



PRESS RELEASE

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The Chief Minister's New Year's Message

Good evening.

2016 was a tumultuous year around the whole world.

And yet in Gibraltar, we have been able to enjoy the recent Christian Christmas and Jewish Hannukah feasts in peace and surrounded by plentiful abundance.

The same has been true for those who have celebrated Muslim, Hindu and other feasts earlier in the year.

Each year, we must be conscious of how lucky we are to live in prosperity and respecting each other's beliefs, as we do in Gibraltar.

This year, we must also be particularly conscious of how lucky we are to live in peace.

We must put our lives in the context of the world in which we live.

In parts of Syria and the Middle East, the past year has been marked by scenes of vicious war, fighting and death.

Europe and the Mediterranean have seen the hardship of millions suffering forced migration.

And the whole world has been the venue upon which terrorists have perpetrated countless acts of violence and murder.

So this year, perhaps more than any other in recent memory, despite our many challenges, we have good reason to cherish our small but peaceful Nation.

We must never forget how lucky we are to have the privilege of bringing up children in the security of Gibraltar.

And the well-being and education of our children is always a top priority for us.

Already planning is advancing for the building of the new schools.



In our first term in office we delivered two new schools and a flourishing university.

We will do even better this time, with five new schools to be delivered.

And we will shortly be launching the programme for hot lunches to be available in schools.

Of course, there are some in our Community who are not as well off as others.

Their children will not have to pay for school meals.

There are some who are suffering unemployment and who are not able to provide for their families as they might wish.

I can tell you tonight that, despite the challenges Gibraltar has faced and is facing, our unemployment has this year once again reached record low levels.

The comparable year on year level of unemployment for the past month of December was 146 individuals registered unemployed.

That is the lowest level EVER for any December since records begun.

Very good news indeed.

That figure may be low, but whilst there is one Gibraltarian who is unemployed, we will continue to work to provide employment for everyone.

In that context you will be pleased to learn that in the coming weeks a number of apprenticeships will commence in various fields.

Apprenticeships in electrical, engineering and mechanical trades will soon start this January.

Apprenticeships in construction trades have already commenced.

And in the GHA, apprenticeships for new Nursing Assistants are also starting alongside further courses for graduation to Enrolled Nurse.

The GHA is continuing to undergo other exciting changes.

One of the things I know you will all welcome is my announcement tonight that the Government considers that we should reintroduce the rank of Matron in the management of our health services.

This is a decision designed to ensure that the **patient** is **the** centre of attention in the provision of our health care.

And the joining up of our health and care services is going to be producing dividends very soon.



Already we are making great progress in the operation of the Alzheimers and Dementia Day facility which I expect will open next week.

And in the next ninety days, I expect we will also be opening the Alzheimers and Dementia Residential facility.

And also in the next few weeks elderly members of our Community will be moving to 140 magnificent new homes at Charles Bruzon House and Sea Master Lodge.

These will in turn free up the same number of rental homes for younger families.

Many other young people will be very happy to hear that you will soon be receiving letters to start the process of purchasing new affordable homes at Bob Peliza Mews and Hassan Centenary Terraces.

You will therefore appreciate that the important priorities of continuing the improvement of the education of our children and the employment, health, and housing of our people are well under way and have not been in any way derailed.

In the fields of commerce, 2017 will also be an exciting year.

Yesterday we announced record growth in Port services, including bunkering.

Recently we saw passenger numbers at the airport reach half a million for the first time.

The works on the tunnel under the runway are also now underway.

After the extensive litigation which we won, I expect we will now start to see considerable progress on that project at last.

This year we will also see the completion of the new LNG fuelled Power Station at North Mole.

This will be a huge step forward for our Nation.

The new facility is designed to provide the security of supply and the generating capacity of clean energy that we need for the next thirty years.

This is important for all of us.

But it is essential for national and international businesses established in Gibraltar.

In that respect, we continue to see new companies entering the market and setting up in the fields of financial services and online gaming.

We continue to see interest in investment in Gibraltar.



And we continue to negotiate the best terms for the taxpayer of a number of large developments in Gibraltar including Rooke and the Eastside.

In just the first quarter of this year, for example, we will see the official opening of the Gibraltar World Trade Centre, a high end office development **that is already almost full.**

Other, new office developments are also necessary and in progress.

And new high end residential developments - alongside our own affordable home projects - are also breaking ground and progressing this year.

New developments aimed at key workers in the financial services and online gaming industries are likely to break ground.

And I also expect to see new reclamation projects getting underway soon.

This is the economic activity which drives our growth and the relative prosperity of each one of our families.

And I can tell you tonight that you can therefore have the confidence that we have no doubt that we will meet the GDP growth targets we have estimated for the period to the financial year 2019/2020.

In that respect, you will be pleased to know that the Gibraltar International Bank is exceeding expectations in its development as an independent financial services institution.

And the public sector and the civil service remains a hugely important part of the growth that enables businesses to establish themselves and grow in Gibraltar.

It is right that we should have engaged positively with unions in the whole public sector to seek greater efficiencies where these can be achieved.

Because everyone in the public sector has a personal responsibility to be as efficient as possible in everything that we do, especially in light of the vote to leave the European Union.

Of course BREXIT and the triggering of Article 50 will be the dominant political agenda item for the year.

With Deputy Chief Minister Joseph Garcia and Attorney General Michael Llamas, I will continue the work of navigating this turbulent course for Gibraltar.

We are working with the whole Cabinet, the whole of the public sector and the civil service and with all those interested in the private sector to ensure that the Gibraltar position is accurately understood in London and in Brussels.

In coming weeks and months, we will be involved in more private and public meetings and discussions on the future for Gibraltar after BREXIT.



Inevitably, this will take much of my time this year.

I nonetheless hope that I will soon be able to meet with those of you who want to see me and are finding it difficult to secure appointments.

I know you understand that at this time I have an obligation to all of us to concentrate on the wider political issues that leaving the European Union represents for us all.

We are working also beyond Europe to attract investment to Gibraltar and to establish strong, mutually beneficial and friendly relationships in neighbouring and far flung nations.

A financial services delegation was in Casablanca late last year, and will be in China again next week, developing the work of our Hong Kong office and our networks in East Asia.

We will continue our lobbying work in the United States as that nation sees a new administration taking over.

And we will work to build even stronger relationships with the United Kingdom, other Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and the nations of the Commonwealth.

Because this is a seminal moment in our political history.

It is a time which will present us with as many opportunities as it will challenges.

And we must have the courage and the vision to grasp those opportunities as we negotiate those challenges.

This is a time for hard work and common endeavour.

For that is how we will preserve, protect and progress our prosperity.

Perhaps not since the campaign for the return of our evacuees or since the closure of the frontier have we been called upon to be as united as we must now be in common purpose.

So this is a time for constructive engagement and debate that seeks to progress our common cause.

I know that the good will of all in Gibraltar is with us in Government as we embark on this process.

We are all in it together.

We did not choose BREXIT but are now obliged to deliver it successfully.

My dear friends and fellow Gibraltarians, make no mistake:

2017 is a year that will likely define our future for generations to come.



We will not be found wanting in enterprise, energy or enthusiasm when it comes to defending Gibraltar's corner.

So a tough and challenging year lies ahead.

But as Gibraltarians, we know that so long as we knuckle down to work together, we have every reason to be optimistic about the future of our beloved **British** home.

Finally, let me thank you for the huge honour and privilege of leading our small but great nation at this pivotal moment in our collective history.

It is genuinely humbling to be entrusted with the administration of our affairs at this time.

And so, on behalf of my wife Justine and my family,

And on behalf of all of my ministerial colleagues and their families,

Let me wish you all a very healthy, happy and prosperous 2017.

Thank you for listening.

Goodnight.