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KAMRA TAL-PERITI

To support members of the profession in achieving excellence in their practice of architecture and engineering in the interest of the community

Honourable Prime Minister Dr Robert Abela
Auberge de Castille
Valletta

Our Ref: 8/6

3rd August 2020

Dear Honourable Prime Minister,

On the 2nd August 2019, Government presented the *Kamra tal-Periti* with a letter wherein it committed itself to bring about significant changes to the construction industry. Government's commitments were accompanied by established timelines, including the presentation to Parliament of the legislation setting up the new Building and Construction Authority by October 2019, the issuance of building and construction regulations within 24 months, and the presentation in Parliament of the long-awaited amendments to the Periti Act by October 2019.

Exactly one year has gone by, yet none of these commitments have so much as seen the light of day.

This open letter also comes four months after the tragic death of Miriam Pace on the 2nd March 2020, which had spurred you to establish a committee to advise you directly on the changes that are required to ensure that the construction industry would no longer be rife with unacceptable practices. Various news portals reported that you were "*angry and hurt*" by the tragedy that had struck the Pace family, and that "*progress cannot be achieved at this price, at the cost of human life.*"

The anger you felt that day is an anger that we experience on a daily basis when we are faced with the systemic failures that plague the industry. These include the complete lack of regulation of contractors, the vacuum of a proper building and construction regulatory framework, and the fragmentation of regulatory bodies that continues to fuel confusion and lack of consistency. All too often we observe issues of site safety, the problem of unregulated workforces including the exploitation of foreign nationals, and an overall sense of slackness which forces us to operate in an industry which is grossly underregulated, with a severe lack of appropriately qualified operatives on sites, and one which is far from being comparable to our European counterparts that it is, to say the least, embarrassing.

The *Kamra tal-Periti* has been calling for a comprehensive overhaul of the industry since as far back as 2007. For years we lobbied successive Governments to implement these much needed changes, without success. Then in June 2017, Grenfell tower in the UK was engulfed in flames, claiming 72 innocent lives. It was then that the *Kamra* had raised the alarm that similar tragedies could befall us too following the change in high-rise policy, and that it realised that it could not sit back any longer. It therefore set up a committee which worked incessantly to deliver a proposal for *A Modern Building and Construction Regulation Framework for Malta* that was published for consultation in May 2019.

After consulting with industry stakeholders, the *Kamra tal-Periti* published the final version of its proposals on the 6th June 2020. The following day, I had written to you and three of your Cabinet colleagues requesting a meeting to present our proposals to you on the 12th June 2020, to mark the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the *Kamra*. To date, and despite several reminders, we have not so much as received an acknowledgement of our request from your office.

It remains inconceivable how this industry continues to be treated as the Cinderella of the public sector from the regulatory side, and its Prince Charming on the economic side. This *laissez-faire* attitude is not only destroying our cultural identity and our environment, but is resulting in loss of life and the social upheaval of local communities.

No other industry is as neglected and unregulated as ours, to the point of posing severe danger to those who operate within it, those who occupy properties adjacent to construction sites, and to those who occupy its end-products; yet at the same time it is presented as one of the pillars and drivers of the economy. Indeed, during the *coronavirus* pandemic you stated that it would play a vital role in the road to economic recovery.

Government efforts to draft disparate pieces of legislation have so far been weak and sporadic, largely characterised by lack of vision, fragmentation, and incompetence, which is why the industry is still in crisis today. The apparent lack of drive to implement an overhaul of the industry raises significant questions as to Government's commitment to address this crisis.

On behalf of the Council of the *Kamra tal-Periti*, and of the profession which has formally endorsed the *Kamra's* proposals at three General Meetings, I reiterate our request for an urgent meeting with your goodself to discuss a revised timetable for the implementation of the Letter of Commitment. We trust that this request will be accepted without delay, otherwise we will be left with no option other than to question the value of your Government's written commitments and its willingness to protect the lives and well-being of its citizens.

Yours sincerely,



Perit Simone Vella Lenicker
President, *Kamra tal-Periti*

cc. Periti
Press