

SPEECH: Felix Alvarez, Chairman ERG

Final version of the speech delivered on 17th May 2017

KEY POINTS

1. Reasons why
2. Brexit is Breakfast? (1969-1984 again?)
3. Media
4. Politicians and Parties
5. Injustice in Justice?
6. Drugs Reform
7. Poverty Trap in Gibraltar

- Thanks to all **attendees**. To members of the Public, who've responded to our invitation. To all the award nominees attending today. To Charles Trico, Secretary of ERG. To Vincent Acris, Mr. Gibraltar, for helping us with the proceedings. Also this year to Gibraltar Women's Association and Stay Clean. And to both **Unite the Union** for once more accepting our invitation to participate in this event, and to members of the media for their coverage, with last but not least to **Jennifer Ballantine and Chris Tavares of the Garrison Library** for allowing and arranging for us to be here in these beautiful surroundings. Thank you – all of you. Very, very much.

1. Reasons why

- This Independent Civil Society Awards event was first imagined 4 years ago as a result of what we believe.
- In ERG, we believe that Civil Society (that's you; that's us) is the material means by which to promote and strengthen any democracy, and without which there can be none. We believe it's not just the politicians and the political parties that matter. They have a role, of course they do. We've created it for them. **But we employ them – not the other way round!**
- Because we are the bit, in all of this, that accounts for Democracy being kept on its toes. We are the Parliament that is required to sit in session 24/7/365.
- And we have learnt from History what happens if we don't! We are the ones ultimately responsible for making sure freedom, justice and democracy are realities. We believe, I believe, that without **us** (Civil Society) Democracy is incomplete. There are countries where they have a Judiciary, a Parliament and a Government, important elements of the Rule of Law. Yet Civil Society is locked up or silenced. **That isn't the Rule of Law: that is the Law of Rule!**

- The crucial word in the title of this annual event is: INDEPENDENT. Dependence we Gibraltarians know a great deal about. It is comfortable for some on many levels. But it cannot take us to where we need to be: a healthy, free-standing Democracy which can challenge nepotism, the traffic of influence, corruption, and gives everyone an equal opportunity. A tall order, I know. But who said anything worthwhile was ever going to be easy? Progress often demands we tread beyond our comfort zones.
- ERG has come a long way since we first launched and started meeting back in the year 2000. And from day one, our position and ethos have always been clear: we stand for solidarity, and we stand for a manner of campaigning for human and civil rights in our community that is predicated on an ethical foundation. That means that ERG will always praise where praise is due. And it will criticise openly where it is also due. But neither I as Chairman nor ERG as an organisation will EVER be any Party's or any politician's poodle. When we have to say something we WILL say it. First in a discreet and private manner. And if necessary in an open and public way. I do not need to convince any of you of this: you will have seen it. For, as an equality, human and civil rights voice we take our duty to stand up and speak out seriously. It's a role this community rightly expects of us. And, in fact, it's to Government's full credit that they have understood our role as a necessarily autonomous, if at times **bloody inconvenient** organisation; and that they have continued to fund us since 2012 *regardless*.
- We all have different views, different angles from which we come to our responsibilities. But it is our hope that we can grow a sense of common exercise. This said, Unite the Union, Stay Clean, the Women's Association and others who are today participating with us in this Annual event are more than welcome. But let me make clear, by way of exculpation: we are together in our aims, but none of them is to be held responsible for anything I might say today. They are, I assure you, NOT GUILTY! And, as always, if perchance there is error in any of my assertions, I welcome correction, adjustment and acknowledgment
- And as I review developments over this last, extremely eventful year for us, there is a long list I need to go through and comment on. And I ask your patience.

2. **Brexit is Breakfast? (1969-1984 again?)**

- There is a wind of disconnection blowing through the landscape. Brexit, Trump, Macron. Disaffection is palpable. And people are voting for it! We cannot avoid asking ourselves: WHY?
- And Gibraltar? Are we an exception? It's an important concern for us all to ponder.

- In late 2011, this Administration came to power and generated a sense of renewal. Others before it had, similarly, carried enthusiasm in their day. Both in their different approaches brought new thinking and new fruits to the table in their own way. That's why we chose them when we did. Whatever side in this binary we may be on, it behoves us to be as objective in our judgement as our opinions will allow.
- And, being objective and to-the-point, the GSLP/Liberal Government has done a very great deal for equality and human and civil rights since it was given power by us in 2011. We have made huge strides in areas that had been stagnant for too long; prominently, ofcourse, on the question of LGBT rights. We've gone from very very little achieved under Mr Caruana on this front¹ – except as forced upon him by the Judicial system - to Civil Partnership for both LGBT and heterosexual couples, protections against Hate Crime and Hate Speech, same-sex adoption. These things were done voluntarily – **but, that's true, yes, after almost a decade and a half of ERG's pressure and campaigns, ofcourse.** But they did it. That is something we acknowledge and appreciate. One Civil Marriage Law for All has also been achieved under this Government. Though, on this occasion, with less of a voluntary feel to it: ERG had to run a hard-hitting public campaign to put significant pressure on a hesitant Executive, which was in due course persuaded by the arguments, but also by the overwhelming public clamour for change.
- Our role as a campaigning organisation must always maintain a high level of ethics and non-partisanship. Noone can ask for solidarity or fair treatment if they are not also willing to be fair and give solidarity towards others first. We cannot make noise on our behalf and call for help (and even be freely given it) yet also be among the first to stand **spectacularly silent** when those who stood for us are calling out. That, unfortunately, is too common an occurrence in Gibraltar. It is not a source of pride; rather, a lantern to selfishness and to our own failures to ourselves. There's an Arabic riposte when someone insults you: IHTIRAM NEFSAK! It means: 'RESPECT YOURSELF'. For when we insult another it's a sign of our own disrespect to ourselves. We have failed ourselves. When we take solidarity but stand deaf and dumb to another's need, we are doing precisely that: disrespecting OURSELVES. No, **we must chase down the inhuman and the unjust and stand by those in need, and let them know they are not alone.**
- This yearly event however is committed to repair and to heal.
- All of this, ofcourse, makes ERG an uncomfortable entity for politicians and Political Parties. We're constantly reminded of that fact. Democracy is NOT easy-peasy! It's hard work! And not just talking but LIVING Democracy is untidy. Especially when independent voices dare to talk through the otherwise convenient narratives of those of influence and power.

¹ It's notable, though, that then Justice Minister, Daniel Feetham, attempted to equalise the age of consent in June 2009, with the support of 3 other GSD Ministers. Unfortunately, it was a move destined to failure as his own GSD Government voted against the initiative, and the GSLP/Libs block voted against it.

- **SOMOS LA MOSCA COJONERA.** Of that let there be NO doubt!
- We are, after all, **INSISTING** that the focus be shifted back to YOU. That the centre of all Democracy is YOU. That Sovereignty is YOURS. That the importance belongs to YOU. And that YOU pay them to do YOUR job. In short, we in Civil Society have the obligation to hold the political class always to account. Every day. Not every 4 years!
- And in our Gibraltarian culture of deference or bowing heads, who else is going to be the fly in the ointment that stands up and shouts out ‘the Emperor has no clothes’ when everyone else is faithfully applauding the fine apparel? The answer to that is independent Civil Society. Again, ALL of us. Not alone. Not separately. But together.
- And today that togetherness is more important than ever. Because **Brexit could all too easily be Breakfast!** It’s the beginning of a potentially dangerous chain of possibilities that, if we’re not alert, could sweep us to destinations we far from desire.
- **Gibraltar has played with the wrong cards for far too long.** Spain’s campaign against Gibraltar has been a consistent, long-term public relations exercise using one particular word ‘anachronism’. And Gibraltar has always played straight into the trap. We have played into the ‘Little England In the Sun’ image – whether in our politics, or in the increasing *imitativeness* of our political architecture; and even in the manner we have sold ourselves to tourism and foreign investment. ‘Gibraltar is just a quaint version of old England.
- **But that ‘green and pleasant land’ is not Jerusalem any more.** It has learnt to move on from being old. A very large sector of its population has moved away from dreams of imperialism. It has a distaste for an unpleasant past, though it is comforted by the pageantry of safety and certainty. Gibraltar is not, as a well-photographed, monument next to CEPSA exaggeratedly claims, ‘the cradle of history’. We’re not the Sumerians, or the Ancient Egyptians or Athenians. Though yes, the Neanderthals and the Phoenicians did visit us. **Yet we are special in our own way.** We DO have a lot to offer of our own. We just don’t like to step out of the comfort of certainty and guarantees. Yet survival and development REQUIRE us, however, to overcome a tendency to risk aversion.
- Because it’s precisely this tendency that has alienated an extremely wide swathe of Britain to both the Right and to the Left: the open-minded who constantly push British society’s margins towards intellectual, technological and social and political innovation. For them – and for many decades now – they are unable to see beyond the ‘anachronism’ of the long Spanish narrative; they have a very real distaste for reminders of an Imperialistic past. Projecting ourselves in image as well as in fact, NOT as a fortress of past values but as a port of progress,

innovation and new horizons in a context of a People determined to rule over themselves; fighting Spain's imperialistic claim is going to be more understood. **It's *their* vocabulary!**

- And yes, it's true that we've done some of all that. But the trouble is we've not been able to fully demonstrate it in social fact. Our society is only now catching up!
- Acting to the opposite effect produces what we have now: a not insignificant 'Fifth Column' within the UK undermining Gibraltar's interests for lack of 'connection'.
- Because, yes, we have ignored them. Our positioning has been unstrategic, opting as we have for anachronistic sympathies ALONE. Note that I am saying 'ALONE'. Our appeal, the pitch we have played to has been exclusive. Thus, the Jack Straws, Peter Hains, Tony Blairs, and even Corbyns of the political scenery in Britain, feel distanced from us. To them, we are precisely part of what prevents the UK moving forward from Empire into the modern role in the world that she has been trying to refashion for herself since the end of Empire, and which has now received a further kick with Brexit. Sympathy from their quarters, therefore, is in short supply – no matter what they may incant to the public gallery, or in their Manifestoes.
- SO the clock has struck for us too. We must be more willing to move forward. It's no longer an option. It's a matter of what works in our favour. What allows us not only to survive but also to thrive. And for that we must build our support, our alliances. We cannot afford to ignore directing ourselves to those we have distanced for too long. We must take risks. Yes. Welcome to the real world!
- Brexit and the developing scenario, then, is another perfect opportunity to be seized – for good or for bad. Under its umbrella, all manner of steps backwards for our ordinary people can happen, and maybe already are! Just as 'British We Are, British We Stay!' was the cover-all for our social decline during the border closure years, Brexit can also potentially become the catch-all 'understandable' block to our continuing growth and development.

3. MEDIA:

- Can we rely on a free and independent media in Gibraltar to stand firm in the protection of our developing Democracy? Can we? How do we know? These questions have little to do either with the intent or the professionalism of media workers themselves². But they have very much to do with questioning the system

² ERG recognised the important role of media in Gibraltar and presented Awards to GBC, Gibraltar Chronicle, Panorama and Leo Olivero in May 2015. Critically looking at the System does not diminish merit of our media professionals at all.

in which they find themselves and for which, in our view, we have to collectively find answers.

- Censorship and lack of full independence can come in different flavours. Where the State plays a big part in supporting outlets financially or otherwise, a newspaper, radio or tv station may provide quality, unbiased coverage on a number of areas **but still avoid reporting** on the government or other powerful social players, and when they do, may do so in the mildest of terms. In other words, media professionals, **against their better judgement**, may at times feel unable to hold power fully accountable with the insistence and continued insistence they require; an essential role for the Press in any democracy.
- **There's also self-censorship**, where editors decide not to follow a story out of fear or deference to authority, or choose to downplay criticism from anything other than 'safe' institutional voices. Finally, and usually hidden from view, is **indirect censorship** where financial pressure on outlets may be implied when they appear to be unacceptably critical of authority. Another side of the same currency could be the exercise of background influence on promotion and other prospects.
- All of these forms of control of media can go largely unnoticed, yet the impact on the journalistic standards of the media can be dramatic on the quality of informational objectivity and democracy we experience as citizens. **Are Media in Gibraltar free of any or all of these? Because if there's any doubt at all, we have to do something about it. The media, its professionals and its ability to be independent are THAT important to us all!**
- For the past few years, ERG has asked for consideration and discussion about safeguards for regulation of the way the media is set up in Gibraltar. Noone has cared to listen. We have raised, over and over again, the dilemma we are in with respect to the Media: what is to prevent people who are too close for comfort to powerful politicians from controlling our media outlets in Gibraltar? What effective and independent oversight, checks and balances and scrutiny are there? An independent Media is such a vital, such a central part of any system of modern democracy that none of us in Gibraltar should simply be sleep-walking through this. Time and again, media professionals everywhere have been crucial to exposing corruption, abuse of power, and raised the voice of the voiceless. Yet here our media workers – whether they be reporters, editors, management, technical staff or administrators – are unprotected. They see and hear things but may be unable to speak out themselves.
- And society at large, what recourse does it have with respect to the media? We widely recognise that the public has a right to be informed. It's for that very reason, *that public interest*, that the Media exists in the first place. Short of defamation suits – which are a completely different kettle of fish to what I'm touching on here today in this respect – what relief is available to it in the face of

Gibraltar's media organisations? Well, the Chronicle has its Charter – which, if you're dissatisfied with the paper's own adjudication and prefer an independent ruling, you'll have to be able to mount an expensive challenge at Supreme Court level. And GBC is also difficult to contend with in similar circumstances – except here the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority deals with the bigger picture. Not a wholly open, democratic or even amenable system. In a word, it's far from being encouraging!

- Following our publicly expressed concerns on this most fundamental issue of the Media in Gibraltar, I invited senior management of Gibraltar outlets to discuss the matter; regrettably, GBC failed to respond to the request. The discussion with newspapers was as brief as it was clear; editorial management engaged were very, very satisfied with things precisely as they are. Their conclusion: nothing needs to be done.
- ERG disagrees with this view. And we do so from three fundamental points of departure:
 - a) In a tiny marketplace like Gibraltar, media independence is not viable on economic grounds alone. No radio or tv programme or newspaper can survive without being fed by Government. A problem for Democracy!
 - b) Given the heavy reliance on taxpayers' money, however, it is our view that both GBC and the Gibraltar Chronicle should be more amenable to taxpayers.
 - c) Since we raised the issue of Media reforms in Gibraltar, we have been approached by a growing number of media professionals – on an understanding of total anonymity, which we are not about to break – regarding ethical and employment problems they face. Both of those elements, I may add, derive directly out of the difficulties apparent within a system too-closely dependent on Power.
- ERG has been undertaking a Media Watch exercise. It's a big task. It'll take time. But we intend to continue building a set of objective and clearly demonstrable data which will assist us all in seeing precisely how independent our reporting may or may not be. Who is covered, who is not, and in what style and with what frequency. **I place emphasis on 'may or may not be'. It is important to us that information is as unbiased and clinical as possible.** To that extent, we have engaged in addressing some of our concerns by requesting the assistance of some international media monitoring organisations. On all counts, we shall be releasing more information in due course.

- Additionally, we are also in the early stages of exploring the bringing together of independent media and communication resources run entirely by Civil Society for Civil Society. This, too, is an ambitious enterprise, and we will provide further details in due course.

4. POLITICIANS & PARTIES:

- I'm critical of politicians and political Parties. I think that's quite clear, right?
- And I'm supposing some of you may share my concerns, and others not. But I'm very wary of what I see beginning to happen in our Gibraltar: I see the slow emergence of a political aristocracy.
- I've been and continue to be publicly critical of the establishment of a Consultative Council. Especially when it pretentiously imitates the British Privy Council. It's not consultation that is offensive; quite the opposite, that is always to be welcomed. But a Council that is formulated to consecrate and perpetuate some voices over others, that certainly *is* offensive and runs counter to the spirit of our age. And to the spirit of our Gibraltarian People's Revolt of the 1940s (which led to a number of independent Gibraltarian voices arising, including the AACR). The Council (and the way it's formulated) dangerously risks the positioning and consolidation unto itself of a social Gibraltarian oligarchy. Look at the political panorama today: more and more we are seeing the same families becoming dominant whether in wealth or in power and influence.
- Civil Society risks being more and more marginalised in favour of a tight circle of almost hereditary ruling names. Look around. You'll know what I mean. It's an old story with many precedents in History: ruling families, money and power. And the Consultative Council will ensure that, even when they no longer hold a democratic mandate, the same voices will continue to hold significant influence over major issues affecting Gibraltar. Again, and I cannot say it loudly enough, Civil Society risks being increasingly marginalised, its voice given less and less prestige, less and less prominence.
- And we are to blame. That is why I set such store on building awareness of Civil Society. No matter which Political Party you may support. We must work to prevent Gibraltar going down a route of privilege and power for some whilst ordinary people become less and less powerful and more and more dependent on the goodness of the few at the top.
- At the last elections in 2015, when invited to ask a question at GBC's public Candidates' Debate, I placed a question before both Mr. Picardo and Mr. Feetham. And that was to invite them both to reveal to the audience on prime time live television the sources of funding for their Parties and their Election Campaigns. Surprisingly, neither candidate did so. But they both replied as if of

one accord that they were working on making this available, implying they would do so soon. Let us hope so. It's important we know.

- But have you heard either Party revealing this information to the Public two years on almost from that question? And have they EVER been inclined to volunteer this information, I ask. And if not: why not? One reason is probably that we haven't asked loudly enough. **ERG HAS AND WILL CONTINUE DOING SO. We ask you to do likewise.**
- Because there is TOO much we the public still don't know here in our own homeland. How is wealth distributed in Gibraltar? In what private hands is our private wealth held? What percentage of our population owns what percentage of our overall wealth? This is, actually, fairly routine information made public in most modern Democracies. So, why are we in the dark here in Gibraltar on this?
- As ERG's publication 'From Town to City' (a copy of which has been provided for you today and we hope you will read) suggests: we're not a simple place any more. **We're now a City in deed not just in terminology – with all its subtle and unseen sociological consequences! Government and Power will slowly become more and more distant from us as they grow and become more complex.** Gone will be the 'Hi Minister' as you walk down Main Street and chase up an issue there and then. Just as the scaffolding is constantly rising and the sea is increasingly a stranger to our every day, this, too, is a reality unfolding before us as we speak; and one we need to fully awaken to – because it makes the strengthening of Civil Society *as a living force* ever more important and ever more urgent. **This I believe.**

5. INJUSTICE IN JUSTICE?

- As I also believe that our involvement in the protection of fundamental rights is unambiguously necessary. Through ignorance or indifference we can be unconsciously complicit with their erosion. For example, we need to be extremely protective of the right to independent justice through the Courts. It's a subject I call 'Injustice in Justice'. We STILL do not know when and if Government will issue their long-promised reforms for the Legal Aid & Legal Assistance Schemes. The right to access to such a fundamental democratic right cannot be decided by the size of your wallet.
- **NOR CAN IT BE** decided indirectly by immunising Government against legal actions by its citizenry. The patronage Government doles out to Law Firms in Gibraltar may be acting, perhaps unintentionally, precisely to this effect.
- And if anybody can explain I am mistaken or misinformed, I am happy to correct and acknowledge.

- For you see, the script we have all too often seen and heard in our work at ERG goes something like this:
- So you want to take action against, for example, the Gibraltar Health Authority? Do you have an issue with them? Do you believe you have been subjected to unfairness or negligence? Have you tried to find relief or remedy by all reasonable means but now are left with litigation as your only recourse? OK. Now, go out and find yourself a reputable and available lawyer.
- Time and again we have seen how individuals (oftentimes already labouring under the effects of anxiety, bureaucracy, lack of solutions, illness, injury or other aggravating circumstances that have brought them to this moment) may find themselves in this despairing situation. And while there may be no technical transgression strictly speaking, and the reasoning may appear valid enough. **But the effects, however, may not!**
- Government legal patronage means that Government reserves the services of particular law firms or lawyers to attend to its own representation in the Courts. It means John or Juani Brown coming to that firm or individual will need to seek representation elsewhere, since, having accepted the arrangement with Government, that law firm or individual lawyer will have to tell you they'd have a 'Conflict of Interest' because they're already taken up if they were to represent you. **Again, I am open to correction if I err.**
- But I have known people going around Gibraltar's law firms having to work their way down a list of lawyers like beggars holding out a cup, only to be turned away over and over and over again. Even if this happens ONLY ONCE: THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE. This cannot be permitted. This is a hard obstacle to the basic fundamental right to freedom of choice and to a fair hearing before the Law. Both Government and the Gibraltar Bar Council must question current arrangements and, with imperative attention, make the necessary adjustments to bring the situation to a swift end. *Citizens' right to representation cannot be trumped (apologies for mentioning that verb!) by Government's patronage or law firms' interests – regardless of which Party may be in power. This is a fundamental right at play!*

6. DRUGS REFORM

- Equality Rights Group could have sat pretty through all of this. We had achieved ALL of our founding year 2000 campaign objectives. Not *one* remains unachieved. We'd gone from total outcasts, derided, criticised and attacked by some pretty vocal politicians, groups and individuals – to what some would call 'success'. I could have taken a backseat cuddling my OBE and attending Garden Parties. But that was NEVER our agenda. We started this journey as we meant to carry on: to address the difficult challenges

brought to us by this Community. And in fulfilling that pledge we do not hesitate through fear to keep our word to Gibraltar.

- For the other big issue and reality facing us now is that of DRUGS REFORM. It's as real a reality as it is fact that what we've been doing for far too long on this issue JUST ISN'T WORKING. And that there's hardly any household, or any one of us, who doesn't have a friend, a family member, a co-worker or someone near and dear to us, who hasn't been directly or indirectly touched by substances of abuse. We all probably have a picture in our minds of someone right now. It can happen to ANYONE'S CHILD. ANYONE'S FRIEND.
- For the sake of rightness and of well-being, people of different opinions on this question must sit down and be willing to work together to see what we can do to be in a better place than we currently are on this problem in our Society. The War on Drugs approach has seen matters get worse, not better. Ironically, prohibiting drugs has only created more drugs of more varieties, more demand, more supply, and more health and crime problems everywhere. We have simply fed the criminals and grown the problem. **It may appear counter-intuitive to some, but the law enforcement paradigm just isn't the way forward any more, if ever it was!**
- We must care much more than this. **We cannot simply take a hammer to the problem, because all that happens then is that everything we encounter begins to look like a nail!** And people pay the price for that. Little people. Carrying on exactly as we have all these years for lack of political will and courage, for lack of objectivity and vision, with its emphasis on punishment and stigma, only leads to what we already have: a war **not** on drugs, but a war against people.
- The drugs issues is complex. Very complex.

There are many elements and factors we need to understand. The question of whether decriminalisation, legalisation, regulation of medicinal or recreational use of diverse substance requires more than a closed mind to information. It requires willingness to bring better approaches, better solutions to the table. ERG and Stay Clean in our joint 'Connected Health' proposals and Campaign, bring precisely that: **PROPOSALS**. Not Set-in-Stone-Preconceived-Agendas-And-Outcomes. We say: Gibraltar needs to open this box. **Seriously open it**. And look inside.

7. **POVERTY IN GIBRALTAR:**

- And look inside another box, too: Poverty.
- Poverty is, ofcourse, relative. The total destitution of people living on a Dollar a day in some unfortunate parts of this planet is not what we mean by Poverty

in Gibraltar. But because it IS a relative issue, the stigma, the insufficiency of people living in a poverty trap in Gibraltar is ALSO keenly felt. As a wealthy society we are even MORE obligated to tackle this issue.

- For yes, we DO have families in that situation here in Gibraltar: some who are disabled, some who are long-term unemployed for a number of reasons, women who prefer to NOT be dependent on the State and on the dole but for whom it makes no sense to continue working because their partner's pension is cut back as a result. People, in effect, falling foul of a system which, at times, traps them. Our welfare system needs to be more human, more flexible, less secretive and less bureaucratic.
- These are not just 'cases'. They're people. You may not know their reality when you pass them on Main Street. They remain mostly unseen or unheard. They're indistinguishable from the rest of the crowd. Some of them are with us today, sitting amongst you. And it's with one such person in particular that I want to leave you.
- For fear of repercussions, she prefers not to be identified, but would like to share her situation with you. Let's call her 'Ms. X'. You will have found a full handout about her situation on your seat*. It's titled 'Trapped: the Story of Ms. X – In her own words'. She is making a direct and open appeal to the Chief Minister. It is a cry for attention.
- It's a story of how a single British mother, resident in Gibraltar for a number of years now, finds herself gratefully occupying a tiny, tiny space with her young daughter in Gibraltar provided by a charitable organisation. On top of everything else, she cannot help but feel herself to be a nuisance through circumstances that any of us could be living through. She has appealed for assistance on many occasions. She and her child are suffering health-wise. Water and electricity supply have been a lingering problem. She manages to hold on, but wonders for how long: her health is rapidly deteriorating. She loves her child. She is a bright and capable person. But she's trapped.
- On behalf of ERG, I also appeal to the Chief Minister and to the Media to bring attention and resolution to her plight.

CLOSING REMARKS:

And with that - Gentlemen and Ladies - Ladies and Gentlemen:

I ask you again to accept my sincere apologies for having kept you so long. Thank you for your patience. And I shall be no more a beggar to your indulgence except to ask just one thing of you:

LIVE FEARLESSLY!

Thank you!

TRAPPED: THE STORY OF 'Ms. X'

In her own words

AN OPEN APPEAL TO THE CHIEF MINISTER

17th May 2017

Dear Chief Minister,

BACKGROUND:

- I'm a single mother. I have a daughter. She is 12 years of age. I know every mother out there will understand that I need to remain anonymous publicly for her sake, though I am fully willing to deal face-to-face with those in a position to help.
- Several years ago, I chose to build a future for my daughter and me in Gibraltar, so I relocated here for work and invested all my savings here in a start-up business; I invested in the region of £60,000 - all of it was lost when we were both involved in a Road Traffic Accident due to an oil slick at the Trafalgar Roundabout.
- I am as grateful now as I was on that day for the acceptance of a room for my child and me. What has prompted me to appeal for help is the fact that my child and I appear to have now become non-entities. We seem to have 'fallen through the cracks' of mechanisms. For simple humanity's sake, it is difficult to believe that we can simply be left without assistance or care, and in such desperate straits. I believe Gibraltar does care, and that is why I made a conscious choice to make this my home. I still have hope things can change for the better.
- I currently live in temporary/emergency charity accommodation and have done so for over 2 years. I am very grateful for this help but am also keenly aware that this space is not meant for me, but for people with different problems to mine, and for whom the Charity is designed to provide assistance. They have so put themselves out for me, however, but, in effect, I cannot help but feel 'a nuisance' and that I'm perhaps depriving someone else in need.
- I am no longer employed, which is a direct result of constantly struggling to cope with the ongoing situation, reaching out for help and being ignored. Ultimately, this is the price I have paid. All my energy and efforts have gone into reaching out for help to the Government and those who work for the community as a whole and the utter disregard I have felt has pushed me into ill health and, subsequently, to losing my job.
- I have reached out to Equality Rights Group for help. And I appeal for understanding and assistance from those in a position to extend a hand.

SPECIFICS:

- I occupy a living space of 12ft x 8ft room with my 12 year old daughter which is our living room, dining room and bedroom. I have no option but to store my personal belongings against each wall in the room, which has dramatically reduced the living space to a 5ft x 3ft living space.
- But I am homeless, with a young child, unable to afford expensive private rentals, and unable to qualify for anything else. I'm desperately trapped. I need help. I am an active, entrepreneurial stand-up-on-my-own-two-feet type of woman, and the impotence I live is only adding to these negative circumstances.
- I do not drink and have never taken drugs and pay my rent each month, I keep myself to myself and spend all my time in my room with my daughter. I live under a constant threat of being made completely homeless.
- I went to hospital on Monday 4th April for an operation on the top of my leg / hip area
- When I arrived home I discovered I had no hot water, but due to the anaesthetic, I fell asleep. My daughter arrived home from school and could not shower. My daughter and I have been completely disregarded in the matter, with no option but to shower in cold water again. I'd like to point out that my daughter has asthma and has had a bad cold since Christmas which she still has and is being exacerbated by showering in cold water. Her health and mine are both at risk, but still nothing is done.
- Despite numerous attempts throughout the last 2 years, I have made no progress in having any issues I have raised resolved, since moving into the premises over 2 years ago. It has affected my health to the point that I am now taking different types of medication for anxiety, in addition to Beta Blockers and medication to help me sleep. This is as a result of the events I've endured whilst living here, the situation and uncertainty I continue to face.
- For every possible solution I discover, there is a barrier, an obstacle. I have applied for a 50/50 but they won't be ready for another 4 years yet. If I am not eligible to go on the Housing List then please tell me what my options are. I am no scrounger: I like to work, pay taxes and abide by every obligation as a citizen. I believe Gibraltar is British and looks after it's citizens, but where do my daughter and I fit in to this? Where is the help and why are we not means tested? This would ultimately be a fairer way of assessing situations. It has been reiterated to me again and again that I will not be able to live in the current premises for the next 10 years until I can apply for a Government House. That option is certainly not my intention.
- In life, circumstances can unwind in a manner none of us would have predicted or wished. This has been my story. I appeal with all my heart, to ask for help. I have little else to hope for.

Thank you.