

25<sup>th</sup> January 2019  
14/2019**THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

## STATEMENT BY THE CHURCH ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

A prominent characteristic of the current Maltese skyline is undoubtedly the excessive number of cranes soaring high above our towns and villages, likened by many to monsters eating away what is left of our spaces and buildings of historical value. The irony of it all is that whoever is interested in simply swelling his coffers tries to have everyone believe that Malta cannot do without such development as this is a sign of progress. If this is true, how come one hears so many people complaining about the excessive construction that is gradually ruining our environment in practically every corner of our country? Isn't development meant to generate well-being, tranquillity and comfort? Development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy<sup>1</sup>.

The Interdiocesan Environment Commission (KA) has—under various administrations—repeatedly reminded the authorities of the need to actively put an end to the unsustainable rise in construction, in the absence of any serious planning due to its negative impact on society. Some argued that the KA's position would threaten Malta's development. But the KA is pleased to note a constant increase in the number of associations that are pronouncing their concerns on unbridled construction.

We have lately witnessed a new phenomenon in various communities: people in Malta and Gozo are uniting to express themselves against the unsustainable development of their locality. Worth mentioning are residents of: Luqa<sup>2</sup>, Pembroke<sup>3</sup>, Swieqi and

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<sup>1</sup>Development as Freedom - Amartya Sen, economist and philosopher, Nobel Prize winner 1998

<sup>2</sup><https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180924/local/hundreds-of-residents-protest-at-plans-for-luqa-warehouses.689883>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20181102/local/protesters-make-another-attempt-to-stop-db-group-project.693223>

St Julians<sup>4</sup>, Rabat, Għarb<sup>5</sup>, San Lawrenz<sup>6</sup>, Żejtun<sup>7</sup>, and more recently Pietà<sup>8</sup>. Whilst sharing the same concerns of all these residents, the respective local councils, and of whoever has the natural and architectural heritage of our islands at heart, the KA appeals to the authorities to listen to the voices of the communities they are obliged to serve.

Worth mentioning is the fact that in a number of these localities, the representatives of the political parties have ignored their political allegiance and spoke with one voice in giving the good of their locality and their fellow residents' priority over any partisan interest. This undoubtedly gives more strength to citizens, as the energy which would otherwise have been wasted in senseless partisan bickering, is focused on the issues that are really important. At the same time, however, it is fundamental that the authorities give due importance to what the communities have to say in deciding over cases of particular significance, as no one can better understand the impact that such decisions may have on their locality.

The KA feels that the citizens have long been hearing about so-called studies (yet never made public) which predict that Malta needs more construction to improve the quality of life of the Maltese. Nevertheless, this prediction does not seem to be occurring, and we are witnessing a growing discontent at the way our natural and urban environment is being destroyed. This, and not the vain promises of individuals who may have ulterior motives, are the real signs of the times which should be heeded by whoever is responsible for Malta's future.

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.one.com.mt/news/2018/12/01/ir-rabtin-fvuci-wahda-kontra-l-izvilupp-ta-lukanda-fis-saqqajja/>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20171114/local/another-gharb-fireworks-factory-just-300-metres-from-restored-chapel.663034>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20190103/local/san-lawrenz-steps-up-fight-against-monstrous-apartment-block.698286>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.one.com.mt/news/2019/01/12/il-komnita-zejtunija-toggezzjona-ghal-zvilupp-fir-ralhal/>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20190117/local/pieta-council-shoots-down-massive-development-project.699443>