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RISING ABOVE COVID-19?

SUMMARY OF THE OPINION PAPER BY THE ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

The Interdiocesan Environment Commission (KA) feels that now that our country is eagerly looking forward to a time of normality as the COVID-19 pandemic gradually subsides, it would be foolish to go back to our old ways as if nothing happened – as if we have learnt nothing from this experience. The KA believes we need to reinforce the self-discipline we have shown throughout the pandemic, so that all of us would be able to weather any similar experience in the future.

The COVID-19 crisis has opened our eyes to our vulnerability and to what is most valuable in life. The pandemic has caught many countries unprepared, giving rise to a huge setback in their economies, and a human tragedy that has shaken the whole world. It is hoped that this would serve as an eye-opener to what we might have to face when the negative impacts of climate change, caused by unsustainable development, start hitting us harder. The United Nations has called on governments to show the same commitment, determination and unity shown in the fight against the pandemic, in order to find a solution to the problem of climate change.

The KA highlights a number of positive outcomes we have experienced during these difficult times: moments of solidarity, generosity, concern for the needy and personal sacrifice for the good of the community. Moreover, it seems we have come to understand how wellbeing does not depend solely on wealth, and that it takes more than financial prosperity to maintain a good quality of life. Nevertheless, the KA condemns the misconduct of whoever, in such a sad circumstance, chose to exploit the situation and disregard the good of others.

While commending the way the spread of the virus has been tackled by the local authorities, the KA feels the Government should show the same insight in adopting a socially just and sustainable post-COVID-19 strategy, which guarantees a decent quality of life for all so that we will not lose what we have achieved during this difficult time. This strategy should primarily provide economic support directly to the community (especially to those persons worse affected by the crisis), and not to those industries whose unsustainable practice is having a negative effect on the quality of life of citizens. This means that any economic stimulus package should ensure that no development would be considered unless it is sustainable and compatible with the European Green Deal.

Proposals for infrastructural projects that are not sustainable and which are devised only to jumpstart the economy, should be meticulously scrutinized before a decision on their implementation is taken. The improved air quality we have experienced these last weeks should open our eyes to the urgency of shifting from an economy that exploits unwisely the natural resources to one which gives due consideration to the natural and urban heritage.

The KA hopes that the authorities would continue to invest in our nation's environmental, cultural and human resources, and endorses the promise of the Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning, that the Government "will support intelligent planning that will create wealth without sacrificing the environment, so that we can emerge strong and successful from this crisis" as a move in the right direction.