



Din I-Art Helwa

The Hon Dr Joseph Muscat, MP
Prime Minister,
Auberge de Castille,
Valletta.

31st October 2014

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Dear Prime Minister,

In the fifty years of Din I-Art Helwa's work to protect Malta's environmental and cultural heritage, this is the first time that all six serving and former Presidents of the association since its foundation have felt impelled to write a joint letter to express their deep concern at the current state of the environment and the government's plans for the future.

Land-use is Malta's most pressing environmental problem. Good planning is vital. But effective environmental safeguards put in place between 1992 and 2012 are now being dismantled without regard to the long-term effects on Malta's besieged landscape. Our environment is in peril.

The national Structure Plan – the country's template for the built and rural environment – is long overdue for review. A set of objectives, constituting the "Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development", were drawn up well over two years ago as the necessary precursor to the completion of a fully-fledged Plan incorporating all the detailed land-use policies which would flow logically from them.

A solidly constructed Strategic Plan is a crucial safeguard for the future of land-use development of this country. But, instead, the government has merely reissued the former objectives without any of the essential detailed policies which must under-pin a Plan of this nature for it to succeed. Malta has been left without a proper strategy for the future governance and good administration of its built and rural environment, thus inviting continued bad management and abuse to fester.

A Strategic Plan of this nature and importance should be debated and approved by Parliament. But the government intends to amend the legislation to enable it to be approved by the Minister alone, without proper Parliamentary scrutiny. Given that the Plan involves a change of such social, economic and environmental importance, the attempt to by-pass Parliament is a retrograde step which runs directly counter to the commitment to transparency and accountability which your government made on taking office.

Moreover, a number of other unilateral decisions affecting the environment are also cause for concern. The Rural Policy, constituting a new direction for the countryside that is likely to lead inevitably to land speculation outside the development zone (ODZ), has been approved by the government without any reference to an overarching Strategic Plan and without conducting any Strategic Environmental Assessments of its impact, as required by the European Union. A new policy for high-rise buildings in an area of Mriehel, which had not been included in the public consultation phase, has been approved. Calls for expressions of interest in land reclamation projects have been published without a Marine Spatial Plan being presented, debated or approved.

Din I-Art Helwa has fought to safeguard Malta's environment for fifty years.

We make this plea to you as Prime Minister to ensure that your legacy to Malta is remembered for the improvements which have been made to this country, not for the further and rapid degradation of the built and rural environment which the lack of a comprehensive Strategic Plan is in danger of inflicting.

Yours sincerely,

Judge Maurice Caruana Curran

Prof. Anthony Bonanno

Martin Scicluna

Martin Galea

Dr. Petra Caruana Dingli

Simone Mizzi