



PRESS RELEASE

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CHIEF MINISTER'S STATEMENT - COVID 19

My dear fellow Gibraltarians.

We are facing a Public Health Emergency.

As we all know, we are not immune from the rapid spread though Europe of the COVID 19 Coronavirus.

Today in Gibraltar I can confirm that we have 2 active cases and 1 recovered case.

We have sent off 91 samples in total and of those we await 39 results.

But let us be clear, MOST IF NOT ALL of those under 70 who are diagnosed with the virus will recover.

We have already seen one of the cases diagnosed in Gibraltar lead to a full recovery.

The patient in question, a young man, is fit and well.

His partner repeatedly tested negative for the virus.

But we should be clear in understanding that not all cases will have such happy endings.

Today, we have crossed the rubicon.

In a Cabinet meeting this morning, we have taken the decision to impose restrictions on movement of those over the age of 70 for their own protection.

Present in the Cabinet alongside Ministers today was the Attorney General, who confirmed that the measure was proportionate and Constitutional in order to protect human life.

This is an unprecedented decision in our democracy, and not one we have taken lightly.

Freedom of movement and assembly are fundamental rights protected in our Constitution.



For that reason, the Deputy Chief Minister and I also asked the Leader of the Opposition to be present at today's Cabinet meeting.

This is no time for politics as usual and we have agreed to continue to work together where we are able to do so.

I will continue to brief and where possible consult all parliamentarians.

Today, we are taking these decisions purely in the interests of Public Health.

Because assuring the safety and security of our citizens is the first duty of government.

SO LET ME BE CLEAR:

If you are over 70 years of age you are at the greatest risk of death from this virus.

That is why, with great reluctance, but with resolve, we have changed our law to provide this additional protection for our vulnerable citizens.

Please follow these new rules.

If you are over 70, do NOT leave your home unless it is to purchase essentials or medicines, if you cannot get them otherwise.

To go the doctor, although we will try to make other arrangements for remote consultations or doctors visits.

To care for a loved one.

To go to work if you really have to.

To exercise a pet if you really have to.

To go to a bank if you really need to.

Or where you need to move to avoid other risk of injury or death.

Or for any other activity that is absolutely necessary. Not otherwise.

But if you are over 70, I cannot emphasise enough to you how important it is that you follow these new laws for your own protection.

We will also be announcing mechanisms to have over 70 years olds provided with remote shopping facilities where necessary, if their extended family cannot assist.

Similarly, I want to be clear with ALL our citizens, that given the patterns we have seen in other countries, whatever we do, vulnerable people will die of this virus.



We will not be able to stop that.

We cannot stop the wind and we cannot stop the tide.

The government cannot stop this virus.

Pretending to do so would be untrue and I will NOT lie to you.

We are at war with a hidden killer that preys on our elderly and most vulnerable.

There is no earthly power that can presently stop it.

But we are taking measures to slow it down.

Avoiding spikes in infection will mean we have more resources when needed to treat people.

Please understand that slowing down the spread of this disease could make the difference between our having the resources and ability to save your loved ones or having to let them die.

Whatever your age, if you follow our advice and comply with our measures YOU can help slow it down.

You can help save yourself from its worst effects.

You can help save a loved one from an infection.

You can help us slow the virus down.

That can help so that we can give our most vulnerable the best treatment when they need it or even potentially avoid the virus altogether.

In Italy, doctors have been left unable to provide care for some.

No healthcare system in the world can provide intensive care on the scale that would be required if the time required it.

So if we do not follow this advice and these measures, more of our people will die.

We have increased our intensive care beds by 500%.

We will have an ICU just for COVID 19 patients and one for general ICU admissions that will, of course, continue.

We have a ward prepared just for suspect cases of COVID 19.

We have an isolation facility ready.



We have sufficient beds in the hospital for an initial surge in patient numbers.

And we will have a field hospital ready by the end of the week.

We have more than doubled the number of beds available for when the worst part of the surge comes.

So we are ready.

But these are difficult times.

That is why large public gatherings have been banned.

That is why I thank our religious leaders for having agreed to suspended public worship.

This suspension will have to continue for many weeks.

As we move forward, and as we lose many loved ones and friends, do not attend mortuaries.

If you are not a close relative of the deceased, do not attend funerals.

Those are the places where the virus spreads the most, as if it were preying on our grief.

I know this will be emotionally difficult.

But it will be even harder if we do not observe these basic rules and the basic rules of hygiene we are constantly repeating to you.

Washing your hands.

Catch it, bin it and kill it when you sneeze.

This is why we have curtailed our bus service and why so much else is disrupted, not least the closure of all bars and restaurants other than for take out.

And rest assured that we will be informing you openly about how matters are progressing with this pandemic.

You will receive a text notice from Gibtelecom to keep you up to date each day.

The timing of this is sometimes delayed.

As a result, we will also post that data on Facebook and Twitter on the Government channels.

And we will hold a daily press conference at 4pm each day as from tomorrow to inform you of latest developments.



The press conference will be live each day on the Government's Facebook page.

For now, schools will remain open.

But this decision will be kept under constant review with the teachers' union.

Vulnerable children and teachers will be given direct advice on whether to attend school or not.

None of these measures are being taken lightly.

More may be required in coming days and weeks.

But the most important measures will be those you take yourself.

Whatever age you are – why be out and about unless it is essential?

Unless you are required to be at work, or if you need to shop for your family, try to apply to yourselves the rules we have imposed on our over 70s.

And please familiarise yourselves with the rules of the State of Emergency in Spain on which we have based some of our own measures.

Respect and observe the Spanish rules if you are in Spain.

DO NOT TRAVEL TO SPAIN unless it is absolutely necessary.

I appreciate some of you have homes there, but avoid travel to Spain entirely unless it is absolutely necessary.

If you do, your reasons for travelling to Spain must in keeping with the rules governing the State of Emergency declared in that country.

And remember that this is only the beginning and more restrictive measures may be advised in future, both in Spain and in Gibraltar.

I am very clear that all of the measures being imposed by Governments around the world and by us here in particular will have an economic effect on businesses in Gibraltar.

I have told you I am very clear that the first duty of Government is the promotion of the safety and security of our people.

Additionally, the Government wants to ensure that we are able assist our business community with measures that will see them through this exceptional moment in our history.

The situation the whole planet is facing is unprecedented for a century, since the world wide pandemic of 1918 and presents all nations with a huge economic challenge.



Already central banks have further reduced interest rates.

And financial institutions in the United Kingdom have reacted and some of those here have already taken steps to assist clients with lending and deferment of liabilities for a defined period.

NATWEST and JSYKE Bank in Gibraltar have already done so.

As sole shareholder of the Gibraltar International Bank, in these exceptional circumstances, the Government has directed and received confirmation from the Board that it will implement the necessary measures, similar to other international, commercial lending institutions, to help personal and business clients affected during this difficult period.

For those businesses in the hospitality, leisure, distributive and catering sector (the “relevant sector”) that have been affected by the restrictions imposed by the Government, the following measures will be in effect as from today.

Where the Government is the direct landlord of such businesses, the Government will waive all commercial rents for the second quarter of the calendar year 2020.

The Government does not presently have the legislative power to restrict the rents that can be charged across the board.

In line with the proposals Government is applying to its own commercial premises, Government seeks to encourage landlords to provide flexibility over the second quarter of the calendar year to affected businesses in such relevant sectors.

This is particularly the case given banks have provided flexibility on their interest payments to those financing the acquisition of commercial property.

In order to encourage similar behaviour from landlords the Government is proposing the following :

- If the landlord does not waive at least 50% of the rent due in the second quarter of the calendar year for affected businesses in these sectors the Government will introduce legislation for the gross rent due for this second quarter, without deductions, to be taxed at 50%.
- In addition tenants who are required to pay this rent and are not afforded flexibility will be allowed a deduction against their tax liability of three times the amount of rent paid.
- Alternatively these provisions will not apply where the landlord agrees to defer the rent due in this second quarter of the calendar year by waiving this and extending the lease by a further three months.

The Government will waive all business rates for affected businesses in the relevant sector for the second quarter of the calendar year 2020.



The Government will defer the business water and electricity charges for affected businesses in the relevant sector for the month of April and allow this to be paid evenly over the following 12 month period without applying any penalty.

This is in effect an interest free loan on this amount.

We are asking telecommunications providers to consider a similar package of measures in respect of their affected customers in these sectors for this period.

The payment of salaries by affected businesses in these relevant sectors to employees will not attract any PAYE or employee or employer Social Insurance contributions for the month of April.

Employers in all other sectors will during the second quarter of this calendar year be allowed to defer their payments of PAYE and SI by 8 weeks from the due date.

This effectively means that businesses can avail themselves of a deferral of 10 weeks after the month end during this second quarter of 2020.

Whether or not the incentives in relation to PAYE and Social Insurance should be extended further will be considered in consultation with the unions and the business representative organisations.

The reason for the Government taking these steps is specifically to allow private sector employers to continue to pay salaries to employees for as long as possible.

That is why we are removing the PAYE and social insurance contribution elements.

A stock purchase scheme will be introduced whereby catering establishments can sell to the Government such perishable stock as they may hold which might spoil and which the Government can use in its own catering facilities.

Additionally, import duties are waived as from midnight last night until midnight on 30 April in respect of all classes of goods except for the tobacco, fuel and alcohol classes.

This waiver will be reviewed with the business representative organisations before the end of next month.

In order to allow companies in the eGaming and Financial Services Sectors to relocate staff from overseas to cover shortage of staff in Gibraltar thereby providing continuity of service, the Government will introduce a streamlined work permit and ETB process.

This will be available on line to limit queuing and attendance at counters.

Associated ETB fees in regard to these and all other applications to register employees in all sectors will be removed for the second quarter of this calendar year.

To assist entities licensed by the Financial Services Commission with cash flow, fees payable by them for the whole year in advance in April will not be payable in advance as a lump sum this year.



Such fees will instead this year be payable quarterly in advance this year.

More measures are under review by the Government and we will make more announcements as we see how matters develop.

We have the financial firepower at our disposal to be able to react and to assist even further depending on how matters develop in coming weeks and months.

But we will not overreact at this early stage and we will retain the ability to assist as the spread of the virus progresses.

And also these measures will apply obviously to businesses that are in good standing at the end of the first quarter of the calendar year.

These measures will not apply to Supermarkets or grocery vendors who are doing increasing business as our people seeking to ensure that we are all adequately provided for at home.

I want to thank our Supermarket and grocery providers for having secured our supply chains and ensured that Gibraltar has and will have the supplies its needs at this exceptional time.

There was never any need to panic buy and our supply chains will remain robust throughout this period.

In any event, the Government has contingency plans in place in the event that they were to become necessary.

Preparing for an expected hard Brexit that has not yet materialised has prepared us well for these unexpected circumstances.

There is no vaccine yet for the virus, nor for the economy.

But if necessary, we will react by providing further liquidity for our businesses in future.

These are just our immediate measures.

As we get further down this road, we will if necessary take other measures.

And make no mistake:

We will make money available and we have the headroom to borrow if necessary.

We have rainy day funds available.

Whatever resources GHA needs that we can acquire, it will get.



The professionals working in our Health Authority and in Public Health have worked tirelessly to be ready.

They advise us that with these measures we can slow down the virus.

I want to pay tribute to the work they have done to get us to this stage.

I also want to thank them for the work they are about to embark on, on our behalf.

Their hours will be longer than ever.

They will be stretched and they deserve our support and deepest thanks.

The team in our civil contingency operation, so ably led by former RG Commanding Officer Ivor Lopez has also done brilliant work.

As has the Government press office team.

Indeed, all our emergency and law enforcement agencies are working closely with us in support of the GHA.

I cannot thank every one of our relevant public servants enough.

And yet I know we are only at the beginning of the work they will likely be required to do.

This is the start of a marathon that will NOT be over next week.

My fellow Gibraltarians.

This is a time to show the best of us.

The hundreds of you volunteering to help are a demonstration of the Gibraltarian spirit coming to the fore.

We have survived being evicted from our land in war and being locked into our land in siege.

This emergency is different.

Let us all support each other and not second guess each other.

This is not a time for medical quacks or social media experts to second guess what our doctors and nurses are doing.

There will be plenty of time to review what we have done.

But right now, we must be at our most united, most determined and most effective.



We will do whatever we have to in order to keep Gibraltar safe.

We will do whatever we have to in order to protect our people.

And we will do whatever we can to protect our economy.

But have no doubt:

You are the ones who need to act to slow this virus.

Please protect yourselves by following our advice.

Please protect your loved ones by following our advice.

In doing so, you will help us to protect Gibraltar.

Follow our advice.

Do not fall for social media hype.

We will tell you the truth at every turn.

You will hear the truth from us first.

Rely on trusted, established media that will check before they report and not on random opinion.

In many instances we have seen that the right reaction to a pandemic is counterintuitive.

So don't fall for layman experts' opinions on everything and anything to do with this pandemic based on what they watch on rolling TV news reporting.

The demographic and geographic circumstances of Gibraltar are different to most places.

We are quite unique in facing this pandemic.

Working together we can slow it down.

My friends,

I WILL NOT HESITATE TO ACT when I am advised to.

But I will also assure you of one thing.

I will only act on medical advice.

I will not impose my views.



It is not safe to pretend to know more than the clinicians.

In coming weeks and months, there will be many heroes amongst us.

Please let us all make sure that there is only one villain.

The virus itself.

Do not stand in the way of what is being asked of you.

Work with us and not against us.

Be another one of the many heroes of this moment.

Do not take the side of the virus by ignoring our advice or failing to abide by these new rules.

My dear friends,

Our resilience will be tested.

But our resolve will never be broken.

Stay safe.

Keep your loved ones safe.

If you believe, pray.

And if you don't, hope.

Because better times will come.

We will smile again and return to normality as soon as we are able to.

Goodnight.

ENDS