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PRESS RELEASE

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CHIEF MINISTER'S NEW YEAR ADDRESS
4th January 2012

Good evening

I hope that you have enjoyed the Christmas and New Year festivities with your families and your friends.

2012 is going to be a challenging and exciting year.

We are working hard on the things that we promised you as part of our recent election campaign and we have already had four meetings of the full Cabinet of Ministers in the three weeks since the election.

We have started as we mean to go on, working as a team.

In order to meet our deadline of legislating within 100 days of our election, we will soon be publishing a draft bill for an act that will protect against harassment and bullying in the workplace.

I will shortly be seeking to meet with all interested parties on this issue, including dignity at work group DAWN, UNITE the Union, the GGCA and the NASUWT.

This will be an important step forward in bringing Gibraltar into the 21st century when it comes to the standards expected in the work place and will be followed by a law to protect "Whistleblowers" who disclose corruption or other wrong doing.

In fact, I have already met on two occasions with the committee of the GGCA in order to get the ball rolling on the review of the civil service that will commence shortly.

To start this work, we are in the process of drafting the terms of reference of the review and undertaking a survey of working hours on which we will be consulting all members of the civil service.

With UNITE we have already held a meeting of the District Committee at 6 Convent Place and more will follow.

The Minister for Education, Mr Licudi, and I have already met the GTA NASUWT as we prepare for the recruitment of new teachers in time for the start of the new academic year in September.

All the Unions will have a role in the review of the Civil Service and Public Sector.

I started this year with a visit to KGV hospital where I met patients and staff on the 1st of January.

I must tell you that the conditions in which we provide care to the mentally ill leave a lot to be desired.

Despite the massive spending of the previous GSD administration, nothing has been spent on KGV for years.

It is frankly embarrassing and sad to see.

We will therefore work as quickly as we can to put in place a plan to redress this problem.

What I can tell you now is that having been in office for just over three weeks, we are already starting to see that behind the impenetrable curtain that Mr Caruana had set up, the state of public finances is not as rosy as he would have had you believe.

What is clear is that if we were right about anything in the election campaign it was that Mr Caruana would be funding his next four years of government by taking Gibraltar further and further into unsustainable levels of debt.

In fact, I consider that the position is so serious that it is the duty of your Government to address you separately on that issue in the coming weeks so that you can understand the magnitude of the problems that we have inherited and that we all face as a Community.

But let us now look at the political year ahead.

As I have said before, we consider that it is fundamentally important that the 1st of May, workers day, should be celebrated on that specific date.

For that reason, this year and every year that we are in government, the 1st of May will be a bank holiday.

The Government will partner with all relevant trade union organizations to organise events to highlight the significance of that date to working people today – emphasizing the need to remember the struggle to attain basic rights for workers.

As the grandson of a man who died in an industrial accident – a grandfather I never met – it moves me greatly to announce that we will also be commemorating “Workers Memorial Day”.

This is a day dedicated to those who have died in industrial accidents at work.

Workers Memorial Day is the 28th April.

As we committed to do in our manifesto for the general election, we will provide a bank holiday on the nearest weekend.

This year that means that Monday the 30th April will be a bank holiday.

Together with Tuesday the 1st May, you will enjoy an extra long weekend to commemorate the often overlooked struggles and suffering of working women and men.

In June we will be attending the United Nations Committee of 24 and in October the 4th Committee.

I will be inviting the Leader of the Opposition to address the Committees with me or alongside me.

He will be free to choose to attend and support my speech **or to attend and speak for himself.**

Quite unlike the position when we were in Opposition and we paid our own way for 16 years, my Government will fund the Leader of the Opposition's cost of travel to New York so that the views of the whole of our Parliament are put to the international community.

We also want more people from Gibraltar to have the opportunity to see what happens at the UN and for local representative organisations to address the Committee, as do NGOs from all the other territories that are subject to the Committee of 24's jurisdiction.

As part of this process, we will shortly be launching a competition for young people who are students at University and from the College of Further Education, Bayside and Westside to come to New York with us - either in June or October, depending on how that might interfere with examinations.

The UN needs to see more than just my face and hear my voice as a politician.

It needs to see and hear the best of Gibraltar in order to understand that the arguments put there by our detractors have absolutely no merit in fact or in law.

The UN needs to see how right Sir Joshua Hassan and Peter Isola were in the arguments about our country that they put in New York almost half a century ago.

I know most of you will support this novel and positive approach to the way in which we address the issue of our de-listing in New York.

This year will also finally see us bring National Day home to Casemates.

I cannot emphasise enough how important we believe it is that National Day should include a political dimension alongside the partying and celebrations.

This year we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of National Day.

It will also be 45 years since the referendum in 1967 in which we voted to stay British AND, coincidentally, the 10th anniversary of the referendum against the Joint Sovereignty deal.

It will therefore be a particularly special year!

We will also be updating the format of National Day and putting the accent on our young people so that their enjoyment of the day is coupled with an understanding of the substance of what we are celebrating.

The massive turnout of young and old in our recent general election shows us all how committed we are in Gibraltar to democracy.

In the short time that we have been in office we have already started the process of establishing the Independent Commission for political reform that will look at how to make our democracy even better.

An announcement will be made shortly of who will make up the Commission.

And we have also started the process of modernizing our parliament.

You will soon start to see the first effects of that, with monthly meetings of the Parliament being called as from this month.

I must tell you that one of the things I am most looking forward to is working to deliver real political reform for our country.

On other manifesto commitments, we have already also made changes to the way the Development and Planning Commission works.

We have added the Environmental Safety Group, an important and responsible NGO, as part of the Commission and we have removed the Minister from the Chairmanship of the Commission, allowing the Town Planner to take that role.

In the next few weeks we will also see the start of the Future Job Strategy; which is designed to provide training and real jobs to the many Gibraltarians and Gibraltar residents who are unemployed.

I know that lack of employment and payment of less than the minimum wage have created serious social problems for many in our community; and the Future Job Strategy will start the process of addressing many these problems.

Another very serious social problem has been created by the failure of the previous government to build sufficient homes for our people.

In Opposition and now in Government, we have seen hundreds of deserving medical and social cases of people who need homes TODAY.

Yet the legacy of the GSD is that there are no homes available for them or the over one thousand people on the housing waiting list.

On this, I have to ask you to bear with us as we start the process of building the homes we need.

This will take time; but it will be a priority for my Government.

Already we are starting work on ensuring that we build the number of homes that are needed.

I know that many of you want to see me and other ministerial colleagues about housing, employment and immigration matters or about matters relating to unfairness suffered under the previous administration.

We work for you.

As ministers our responsibility to be accessible is as great today as it was in opposition as Members of Parliament and during the election campaign as candidates.

We promised you a new and more modern and approachable style and we will deliver this.

We will see all of you who wish to see us in the coming weeks and months; but it is impossible to see you all immediately.

Having only really had two and a half weeks of working time since the election, due to the Christmas and New Year holiday, we are still trying to put in place the systems we need in order to be as responsive as possible.

I am already working on IT and e-government solutions that will help us to communicate with you as effectively as possible.

On the international front, you know that I am committed to working closely with the United Kingdom on matters of mutual interest and consistent with the nature of the relationship which is provided for in the 2006 Constitution.

I encourage you to participate in the Overseas Territories Review which is being conducted and on which Europe Minister David Liddington recently published an article in the local press.

I will be making clear to the UK the views of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar on this issue in the coming weeks also in a co-operative and positive spirit.

The fact is that our Constitution is a living and evolving document and we need to keep that evolution fluid and constant; never believing that it is a document set in stone that cannot be changed for reasons external to the relationship between us and the UK.

Moreover, we will always seek to foster the best possible relationship with all our neighbours.

We will be seeking to establish a more permanent structure for bi-lateral relations with the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco, our emerging North African neighbour.

As you know, many Moroccan men and women travelled to Gibraltar in the 60's to help us to maintain our economy alive and Britain's military interests viable when General Franco ordered the closure of the Frontier with Spain.

Today, many of those people still live amongst us and we can prosper further by developing links with our Southern neighbour for the mutual benefit of our people.

In our relations with Spain we will continue to seek no more and no less than normal neighbourly relations and co-operation.

We will see whether Spain is ready for such a relationship to start to flourish without her sovereignty claim poisoning the potential for positive engagement between us.

My friends, whatever challenges 2012 brings us, together, we as a community can face them all down.

I cannot hide that for my wife and my family the most important event will be the arrival of our first child in early to mid-April.

At that time, I will be taking a short period of time out from my responsibilities as Chief Minister for paternity leave.

Dr Garcia, the Deputy Chief Minister, will chair meetings of the Cabinet whilst I am away.

I know that the ministerial talent around me is such that this will not be an issue at all.

Despite the legacy of debt that we have inherited, we will face the challenges of 2012 with the energy, the ability and the courage to ensure Gibraltar's success not just this year but for the next four at least.

Working together, pulling in the same direction, always putting Gibraltar first, we will succeed in our drive to deliver prosperity for our country.

As we all now start back at work or go back to studies, let us be grateful for the time we have enjoyed with our loved ones this Christmas season and let us relish the challenges to come.

On behalf of my wife Justine and myself, a very happy New Year to you all.

Thank you very much for listening,

Goodnight.