



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Government's Strong Policy on Drugs Will Remain Unchanged

The Government takes note, with concern, of today's joint press release by the Equality Rights Group and Stay Clean drugs charity in respect of the Minister with responsibility for drug rehabilitation and the forthcoming seminar organised by the Drug and Alcohol Awareness and Rehabilitation Service.

The ERG and Stay Clean use their latest press release as a vehicle to embark on a vitriolic personal attack on Minister Samantha Sacramento and, by default, on all the professionals tirelessly working in a dedicated and coordinated manner towards effectively addressing how drug misuse impacts on our community.

Insofar as the seminar, it is blatantly clear that they fail to see the objective of the seminar, which is to bring together all professionals at management and operational level, as well as to discuss the role of the department itself.

Minister Sacramento, in addition to having the responsibility for the provision of rehabilitation services at Bruce's Farm and in the Community, the Minister also has responsibility for developing policy and strategy for the whole of the Government. This involves the advice of professionals in various disciplines, including health professionals, particularly the GHA Medical Director and the Director of Public Health. All professionals in turn report to the Minister Sacramento on drugs matters.

Drug policy, while centralised in the drugs department, is not exclusively about just that department: it is about listening to the wealth of frontline expertise and experience that exists within our community and formulating a strategic approach that works across the whole spectrum. This ranges from a robust law enforcement approach to providing compassionate, accessible services that meet the needs of those placed in a vulnerable position because of drug misuse.

It is also vital that we give the right message about the risks of drug misuse. It is precisely both ERG and Stay Clean who may be putting vulnerable persons at risk by advocating policies which go against the expert opinion of all those at the forefront of drugs policy within our community, be they educators, law enforcement officers, counsellors or even volunteers who visit recovering addicts in prison.

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The Government also questions exactly who ERG and Stay Clean - which only has a handful of members remaining since the majority have left precisely because they are not in agreement with the policies that they advocate - represent, and what mandate they have.

The Government further finds the joint approach by ERG and Stay Clean, whose self-appointed representatives speak for a small minority of individuals, unrepresentative of the wider community. Throughout the past few years Minister Sacramento has maintained a close and open dialogue with all the voluntary groups who deal in a very direct manner with the consequences of drug misuse within our community. These groups and their members are supportive of Government policies, and it is clear that neither the ERG nor Stay Clean speak for the majority of persons affected in any way by drug misuse.

It is totally counterproductive by the ERG and Stay Clean to make sweeping statements and jump to ill-informed conclusions when all professionals and other stakeholders in the public and voluntary sector are working in tandem in the wider interests of our community.

Samantha Sacramento MP, Minister with responsibility for drugs abuse rehabilitation, awareness and strategy, said: "I fully expected the ERG press release: it is apparent to everyone that Mr Alvarez has a personal vendetta against me given that he uses every opportunity to lash out at every single thing that I do, and in such an unpleasant and personal way, one which I have never experienced even from any member of the Opposition, on this or any other subject. I am very reassured by all the people who I have helped over the years and all the professionals who I work with that the progress that has been made in assisting people with drug addiction problems has never been better.

"ERG and Stay Clean, the latter rather ironically, have a very clear agenda to legalise drugs in Gibraltar. The Government has clearly stated its position, based on the advice of all professionals, that this would be counter-productive for everyone. The general public, who on the whole are against the legalisation or decriminalisation of drugs in any event, can rest assured that Government's strong policy on drugs will remain unchanged".

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC, said: "When I allocate portfolios, I choose the Ministers who I feel will best deliver on the task. Samantha Sacramento enjoys my full confidence and the full confidence of her Cabinet Colleagues in dealing with all matters related to the control of drug abuse. She brings professionalism and genuine concern to the matters which she has responsibility for and is not afraid to ruffle feathers if she has to in order to do the right thing. In my view she is deserving of the public's confidence in respect of the discharge of her responsibilities in this field on which she is working diligently and effectively. I congratulate her for the work that she has already done and for the work that she will continue to do in this area of her responsibility."