**PRESS RELEASE**

**Joint Statement of V. Arden McLean, Winston Conolly, Ezzard Miller, Alva Suckoo and Anthony Eden, Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Cayman Islands, regarding Minister Panton’s Response to Motion No. 17/17**

Whilst we do not wish to fuel the controversy that we have been wrongly accused of creating with regards to the captioned motion, we feel constrained to respond to the Minister of Financial Services recent statements to the press. We would like to start by stating, very clearly, that it has never been our intention to do anything which could or would harm this country or its reputation. After much consideration, we took the view that it would in fact be more detrimental to stand by and do nothing in hopes that somehow all that is wrong would somehow put itself right. Also we had no choice but to bring these matters to the attention of the Legislative Assembly for no other reason than that it is our sworn duty, as parliamentarians, to ensure that those things which are absolutely essential to the democracy that we enjoy, are protected. This, we believe, is what our constitution guarantees and what our collective electorates, as well as all of the people of this country, deserve – the truth.

As such, we have simply asked for the persons who are constitutionally charged with the requisite duties of investigation and adjudication thereon to look into the circumstances outlined in the Motion. We think that given the particular circumstances and all of the raging debate on the Legal Practitioners Bill which is being proposed by the Government, that there are far too many questions regarding the conduct of some law firms, the Bill, its intentions and its design, and too many issues being raised as regards the process by which it was drafted. These matters have been raised with the Minister of Financial Services, and there have now been a number of letters written and public utterances made by various persons wherein the very propriety of his stewardship of the Bill has been called into question. Yet, there seems to be no indication of concern by the Government or the Minister as to these matters, which tend to call into question the very parliamentary process itself as regards this draft legislation. Those allegations have been largely met with deafening silence.

We felt that the very serious accusations and concerns which have been raised by various persons could not simply be brushed under the rug and ignored. One concern is the apparent holding out of persons without Cayman Islands practicing certificates as being Cayman attorneys by large firms and the very serious liability that this behavior has caused to our jurisdiction. There have also been numerous allegations that overseas law offices have been used to circumvent the intent and purpose of the Immigration Law. Our position is that no person, company or firm is above the laws of our country and that these allegations must be addressed to ensure the wellbeing and protection of our economy and democracy.

For these reasons we felt we had no choice but to raise these very important matters by way of a Motion so as to provoke parliamentary debate on these issues, rather than to leave the public to speculate as to the reasons why there is a confusing indifference to the complaints made against some law firms and pregnant silence about the Minister’s involvement and independence emanating from the Government.

Instead, the Minister has taken to the airwaves and various media outlets, a number of which he also has some nexus to, accusing us of making this issue “personal”. We would like to say that it was never our intention to have to bring such a motion, adverting to alleged personal conflicts of interest. However, we would like to point out that any allegation of a personal conflict of interest is, by its very nature, personal. That is not our fault. But we felt that we simply could not proceed to debate the Legal Practitioners Bill, when so many members of our community and, perhaps the wider global community, are left to wonder what the true position was regarding the potential breaches of law by law firms and the origin and intent of the Legal Practitioners Bill, and much more importantly, its implications for Cayman as a jurisdiction as well as the ramifications of the same for the practice of law by Caymanians at present and for future generations.

We have noted with great disappointment that the Minister has also chosen to accuse us of politicizing the Motion and the Legal Practitioners Bill, and that it is our intent to obstruct its passage. Firstly, the accusation of politicizing the Bill is nonsensical, because the promulgation of any legislation by way of the parliamentary process, under our Constitution is necessarily a political process. Secondly, the allegation of our desire to obstruct the passage of balanced and meaningful legislation is completely unfounded and unfair, particularly in light of the fact that we have, with the able assistance of a number of local practitioners, over the past three months, drafted some 32 pages of substantive amendments to the draft legislation. This has been done with the specific intent of creating balance and fairness and proper regulation of the legal industry, as well as economic and jurisdictional protection for the Cayman Islands, rather than promoting special interests that would only benefit a few partners of the large law firms.

We would gladly support a Bill that contains these provisions and any other amendments that would achieve the benefit for the country as a whole that we believe is deserved. We would also welcome an independent investigation into the merits of the complaints which have been made against the firms. We are aware that the largesse of this country has been enjoyed by many partners of the law firms and we would only hope and expect that this country’s generosity can be reciprocated.

For that reason, we felt that this jurisdiction simply cannot move forward to ignore these very serious accusations made against some law firms and to blindly license certain practices which may be, at this point in time, illegal, without at the very least, the various allegations being properly investigated and ventilated in the Legislative Assembly, so that our parliament can make an informed, rational and well-reasoned decision on the way forward. We believe that to do any less than this is a dereliction of our duty to Parliament and the people of this country who elected us. As such, we make no apology to anyone who may be inadvertently offended by our simple desire to do right by our people.

We are therefore hopeful that the Government and all other members of the Legislative Assembly share our concerns in that regard, and that they will do what their conscience dictates, rather than do what is politically or personally expedient, and that the Motion will be moved forward, debated and decided upon before the debate on the Legal Practitioners Bill ensues. In this way all of the issues surrounding the accusations made against the firms and the questions raised regarding the origin and intent of the Legal Practitioners Bill 2016, can be addressed. Our people and our country deserve no less.