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REFLECTIONS BY THE DIOCESAN COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE ON THE GOVERNMENT PRE-BUDGET DOCUMENT 2012

The main objective of the Peace and Justice Commission is that of fostering awareness of the Social Doctrine of the Church by studying and relating the implications of economic, social and legislative measures to social justice in the interest of the dignity of the human being and the common good.

In this respect, the Commission is presenting its reflections on the social and environmental aspects mentioned in the Government Pre-Budget Document which will be presented to Parliament on the 14th November 2011.

The pre-budget document obviously focuses on the economic side of the labour market, emphasising the potential of work for economic growth. Yet its general framework points to the kind of society that the economy is supposed to promote. There are three points that one would like to see being followed-up and developed further.

One concerns the relation of employment to social inclusion. In principle, it is true that a decent job gives one not only a sense of self-esteem but an opportunity to function as an active member of society. The problem, however, would be how people living in poverty and on the margin of society can be adequately and properly assisted to enter the labour market. Over and above training and education, these people have a host of other (more basic and urgent) needs such as inadequate housing and health-care support as well as lack of basic life-skills and a strong enough motivation to move out of a state of dependency.

The document observes that “persons who become dependent on the welfare state end up being trapped in such a system”. Rightly enough, the problem is not seen simply in terms of the application of external measures that would weed off undeserving people off the system. It involves a culture change from one of dependency to one of contribution. Essentially, this would imply the cultivation of a sense of justice that would dispose one to contribute to the common good.

A society that is based not only on distributive but also on contributive justice requires, as the pre-budget document says, greater cooperation between business, government and training or educational institutions to create a truly contributory culture. What this cooperation involves in practice is not spelled out. But the point deserves a lot of attention.

The importance of balancing the three major concerns of sustainable development: environmental concerns, economic concerns and social concerns is acknowledged. However the major concern seems to be shifted to economic concerns. Environmental concerns seem to 'make sense' only within the context of them being the source of more economic gains. Social concerns are noticeably lacking.

The full text can be retrieved from the Commission's page on the Church in Malta website.