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26 September 2008

DISTRIBUTION: ALL MEDIA  
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REF: 118/2008

**REFLECTIONS BY  
THE DIOCESAN COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE  
ON THE GOVERNMENT PRE-BUDGET DOCUMENT 2009**

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 aspects mentioned in the Government Pre-Budget Document which will be presented to Parliament in October 2008.

This document has been prepared with the input of the various Commissions, Secretariats and Agencies operating within the Malta Church Diocese.

The Commission, while noting that the principal objective of the Budget Document 2009 is "**Together for a sustainable Future**", augurs that this objective will integrate with the reflections on the previous budget, which were those of contributing towards the **sustainability of sound families** built upon an indissoluble marriage between a man and a woman for the common good of society, especially those members of society who are most vulnerable.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Commissions wishes to mention once again, some of the recommendations it made last year in its reflections on the pre-budget document 2008, and which were either not considered or not considered to the extent recommended. In doing so, the Commission seeks to delve further into these issues and relate them to what is being recommended in this year's Government pre-budget document.

The main recommendations are:

- The child allowance for children who are disabled, should be raised to double the standard allowance.

- An additional allowance in the form of a bonus should be paid in December. If the economic situation does not yet permit such a payment, this additional bonus should be given to those children who suffer a disability.
- The Government should consider introducing a paternity leave quota to encourage male spouses to shoulder part of the burden of raising children while the female spouse carries on with her career. The paternity leave quota will form part of the paternal leave and will be lost, if not availed of.
- The parental leave should be increased to 17 weeks for the second child and 21 weeks for the third child. The additional weeks will compensate for the longer time it takes to settle with additional children.
- The fiscal benefit available to those parents who send their children to kindergartens or private schools, should be increased gradually over a definite period, until the entire fee is allowed as a deduction against income for tax purposes.
- The fiscal benefit available to residents in a private residential home for senior citizens, should be increased gradually over a definite period, until the entire fee is allowed as a deduction against income for tax purposes.
- Those persons who work less than eight hours a week, should pay a nominal contribution towards social security. The same contribution will be paid by their employer and benefits will be pro-rated to the payment.
- A process should be initiated for the revision of the minimum wage, over a period of not more than three years, to an amount which will guarantee a modest standard of living. Persons in receipt of a minimum wage are living below the poverty line and are therefore considered vulnerable.
- Persons in receipt of a service pension should be entitled to receive the social security pension in full. If Government aims to achieve this situation, the period within which this happens should be defined. The non-eligibility to a full social security pension for persons in receipt of a service pension is a social injustice.
- The premiums payable on private health and pension schemes should be fully deductible against income for tax purposes.
- Interest paid on loans for purchasing the first residence should be fully deductible against income for tax purposes. This benefit should be capped on a specific loan amount.
- Government should carry out an evaluation that will determine the special needs of Church schools for the employment of facilitators with children with special needs, counselors and social workers, educational psychologists, career advisors, activity teachers, health and safety teachers, computer technicians and relief teachers. The cost thereof should be borne by Government.

- Government should regularly issue a pro-forma fee note to parents of students who attend Government schools as a means to creating awareness of the cost of education to Government and of the importance for beneficiaries to make good use of the educational services given.
- The age limit for the consumption of alcohol should be immediately increased to 18 years with a plan for this to be extended to 21 years within three years.
- The tax on alcoholic beverages should be increased substantially as a disincentive to drinking.
- The tax on tobacco and tobacco products should be increased substantially as a disincentive to smoking.
- Hefty fines should be introduced for the emission of poisonous fumes by public transport vehicles and other heavy vehicles as a result of abuse in the mixing of fuels for economic reasons.
- Remedial action should be taken to reduce the long waiting lists in the Government hospitals. The Government should outsource surgery to private hospitals as part of remedial action.
- A nominal fee should be introduced on medicines currently distributed by the Government free of charge. Furthermore, a pro-forma invoice should be issued with medicines highlighting the cost to Government and the benefit being received by the beneficiary.
- Government should charge fees for hospitalization in Government hospitals to all those who subscribe to a private health insurance. Again, a pro-forma invoice should be issued to users of Government hospitals.
- Physical education in all schools should be part of the daily curricula, as recommended by the World Health Organization. This should be one of the measures taken to reduce child and youth obesity.
- The Government should, as part of Health and Safety at the place of work, address the increasing problem of bullying at the place of work.
- The Commission welcomes every initiative taken to create productive work with the right conditions of employment and/or returns and recommends concrete action to create employment for dockyard workers who will be made redundant as well as for those who have been unemployed for a number of years and also for those over the age of 45, now even more with the pensionable age going up to 65 years.
- The Government should continue to fight with political will the problems related to drugs, alcohol, illicit substances and usury. These social problems are afflicting members of society from all social classes. Government should recognize more the contribution made by voluntary Church organizations to combat these social problems and to assist in the rehabilitation of victims.

- Whereas the Commission agrees with the Government's aim of balancing the budget by the year 2010, it suggests that in the light of a volatile economic situation at a National and International level, this should not be achieved at the expense of lowering the standard of living of the average family which has already to combat increased costs of food and other essential services.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Commission wishes to conclude by emphasizing that these reflections are meant to give a contribution towards a more open and impartial dialogue. In this respect, the Commission appeals to everyone to do his/her part to adopt the fundamental principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church, and to approach these recommendations from the perspective of the common good and the well being of the most vulnerable members of our society rather than from an egoistic perspective.

The Commission suggests reading the full document in Maltese which is found on its website [www.maltadiocese.org](http://www.maltadiocese.org).