

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Financial Secretary's Appointment**

- Albert Mena exactly the right man for the job
- Imputation against his integrity totally unfair and improper

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar notes the alleged concerns raised by the Opposition regarding the appointment of the Financial Secretary, Albert Mena. However, given that this matter has already been the subject of Parliamentary questions and numerous Government press statements, it is ironic that the matter, and indeed Mr Bossino's letter dated 6 November 2014, have been re-surfaced in the week before the Budget, not by Mr Bossino himself as a member of the Opposition, but by the GSD spokesman Robert Vasquez, who is not a member of Parliament and who only recently joined the GSD and its executive.

The Opposition are well aware that, in addition to answering Mr Bossino's Parliamentary questions, the Chief Minister has discussed the matter with Mr Bossino face-to-face on several occasions. The Government considers these discussions to be an appropriate and proportionate response by the Chief Minister to Mr Bossino's letter, which had been addressed to him personally.

For the sake of Mr Vasquez, who seems unfamiliar with established procedure regarding the appointment of Financial Secretaries and the Parliamentary discussions regarding this particular appointment, the Government will reiterate its position on the matter once again.

Firstly, established procedure dictates that vacancies for the post of Financial Secretary are not required to be advertised. The previous Chief Minister, Sir Peter Caruana QC MP, who Mr Vasquez now says he greatly admired despite previously strongly criticising him, established the principle that the posts of Chief Secretary, Chief Technical Officer, Financial Secretary, Chief Legal Adviser (when Mr Llamas was appointed to the post by Sir Peter Caruana QC) and the posts of those representing Gibraltar abroad, were posts directly by the Chief Minister. The same standard exists in the United Kingdom in relation to the post of Cabinet Secretary.

This administration, whilst in Opposition, never quibbled with that practice in relation to these particular posts given their importance in the structure of the administration. We were concerned about many other direct appointments made by the GSD administration.

Secondly, regarding the GSD's apparent concern that Mr Mena is not a career Civil Servant, the Government remind them that in any case, there is only one previous occasion when a Financial Secretary has been appointed from within Gibraltar's Civil Service. Mr Mena's case is not an aberration, it is



therefore the norm in recent times. Furthermore, as the Chief Minister disclosed in Parliament, there was nobody inside the Civil Service who was either recommended for the position of Financial Secretary or indeed who wanted to take the post. The Government considers this to be the result of a total absence of succession planning throughout the previous administration and has taken steps to fill yet another one of the vacuums left by the GSD's short-sightedness. Programmes like the recently announced opportunity for Gibraltar Civil Servants to take part in training schemes are the beginning of addressing that problem in a sustainable manner.

Finally, Mr Mena works wholly and exclusively for Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar throughout his secondment from Hassans. Any concerns that there may be a conflict of interest arising from his secondment are totally without merit. As the Leader of the Opposition is a Partner of Hassans, he should have no concerns about this.

The Chief Minister, the Hon. Fabian Picardo QC MP, said: 'I have already answered the Opposition's concerns on this matter in Parliament and in my personal contacts with Mr Bossino. In future, Mr Vasquez may wish to think twice before imputing improper motives to a highly reputable individual, whose expertise and ability is second to none, and to the Government which appointed him. That is what Mr Vasquez did in his clumsy GBC interview. What is clear is that the Opposition is not trying to get at any transparency here, as the appointment is fully transparent. All they are trying to do is to further their campaign of undermining everything the Government does, without any regard whatsoever to whether that is good or bad for Gibraltar. What I am particularly happy to do is confirm that, amongst the people who I consulted before I appointed Mr Mena were current and past Chief Secretaries, the current Principal Auditor, the then Financial Secretary, the Accountant General, the Commissioner for Income Tax and Senior Administrator, as well as senior partners of Hassans and other law firms and accountancy practices in Gibraltar, including the founder of the GSD himself, the Hon Peter Montegriffo QC. All agreed with me that, given the refusal from those within the civil service who might have been able to do the job of Financial Secretary, Albert Mena stood out as the obvious choice for everyone and as the right man for the job. The work he has done in the short time he has been in post demonstrates that Dilip Daryanam, Ernesto Gomez, Ernest Montado (who had acted as Financial Secretary in the many years he was Chief Secretary and who actually fully supported and encouraged me to make the appointment and thought it a brilliant idea), Ms Christine Victory, Peter Montegriffo QC, Jimmy Posso, Frank Carreras and the many others who I consulted at the time were right in their recommendation and in their agreement that Mr Mena would do the fantastic job he is now indeed doing for Gibraltar. Albert Mena is the best qualified Financial Secretary Gibraltar has ever had, qualified as a Chartered Accountant and Barrister and the youngest ever President of the Gibraltar Association of Accountants. His calibre as a professional is unimpeachable. He does not deserve that the service he is giving the Community should be either clumsily or deliberately besmirched by Mr Feetham and Mr Vasquez in this way. Their pernicious innuendos are a transparent ploy to tarnish his unblemished reputation for honesty, integrity and hard work. What is particularly telling is that this matter is now being pursued by a recent convert to the GSD, who was previously highly critical of them in Government, and not by the current Deputy Leader of the GSD, Mr Bossino."