessary partisanship on matters of national importance and wishes the Opposition to be briefed, in confidence, on such matters. These briefings have previously been refused by the GSD in issues where the Chief Minister has offered them in the public interest. The Chief Minister offered such briefings again in this latest session of Parliament and will shortly be contacting the Leader of the Opposition in this regard.

This approach, which puts Gibraltar first, has represented a major shift in the way that Gibraltar's Parliament does business: it is not something that has ever been done before and it is certainly not something that happened under the previous administration, even when Gibraltar was faced with the problematic issue of joint sovereignty.

This Government therefore believes that it is important to formalise this process which demonstrates how our democracy has matured under this administration and to establish

a “Privy Council-style” body for Gibraltar in lasting terms, so that opportunities for confidential briefings can continue and can outlast this administration. With this in mind, the Government intends to introduce the necessary legislation and establish procedures to this effect during the lifetime of this Parliament.

On a lighter note, this Government has frequently invited Members of the Opposition to social events and, unlike its predecessor, this Government invites the Leader of the Opposition to Gibraltar Day in London!

However, the Leader of the Opposition is clearly not as well briefed as he should be: in the GBC interview he said that ‘Gibraltar has signed 27 Agreements for exchange of tax information.’ In fact Gibraltar has over 100 tax information exchange arrangements in force to the OECD or equivalent standard.