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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Statement by the Chief Minister on comments made by HE the Governor**

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar notes the various statements made in relation to His Excellency the Governor's remarks on the programme "Talk About Town" on GBC.

The Chief Minister, Hon Fabian Picardo QC MP, has made the following statement:

"The Government does not share the view that the 2006 Constitution was in any measure simply "an over-reaction" to the Joint Sovereignty initiative. It is nonetheless important that Gibraltar should be aware that this view is held in some quarters.

The best objective evidence of this is the fact is that the negotiation of the Gibraltar Constitution occurred at a time when most, if not all, the Constitutions of all the other Overseas Territories were being negotiated. Most now include similar if not identical clauses and/or mechanisms in many respects. This process pre-dated the Joint Sovereignty initiative.

The Government considers that whatever the description of the 2006 Gibraltar Constitution Order that anyone may prefer, the Constitution is the touchstone of our laws, our administration and our system of government and it must be respected by all citizens. It must also be respected that those who may now think that it was an "over-reaction" and that it went too far.

Moreover, it also not possible for the Government to share the view that the Joint Sovereignty initiative was an emanation of Minister's alone and not of Foreign Office officials.

In the first place, the history of Gibraltar is littered with examples of different kinds of sovereignty proposals being mooted including a lease-back, a condominium and joint sovereignty leading to full Spanish sovereignty. The proposals of 2001-2 were one more from a thick file which was clearly already in existence.

Secondly, a senior member of the Foreign Office made clear to the Deputy Chief Minister, Hon Joseph Garcia MP and Minister for Employment and Inward Investment, Hon Joe Bossano MP, that the Joint Sovereignty plan had been prepared by officials. He confirmed it had first been presented to the then Foreign Secretary Rt Hon Robin Cook (deceased) who had rejected it. It was later presented to his successor Rt Hon Jack Straw MP and Europe Minister Peter Hain MP who decided to advance it, in consultation with former Prime Minister Rt Hon Tony Blair, at a time of ongoing co-operation with Spain in the Second Iraq War.

It is certainly true to say that I enjoy an excellent personal relationship with His Excellency, Sir Jim Dutton, even though we may not agree on all issues. It is normal in such a relationship that there should be discussion over a broad range of matters. This happened with the present Governor, with the former Governor Sir Adrian Johns and with Foreign Office Ministers and officials. The result of these discussions is that the United Kingdom and Gibraltar have been working together in lock-step across a whole portfolio of different matters and that everyone, from the Prime Minister downwards, have been very supportive of Gibraltar. On constitutional issues, as with everything else, the position of Gibraltar is always based on proper legal interpretation, meticulous research and sound advice following established principles of good government and good corporate governance. As such, the Gibraltar view has - in my time in Government so far - always prevailed.

From my contact with him, Jim Dutton appears to be coming to understand Gibraltar and I can certainly say he has in my presence been a strong advocate for Gibraltar and its people. I believe he will continue to be even more of a positive advocate for Gibraltar as he progresses further along the learning curve and beds down his understanding of us as an open minded, multi-cultural and tolerant people whose community is, in many respects, the envy of the rest of world."