



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Celebrating the Achievements of Team Gibraltar at the Special Olympics World Winter Games**

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017 Minister for Equality, Samantha Sacramento MP, hosted a cinema screening and reception in honour of the Special Olympics athletes who attended the World Winter Games held in Austria earlier this year.

The event was attended by the Chief Minister Fabian Picardo, Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia and the Minister for Sports Steven Linares. There were over 130 guests, including athletes and their families, Special Olympics committee members, coaches and volunteers, members of the essential services and sponsors.

The evening was kicked off at Leisure Cinemas with a screening of a short film documenting the experiences and achievements of Team Gibraltar at the Special Olympics World Winter Games. The screening aimed to celebrate the athletes' achievements, share the experience with family and friends who could not attend the Games in person and to raise awareness of the Special Olympics movement locally.

In March 2017 15 athletes, 7 coaches, the Head of Delegation Annie Risso MBE, assistant Head of Delegation Caine Sanchez, and family members and supporters attended the Games in Austria. Gibraltar's athletes did spectacularly well and returned with 2 gold medals, 2 silver medals and 1 bronze medal.

The short film encapsulates the Gibraltar team's experience in Austria and explains what Special Olympics means to the athletes and their families. The aim was to capture this moment and showcase the unique experience of Special Olympics and the social value of participation. It demonstrates the amazing team spirit and fun that was had.

The Government fully supports the Special Olympics and is in the process of developing a purpose built facility for Special Olympics in the Europa area, which will contain a sports hall, gym, changing rooms, treatment room, office, kitchen and restaurant. The site will, needless to say, be fully accessible to individuals with physical disabilities.



Minister Sacramento for Equality, the Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, said: "I have become truly immersed in the Special Olympics movement over the last 5 years and I would like everyone to be aware of its value and benefits. The true social value and the enjoyment it brings to people and families is something that is only really understood after direct involvement.

"The aim of Special Olympics is to improve and enhance the lives of people with learning disabilities through sport. It is about inclusion, acceptance and setting goals. Above all it is about celebrating individual abilities and talents and bringing out the true potential in each athlete.

"Our Government totally supports the Special Olympics movement and wonderful work has been done by my colleague Steven Linares, the Minister for Sports, in developing a purpose-built complex for Special Olympics which will help the team further their goals and ideals.

"I would encourage anyone considering joining Special Olympics to do so, and I would also invite individuals and organisations to consider how they can be involved in supporting Special Olympics in any way, whether as a coach, unified partner, volunteer or sponsor. Inclusion matters to all of us and we are individually and collectively responsible to see it happen at every level.

"My heartfelt thanks go to Annie Risso, her committee and all the volunteers who make Special Olympics a reality in Gibraltar."

Minister for Sport, the Hon Steven Linares MP, said: "Out of the four major projects of sports the Special Olympics complex is the one that is closest to my heart because of my profession as a special education needs teacher. This new complex will help not only the Special Olympics athletes but it will also help all our community, who can also use the facilities, and therefore be truly inclusive."

Annie Risso MBE, President of Special Olympics Gibraltar, said: "Special Olympics is about more than sports. It is about changing attitudes, acceptance and finding equality in all aspects of life for persons with intellectual disability. In offering to support Special Olympics, Minister for Equality Samantha Sacramento had the brainwave of arranging for a film crew to cover the Winter Games in Austria. This 15 minute video has demonstrated and captured the essence of what Special Olympics is about.

"At the Leisure Centre last night there were tear-jerking moments whilst watching the different emotions on the athletes' faces; the joy, the struggles, the winning, the losing and the dedication of the coaches helping the athletes enjoy and deal with their experiences.

"My heartfelt thanks go to Minister Sacramento for her continuing support, her vision of how to help further the awareness and her presence at World Games since 2014. Today, her active involvement in Special Olympics Gibraltar and her participation in the Global Forum in Austria have elevated our standing within this great international movement. Our athletes have always been quoted by our Government as great ambassadors and I would like to add that Minister Sacramento has become that within the Special Olympics family."