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MALTA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – A VISION FOR 2050

STATEMENT BY THE CHURCH ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

In its submission in the consultation exercise related to Malta's Sustainable Development Vision for 2050 which was carried out last November, the Interdiocesan Environment Commission (KA) makes the following points:

- a) As to responsibility at ministerial level, various ministries tend to be too focused on their own remit to respond to sustainability issues. Moreover, housing sustainable development within the Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change tends to reinforce the misconception that sustainable development deals with 'environmental stuff'. Consequently, the KA suggests that SD should form part of the portfolio of the prime minister.
- b) The KA suggests the setting up of a parliamentary committee made up of both sides of the House that decides on a national sustainable development strategy with its accompanying policy actions.
- c) Although commitment at all levels is important, Government has to do its part. On a policy level this commitment towards sustainability might mean that:
 - i. sustainable development implementation might require positive discrimination of policies to safeguard the environment and promote social wellbeing **over** short-term economic gains,
 - ii. the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) evolves into the Malta Council for Sustainable Development (MCSD), and
 - iii. consultants on matters concerning development are chosen from a cohort of persons who know what sustainable development means.

The KA commends the Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change for presenting a long-term vision for sustainability and for relating it with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also endorses the wide consultation exercise that accompanied the document, as a good sign of how the process will evolve.

However, it finds it rather strange that in a document addressing sustainable development in densely populated country like Malta the concepts of 'carrying capacity' and 'limits to growth' are not sufficiently explored. One needs to examine whether what goes into increasing our Gross Domestic Product is in fact contributing to the sustained wellbeing of current and particularly future generations.

Consequently there are aspects that need to be considered in the document's proposed four key normative governance principles:

- a) **Long-term:** essentially one needs to start attacking the causes of issues not their symptoms.
- b) **Integration:** while acknowledging the need to integrate environmental, social and economic policies the document, however, repeats the mistake of addressing them separately. A country's economic development will surely falter if the quality of its environment and its social fabric are not given priority.
- c) **Participation:** ensuring a wide consultation and participation of citizens is key to generating ownership and consequently implementation of the sustainable development strategy. Participation cannot be relegated to a once-in-every-5-years approval of an electoral manifesto.
- d) **Reflexivity:** The KA would have expected the development of the Vision to include an evaluation of the past. It feels that the document once again assumes that a change in policy will automatically bring about a change in behaviour.

Moreover the KA would like to suggest **honesty** as another key normative governance principle for Malta's SD Strategy.

There are issues, such as the excessive number of private cars populating our roads and the negative impacts on sustainability of the construction industry, which have been completely disregarded by the document despite being the root cause of problems. The construction industry has gone well beyond its carrying capacity, and is impacting negatively our living spaces and social fabric.

The Vision acknowledges that education is crucial towards achieving sustainability. However, the KA points out that education for sustainable development (ESD) for adults (particularly of policy makers and local councils) is still rather lacking. The document rightly promotes the upskilling and development of an adaptable flexible workforce. This would help Malta move away from unsustainable short-term gains for the few who profit from a pro-business approach to long-term benefits for the community who would gain from a pro-person approach to economy.