

We, the undersigned, representing entities active in the field of cultural heritage in Malta and Gozo,

Refer to the Declaration of Principles of the Constitution of Malta, and in particular to Article 9 which stipulates that “the State shall safeguard the landscape and the historical and artistic patrimony of the Nation”;

Conscious of the fact that we all spend most of our lives within the built environment, be it at home, at a place of work, or whilst participating in education, business or relaxation, and that the state of the built environment has a major impact on the quality of life of all citizens of these islands;

Concerned about the rapid changes that are taking place, dramatically and irreversibly transforming the distinctive architectural character, streetscape and skyline of our towns and villages, which have evolved harmoniously over several generations, and which are now being severely compromised and even at risk of being lost;

Alarmed by the unprecedented construction pressures that have recently intensified, even within our Urban Conservation Areas, to the extent that we are now witnessing indiscriminate demolition of built and other cultural assets in these areas, and a general impoverishment of the quality of our urban areas;

Concerned about the fact that planning systems have often favoured speculation, rather than the more fundamental needs of society, and concerned about the ever-increasing incidence of permits granted for demolition of heritage buildings, without any regard given to their architectural significance, nor to the cultural and social considerations that are important to the community;

Convinced that our heritage buildings, and the wider cultural landscape, are irreplaceable assets that also have a real economic value that can contribute to the creation of wealth when positioned within a planning framework that aims for sustainable development;

Aware of the importance of archaeological remains that represent a unique and invaluable part of Malta's cultural heritage, and of their significance within a broad Mediterranean context;

Aspiring to promote a built environment which constitutes a healthy synergy and balance between the existing built fabric and new urban developments of high quality, as opposed to short-sighted speculation;

**HEREBY DECLARE THAT WE CAN NO LONGER TOLERATE THE CURRENT FAILURE OF THE STATE
TO SAFEGUARD THE PATRIMONY OF THE NATION AS GUARANTEED BY OUR CONSTITUTION**

Therefore, calling upon Government to shoulder its responsibilities for the upholding of the Constitution, we propose and demand:

- That a single integrated Public Inventory of Cultural Assets that are scheduled or identified for scheduling, or worthy of scheduling, be urgently compiled, and maintained, under the Cultural Heritage Act, and not under the Development Planning Act, and that such inventory be binding on planning decisions;
- That conservation experts and heritage NGOs are invited to be actively and genuinely involved in policy making in the legislative processes relating to development planning;
- That the protection status of Urban Conservation Areas, and the areas immediately surrounding Urban Conservation Areas, as well as the significance of Grade 2 scheduling, be urgently redefined, so as to give effective protection to the cultural assets therein, rather than promote “façadism” or token, and effectively meaningless, preservation of fragments, such as niches, plaques, and sculptural features;
- That special attention be given to the protection of traditional skylines of historic towns and villages, and that permissible building heights as designated in the Local Plans do not compromise these skyline views;
- That the current, rather ineffectual, protection of heritage assets within Urban Conservation Areas be strengthened by a blanket presumption against the demolition of buildings, or parts of buildings and gardens, as well as by a blanket presumption against the building of additional floors above the existing, unless it could incontrovertibly be demonstrated that no additional damage to the character of the Urban Conservation Area would result;
- That the *European Landscape Convention* (Florence, 2000) be ratified by Malta, without further delay;
- That the *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Faro, 2005), be signed and ratified by Malta, without further delay;
- That Government takes suitable measures to ensure that provision is made in the budget of developer-funded archaeological investigations to ensure a timely publication of a summary scientific record, as well as the full publication and recording of the findings, as required by the *European Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage* (Valletta, 1992), to which Malta is a party;
- That Government provides its agents, primarily the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, with the necessary tools and resources to safeguard our cultural heritage in an effective and lasting way, within a strong legislative framework;
- That, in addition to schemes such as Irrestawra Darek, public funds be made available to allow investment in public infrastructure, including pavement and street quality, especially in Urban Conservation Areas, so that these are truly given life again, to the social benefit of existing residents;
- That a public Heritage Property Fund be created, which could be used in exceptional circumstances by the State, to intervene and acquire key properties, at market value, which have strategic cultural significance, so that these properties can be restored and redeveloped in an appropriate way, before being put back on the market to recover some, if not all, of the funds expended, or otherwise to be put to communal or societal use.