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Gozitan civil society groups in UNPRECEDENTED unity behind ONE ENVIRONMENTAL GOZO VISION

Seven key Gozitan entities representing a broad cross section of Gozitan society, are demanding immediate action on the state of play of Gozo's natural and built environment with firm proposals to safeguard the future of the island.

The entities have been engaged in intense discussions over the last few months about Gozo's natural and built environment, and in an unprecedented manner have jointly agreed on an 8-point plan, requesting the authorities to take immediate action.

This unprecedented alliance includes the Gozo based environmental NGOs *Din L-Art Helwa Għawdex*, *Għawdix* and *Wirt Għawdex* representing the voice of all environmentalists in Gozo; the *Gozo Business Chamber* representing industry and commerce; the *Gozo Tourism Association* representing the tourism industry in Gozo; the *Kunsill Reġjonali Għawdex* representing all the mayors and communities of the 14 local council areas in Gozo; and the *Gozo University Group* representing Gozo's tertiary educated youth.

The 8-point plan outlines long-term, positive changes to construction and development policies in Gozo. The plan is designed to ensure that the fabric of Gozitan society, and the built and natural environment are respected, while promoting the sustainable development and prosperity of the island.

The group, operating under the common umbrella of '*Għal Għawdex*', has issued the following demands to the Government and the Planning Authority.

1. Develop a new regional plan and policies specifically designed for Gozo, to preserve it as an island of villages within a modern world, promoting the concept of responsible architecture, respecting the fabric of traditional village cores, of village and ridge skylines, and protecting the coastal environment with guaranteed access to all parts of the coast for the general public.

2. Until such time as a new Regional Plan for Gozo is finalised and agreed with all stakeholders, implement the following measures to arrest the present assault on Gozo:



- a. Suspension of DC2015 Annex 2 regulations (with some exceptions in areas that are already committed in an irreversible manner, including areas of Xlendi and Marsalforn).
- b. Extend UCA boundaries to the maximum possible, subject to the characteristics of each village with strict imposition of UCA rules in all towns and villages.
- c. Moratorium on new ODZ applications with exceptions for **genuine** agricultural use and strict application of the Rural Policy and Design Guidelines (RDG) prohibiting summary applications for any sheep, cattle and poultry farms, stables and warehouses, only allowing full development applications in exceptional circumstances under strict conditions and with monitoring of long-term use, with no subsequent sale of the property, or applications for change of use, allowed for a 25-year period following approval.

3. Until such time as a new Regional Plan for Gozo is finalised and agreed correct the implementation of fiscal incentives on sale and purchase of property in Gozo by:

- a. removing all fiscal incentives on sale of buildings and land for development into apartments.
- b. retaining the existing incentives on sale and purchase of properties in UCA where the purchaser signs a guarantee to restore the property without subdivision.
- c. extending the incentives in (b) above to all vernacular and postwar properties outside UCA where buyers undertake to preserve the integrity of the property, respecting and not exceeding the surrounding traditional



village heights. Subdivision may be allowed only if it does not impact in any way the integrity of the property.

4. Implement a fiscal incentive scheme to encourage the restoration and conversion of existing large traditional properties and bring them back to life as residential homes, high-quality boutique hotels and guesthouses on condition that the fabric of the traditional property, the surrounding built environment and the existing traditional heights are respected and not exceeded unless it is in an area that is already heavily and irreversibly committed.

5. Designate Gozo as a *'design priority area'*, enforcing stricter architectural standards and use of traditional materials for all new buildings, with traditional limestone or reconstituted stone compulsory on all facades except in heavily committed areas where more modern, but creative designs subject to careful scrutiny, can be implemented that blend in well with the surrounding environment.

6. Strictly enforce a 150-metre buffer zone around historical and scheduled buildings and monuments, respecting and not exceeding the existing height of the historical and scheduled buildings within the buffer zone, eliminating all existing loopholes and prohibiting the use of summary applications, only allowing full development applications to be submitted in such areas.

7. Render illegal the development and sales of new apartment blocks without adequate parking facilities and make it compulsory to purchase at least one parking space with each unit (where available).

8. This plan should not in any way preclude the strict enforcement of current policies, rules and regulations, which, if properly enforced by the Planning Authority would already lead to better development within the region.

The seven entities made a courtesy call to the President of Malta H.E. George Vella and briefed him – as the Head of State – on their vision for the sister island. The group are now calling for urgent meetings with the Prime Minister and the Ministers for Gozo, Finance and the Environment together with the Executive



Council Chairperson, and the Chairperson of the Planning Board at the Planning Authority, to discuss policy and implementation of the plan.

The seven key Gozitan stakeholders believe that the right changes can be made to steer the island of Gozo towards a different approach where a truly sustainable balance between the need to drive economic prosperity while protecting and preserving the island's heritage and long-term attractiveness to local and foreign residents and visitors can be achieved with goodwill and immediate positive action on all sides.

