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E-NEWSLETTER

Introduction

Happy New Year and welcome to the January edition of my newsletter! Please feel free to pass this to friends, family and colleagues. If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter, please email me with "unsubscribe" as the subject header.

Thank you for your support,

Catherine

Contents

1. A Historic Vote for the EU
2. Tougher Toy Standards
3. A New Deal for Workers
4. The Importance of an Immediate Ceasefire in Gaza
5. Zimbabwe on the Brink of Collapse
6. Commission on Scottish Devolution

A Historic Vote for the EU

On the 17th December 2008 the European Parliament endorsed a new climate change and energy package which is the most ambitious and wide-reaching in the world. The new package has been designed to ensure that all member states are committed to reducing carbon emissions and advancing the use of renewable energy sources.

The new agreement will lead to a 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 (compared with 1990 levels), a 20% increase in the use of renewable energy sources and 20% cut in energy consumption through improved energy efficiency by 2020.

It is projected that up to 160,000 jobs will be created in the UK as a result of the ambitious renewable energy target – many of these jobs could be produced in Scotland.

A New Deal for Workers

Labour MEP's have supported the recent European Parliamentary vote to remove the 'opt out' clause from the revised Working Time Directive. The 'opt out' entitles member states to introduce measures to allow workers to work more than the maximum of 48 hours per week. The Scottish Nationalist and Scottish Conservative MEPs voted to retain it.

In early 2009, a conciliation committee will have up to 8 weeks to reach a compromise between the European Parliament and the Council. This is due to happen because the European Parliament and the Council have different positions on the Directive.

If finally agreed, the new legislation will mean that workers, who until now had only been allowed to do an average of 48 hours per week over four months, will be able to average that over a year, thus increasing flexibility. This will give workers more choice if they want to make any money through overtime – but without putting them or the public at increased risk. Recent studies have indicated that working long hours increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, depression and stress.

Tougher Toy Standards

I recently voted in favour of new toy safety rules which will protect Scottish children. I am delighted that the European Parliament overwhelmingly voted to pass these laws.

At a toy safety seminar in Brussels, I saw at first hand the kind of toys which pose risks, ranging from edible toys with poor warning labels to highly fragranced baby toys which can cause allergies. It is frightening that manufacturers are producing products which fall short of the mark, when it is universally recognised that toys are the tools that children use for play, comfort and learning.

The old EU law was 20 years out-of-date. The new laws will tighten the rules dealing with suffocation and choking, make importers responsible for ensuring that all toys brought into the EU are safe and allow the EU to put a quick ban on toys that contain risks.

The Importance of an Immediate Ceasefire in Gaza

The humanitarian situation in Gaza and the region as a whole has deteriorated drastically. Following Hamas rocket attacks in December, Israel has retaliated with the heaviest bombing of Gaza since 1967.

I wholeheartedly support an immediate end to the escalating violence and call for a political, not a military, solution. The current actions by Hamas and Israel are only fuelling the extremists, leading to more violence, suffering and desperation. Since December, hundreds of innocent civilians have died and thousands more are reliant on the international community for survival.

The EU response has been an active one. I am delighted that the EU has announced a further £2.9 billion in urgent humanitarian aid for the Palestinians in Gaza. It is imperative that we hold out hope for lasting peace and security for the Israeli and Palestinian people together.

Zimbabwe on the Brink of Collapse

I recently gave a speech to the European Parliament on the crisis situation in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is ruining a once prosperous country. With no governance, very few jobs, hyper-inflation, no food and no health service, it deeply saddens me to say that Zimbabwe is on the brink of collapse.

The outbreak of cholera has killed thousands of innocent Zimbabweans. Mugabe claims that the cholera epidemic has been contained but aid workers advise that it is getting worse. One of the victims of Mugabe's regime is Munashe Hunde, who died shortly before his first birthday. Cynthia, his mother, was forced to leave Zimbabwe to find work in South Africa, but returned to find her son dying of the disease.

It is imperative that we support change in Zimbabwe and help innocent victims like Munashe.

Commission on Scottish Devolution

As many of you will be aware, the Commission on Scottish Devolution published its First Report on 2 December 2008. The purpose of the Commission is to review the Scotland Act of 1998 and to recommend any

changes to the current constitutional settlement. If you do not already have a copy of the First Report, you can access one at www.commissiononscottishdevolution.org.uk.

If you would like to comment on the issues raised in the First Report, you can do so by 27 February 2009.

To contact the Commission, please write to:

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Get in Touch

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