



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
MINISTRY FOR EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
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New Harbours
Gibraltar



PRESS RELEASE

No:94/2010

Date: 29th April 2010

On behalf of the Government of Gibraltar, I wish to convey to all workers our continued commitment to protect the quality of jobs and enhance the quality of life of all citizens, as we remember on May 1st many workers, irrespective of nationality, ideology or any other difference, who through their struggles and sacrifices have contributed to make possible the democratic system we enjoy today in Gibraltar.

These are difficult times for the world at large given the unprecedented economic crisis that has swept across countries, creating difficulties and hardship at all levels of society. Much as Gibraltar remains resilient it would not be altogether unexpected to feel some of the negative impact at such a state of play.

Notwithstanding, the Government, through its diversified economic strategy, remains resolute in its efforts to work with all social partners in order to secure and augment both the creation of wealth and a fair distribution of all associated benefits.

Particularly significant in our social policy is the periodic review of the standard minimum wage which assists markedly in protecting workers from exploitation. These reviews have resulted in notable increases up to the present level of £5.00 per hour. This measure has been complimented with both consecutive large reductions in rates of tax and the introduction of a far fairer pay related social insurance contribution scheme than the old and now abolished two tier system of standard and reduced rates. The combination of such measures has naturally and purposefully had the greatest and most positive effect on the lower paid workers. The Government will work with Employers and Employee representatives through the Labour Advisory Board to address any unfairness to employees and employers that may take place in the Labour Market.

Our youth is recognised as a most valuable resource for our economic and social well being. Through the Vocational Training Scheme that supports so many young people, we have substantially increased their allowances; and we have also enhanced our youth training schemes including increasing the number of apprenticeships for which there is an industry demand. Similarly, a breakthrough was made last year by introducing Telecommunication apprenticeships, in partnership with Gibtelecom and Social and Healthcare apprenticeships with the Elderly Care Agency and the GHA. Currently we are in the process of launching other apprenticeships in Business and Administration in Government and the Private Sector, as well as other schemes in the Gaming Industry.

In another front, pensions protect workers when they are most vulnerable, particularly when they retire and consequently cannot earn their living. In this respect the Government has

progressively acted in various ways. It has, for example, given occupational pension to hundreds of workers in all Government companies and in those private companies that work exclusively for Government. We have also made available the Provident Fund No.3 to all private employers, thus making it cheaper and easier for the private sector to introduce pensions for their workers.

Additionally and in furtherance of the overall social safety net provision, old age pensions have been increased by 65.2% in one year and tax on pension income abolished. Similarly, the Government continues to support the Community Care Trust and working men over 60 who have to carry on working because they have no occupational pensions and it has now been made possible for them to receive a social wage payment.

Mention must also be made, of course, of the hundreds of Ministry of Defence jobs, quality jobs, that have been saved and retained and the protection that such jobs afford to these families. This has been possible through the Government's imaginative and bold intervention in the face of MOD contractorisation and redundancy threats. This is unprecedented in Gibraltar.

Indeed our list of measures introduced to enhance the quality of life of our citizens is extensive and our policy of further improving social and working conditions including the creation of employment schemes is ongoing, during this and the next Parliament.

Personally, because of the Ministry for which I have responsibility and no less because of my background as trade unionist, May 1st represents and symbolises both the struggle and the achievement of workers in the long and difficult road to fairness at work and where workers' rights are respected and their obligations may be undertaken with dignity.

This Government is justifiably proud of its record and the unprecedented progress that current and retired workers have achieved since we came into office. Genuine commitment to workers' rights is measured by actions and not words. Workers know this and do not forget this.

On behalf of the Government then, I wish all our working and retired citizens a happy May Day and weekend.