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Media Release

MEA calls on Government to Reduce Public Holidays

The Malta Employers' Association called on Government to take immediate measures to fulfil its stated objective to increase national productivity through an increase in annual working days. The Association issued this statement as a reaction to the recommendation by the Committee on Freedom of Association of the ILO that ruled that in its legislation regarding public holidays falling on weekends, the Government has acted against the spirit of Conventions No. 87 (the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention) and No.98 (the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention). Malta has ratified both these conventions.

The Association said that there is no question that the Government acted in good faith in seeking to increase productive working days with minimal impact on workers' earnings. However this approach, though prudent, has been prone to a number of loopholes that has yielded a murky result, with the employers caught in the middle of different interpretations as to what the legislation actually means, and also regarding its implementation.

The decision by the ILO does not find difficulty in accepting the Government's prerogative to take measures to decide which days to list as national or public holidays. The report in fact points out that even the General Workers' Union, as the complainant, does not question the Government's right to repeal public holidays. It is only the means used to achieve the objective of increasing productive days which is being criticised by the Committee for the Freedom of Association, since it compromises the validity of collective agreements and precludes voluntary negotiations in the future about the right to recover national or public holidays falling on weekends.

Thus, the MEA is proposing that the Government should exercise its mandate to apply public policy to improve national competitiveness by simply reducing the annual number of public holidays by four days. As rightly stated in its case to the ILO, the Government has compelling reasons of national economic interest which have necessitated measures to address the urgent need to retain economic competitiveness and productivity. This will be a more direct approach that will not be subject to interpretation, that respects the ILO conventions, and which should also appease the Union's concerns about the workers' right to collective bargaining.