



*Premier of Bermuda*

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**The Mater of Beneficial Ownership Registers for Overseas Territories**

**By**

**The Hon. Michael H. Dunkley JP, MP  
The Premier of Bermuda**

*Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2015*

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**Mr. Speaker**, I rise today to provide this Honourable House with the context of the Government's response to UK media comments attributed to the Rt. Honourable Edward Miliband, MP, the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition in the UK with respect to the matter of Beneficial Ownership Registers for Overseas Territories.

**Mr. Speaker**, Mr. Miliband's comments emanated from a letter he intends to send to Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies and were widely reported both here at home and overseas. The key excerpt from his media comments directed to OTs which raised eyebrows are as follows ... and I quote **Mr. Speaker**:

*Ahead of the General Election in May, I am writing to put you on notice that a Labour government will not allow this situation of delay and secrecy to continue.*

*Labour will act on tax avoidance where the Tories will not.*

*All UK Overseas Territories or Crown Dependencies will have to produce a publicly accessible central register of beneficial ownership within six months of the election of a Labour government.*

*If any Overseas Territory or Crown Dependency does not meet this deadline, we will ask the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] to put them on the OECD's tax haven blacklist.*

**Mr. Speaker,** Honourable Members will already know that the Government of Bermuda has continually demonstrated its commitment to take the required measures to protect our borders from those who would wish to use them to undertake or hide criminal or other such unacceptable activity and for over 70 years has imposed safeguards in this regard.

**Mr. Speaker,** as I indicated publicly, I was disappointed to learn of Mr. Miliband's intended letter to Leaders of the Overseas Territories and on February 9<sup>th</sup> I wrote directly to him to share Bermuda's position.

**Mr. Speaker,** notwithstanding the direct communication it was important that Bermuda take all necessary steps to respond publically to the media comments and on Saturday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, the Bermuda Government issued a statement to the UK Media that was also carried locally and across the United States.

The statement set out that Bermuda is already compliant in the area of transparency and tax.

**Mr. Speaker,** by Monday evening the Bermuda response had been covered in over 170 media outlets including several global translations.

Bermuda's message reaffirming the integrity of the jurisdiction as it relates to our adherence to international standards and tax transparency was well received internationally and has led the way in the response to Mr. Miliband's comments.

**Mr. Speaker,** in the letter sent earlier this week in following up with Mr. Miliband I set out that Bermuda is not in the same position as other international financial centers. In fact we are leaders in this regard and that difference should be recognized.

**Mr. Speaker,** while some countries may collect beneficial ownership centrally at the time of incorporation of a company only Bermuda continuously updates its central register every-time a company's shares are transferred.

Our unique Government-held central register has deterred persons with bad intentions and forced them to choose other jurisdictions to set up their companies, as Bermuda has over 80 tax treaty partner countries (including the UK) with whom we share this information when requested.

**Mr. Speaker,** Bermuda boasts one of the world's longest standing records of meeting international regulatory standards. Bermuda's success is primarily the result of a global standard of intellectual capital that resides in our island, which provides financial services to our global customers in the Reinsurance field. This intellectual capital is based on our three core elements: the Government, the regulator (the Bermuda Monetary Authority) and the private sector, working together in synergy.

**Mr. Speaker,** the people of Bermuda can be assured that this Government will grasp every opportunity to not only highlight Bermuda's valued economic contribution to the UK but to share our practice and long-standing experience with a Government-held central registry of beneficial ownership.

**Mr. Speaker,** the UK is in the throes of an election campaign. In just over three months UK voters will go to the polls in what, by all accounts, is likely to be a close fought race after five years of coalition government. The battle lines being drawn between the two main Parties are increasingly robust and from time to time statements such as these are likely to be made in the name of winning votes at home. This is not unique to the UK and Honourable Members may recall that 2008's US presidential election featured a primary season that named some Overseas Territories in attack ads.

**Mr. Speaker,** our responsibility as the Government of Bermuda is to remain vigilant, defending Bermuda's record as required, not concerning ourselves with the internal politics of another country. Bermuda is a transparent and highly regarded jurisdiction and I am confident that our sound regulatory framework and our equally robust defence of our record of transparency will more than match any attempts to cast us in any other light.

Thank you , **Mr. Speaker.**