



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **A Statement by the Minister for Equality on International Women's Day**

Today is International Women's Day. 2018 is a very important year as it marks the centenary of women's suffrage in the UK. The celebrations of International Women's Day this year are, therefore, particularly poignant as we reflect upon the struggles that women endured in order to secure equal voting rights and all the progress made since. In so reflecting, on this day we must consider the challenges that still lie ahead for women and how we can each contribute to a more inclusive and gender equal society.

As we look to the future, it is important that we recognise and promote the many achievements by women and for women locally, as well as recognise those who have influenced the gender equality trajectory through Gibraltar's history.

Establishing a new ministry such as the Ministry for Equality from scratch is not easy, especially when we are dealing with concepts that have not been given much attention or importance in the past. I am fortunate to have a dynamic and motivated team who work on these important issues all year round. Our job is to look at the challenges that women face in our community and make it a fairer, more inclusive Gibraltar.

The theme that has been set by the United Nations this year is 'Press for Progress'. We ask ourselves: What are the relevant women's issues today? What do they mean for us in reality? How do we press for progress in Gibraltar? While of course my responsibility as Minister for Equality is to promote diversity and inclusion of all the equality strands, on a day like today we consider specifically the issues that relate woman because of the particular struggles what women endure.

Globally, one of the issues that continues to affect women is gender based violence and domestic abuse. It is estimated that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse. Like every other country in the world, Gibraltar is not free from domestic abuse and this has been an important part of the work that has been carried out by the Ministry for Equality. We are in the final stages of publishing a national strategy which will be a five year plan so as to ensure that the strategic focus by all relevant stakeholders as longevity. The strategy is ambitious in its aim and will introduce a number of new measures across a range of departments to better support victims and help break the cycle of abuse.



We have of course also been looking at the economic progress of women. Over the past year we embarked on an exercise to look at the gender pay gap in our economy. We have already drawn our initial conclusions from the data that we have available and we wish to develop these preliminary findings further and enable us to focus on particular industries. We are therefore working on designing the collection of future data in a different way and will be looking to modify this year's employment survey so as to achieve more detailed results to analyse. In addition to this, my Ministry and I are looking at a programme of training initiatives on gender diversity in the workplace that we will make available to the public and private sector with a view to developing a workplace that is fairer to women and encourages progression.

We must move away from stereotypes as these are incredibly damaging for meaningful progress, setting boys and girls on gendered paths merely imposes unnecessary barriers and is something that all too often hold many women back.

Gibraltar has an excellent education system, which gives every child the right start in life. This Government is in the process of implementing a radical reform of education in Gibraltar, which will take leaps forward to ensuring fully inclusive education for girls and boys. This aims to solve an issue that historically has been perceived as discriminatory due to the inability of girls and boys to access the same subjects at comprehensive level, particularly regarding the sciences.

The unequal representation of women in certain fields such as STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) is a challenge. I have established a close relationship with the local branch of Girls in Tech this past year and look forward to further collaboration to secure higher levels of participation in this field. I am delighted that this year we have an all-girls team reaching the CyberCenturion finals. Challenges like these develop students personally and socially but also send an important message that girls are just as inherently capable in this field as boys.

It is important that women are equally represented at all levels in our society. Raising the profile of women in public life and public office plays an important part in sending the message that women have an equally important part to play in shaping society. It is time that more women feel encouraged to take the step into public office and I would personally love to see greater representation of women in Parliament.

It gives tremendous satisfaction to see that since we started marking International Women's Day in 2012, the momentum for celebrating gender equality on this day has grown from strength to strength. It is wonderful to see the community taking ownership and playing a role in raising awareness and there are various events taking place this week.

Personally, I believe that progress is palpable, but we each have an individual and collective responsibility to continue to progress by awareness and action. As Minister for Equality, and as a woman, I would encourage everyone to break the barriers and shatter those invisible ceilings as we continue to press for progress.