

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

56/2010

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The Opposition considers that it is insensitive for the Government to have politicised an art exhibition by putting pressure on the artist to withdraw a work because it involved the Theatre Royal.

The work in question was a memory wall on the builder's hoarding at the Theatre Royal site. Members of the public were going to be asked to attach to the hoarding any Theatre Royal memorabilia that they had like photographs, play bills or anything linked to the building. The intention was to collect the material and make it into an eight feet by four feet collage. The artist was approached by the Government and asked to withdraw the work on the basis first that No 6 Convent Place did not understand it and secondly on the basis that there seemed to be a conflict of interests between the work and the Government plans for commemorating the theatre, among other reasons.

In the on-going discussions, it has been revealed that the artist had to send a three page letter to the Minister for Culture to explain how the item was considered to be a work of art. The Minister did not accept the explanation and a conversation followed during which Mr Reyes apparently explained that he was in a "sticky position".

It is obvious that the Government did not like the idea of an artistic event involving the Theatre Royal site because it would only have served to remind the public of the disaster that they have presided over. It is also very odd that the Minister should have spoken of a conflict of interests between the Government's plans for commemorating the Theatre given that no such plans have been announced. Indeed, what the GSD Government have said is that they now intend to demolish the building completely and convert the area into a park. This is hardly a commemoration and nor does it conflict with the planned event in any way.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Culture Steven Linares said:

"This is not the first time that the Government has behaved in this way with regard to cultural events of this nature. It will be recalled that at the opening of Gibraltar's International Art Exhibition one year, an exhibit was removed for political reasons at the request of the then Minister even though it had been assessed and passed by the adjudicators whose responsibility it was to filter submissions on aesthetic grounds. This time they have opposed an on-site Theatre Royal collage. It is obvious that the Government should take a broader, non-partisan view of these cultural issues."