



**THE CHURCH IN MALTA**

**COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE**  
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## **MESSAGE BY THE INTERDIOCESAN COMMISSION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD TOWN PLANNING DAY 2015**

On the occasion of World Town Planning Day which is observed on 8<sup>th</sup> November, the KA would like to appeal to all Members of Parliament to put aside any partisan motivation and seriously consider the implications of the proposed Bills relating to Development Planning and Environment Protection which are expected to be debated in Parliament.

The Maltese Islands cannot afford to have a weak planning system because of weak procedures and weak planning policies that fail to safeguard the common good in lieu of satisfying the interests of the few. The KA would like to emphasise that the weak planning system which is being proposed in the Bills is “aggravated by the fact that the replacement of the Structure Plan by the so-called Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development is itself a very weak document which does not even deserve the adjective ‘strategic’. Moreover, changes to policies that have been carried out render development in Outside Development Zones much easier.”<sup>1</sup> The result of such weak policies is already leading to situations where a mound of rubble in the middle of the countryside justifies a two-storey building. This is not what one would think of in the context of “responsible planning”, ironically the subject of a MEPA-sponsored talk for World Town Planning Day.

In its Opinion Paper of 7<sup>th</sup> August 2015, the KA made its views clear on the proposed Bills and has warned that some of the proposed changes will lead to the collapse of governance at the Planning Authority due to the lack of checks and balances, reintroduce legally-sanctioned ministerial involvement in the planning process and will also create the right climate for corrupt practices. Once again, the KA “would like to remind all Members of Parliament that serving their country is not equivalent to serving an interest group which seeks only to reap fast profits by exploiting the natural environment or intensifying construction in urban environments which undermines rather than improves the quality of life of citizens.”<sup>2</sup>

Transparency, scrutiny and proper public participation in the planning process is crucial. This applies both to private as well as Government-related projects. In this context, the KA is of the opinion that it is unacceptable that projects in hospital-designated areas be exempt from

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<sup>1</sup> KA: *Opinion paper on the Bills relating to Development Planning, Environment Protection and the Environment and Planning Tribunal* 7<sup>th</sup> August 2015

<sup>2</sup> Ibid



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Environmental Impact Assessment procedures or from the development permit application process. It therefore appeals to Government to reverse this decision.

The KA finds unacceptable the proposal that the term “educational purposes” be abusively stretched to include and justify developments in Outside Development Zones that are purely profit-driven or which do not intrinsically qualify as such. This would include proposals for racing tracks for cars and motorcycles. Educating and training drivers does not necessitate the building of a racing track as was implied in a recently-issued request for proposals. Earmarking large tracts of land for “educational or health related purposes” seems to be the latest fad adopted to silence objectors of the project and attempt to justify the irresponsible (and unnecessary) use of land. The KA strongly feels that any Planning Authority truly deserving such a title should safeguard our densely populated island’s limited space by establishing a truly responsible and rigorous planning process and framework that genuinely serves the common good.