

## **PR on Armier and White Rocks Issues**

*12<sup>th</sup> July 2010*

The Prime Minister was recently criticized for stating that government was not spending a penny in return for a state-of-the-art sports complex at White Rocks, Pembroke, for, as many pointed out, the public land being offered to the developers is worth millions of Euros.

In addition to monitoring this project due to its proximity to a special area of conservation, the environment groups Ramblers' Association, Friends of the Earth Malta, Flimkien ghal Ambjent Aħjar and NatureTrust (Malta) voice their concern at the opaque processing so far and agree that the value of such land is in fact worth millions.

It is in this context that the Armier squatters' situation should be judged. Their ferocity in bargaining, their electoral arm-twisting, and their instant initiative in organizing themselves is better understood when the millions of real estate value at stake on this public land is revealed.

The Armier tract of land is thought to be much larger in size than that of the White Rocks project, and is also seafront public real estate. Worth millions of Euros, it is about to be written off for a pittance due to political blackmail.

The affront to the law-abiding public should not be underestimated. No amount of government transparency and revolutionary planning at MEPA is going to impress the public if a whole seaside town built illegally on prime public land by cowboys, is "sanctioned".

In addition to the illegal shacks, caravaners are now insolently demanding alternative sites in locations convenient to them in order to move off the land they illegally occupy. It beggars belief that the leaders of Malta's main political parties should pander to land grabbers by offering them property that rightfully belongs to the nation. Such an agreement would legitimize these squatters' claim to the value of the land they have squatted on. This property is already being speculated and will continue to be bartered for clean and legal real estate.

The squatters' brigade claims to have paid €93,000 in expenses which works out to €4,650 per year for a minimum of 20 years of illegal possession. Divided between some 800 illegal households, this comes to less than €5.81 per year. If that is not theft, we don't know what is. Not only have the squatters had it obscenely good enough for far too long but they have made outrageous claims also for the future.

The agreement signed with the Nationalist government on the eve of the 2003 election, would extend the existing 67,000 square metres to around 231,000 square metres or 230 tumuli of public land which amounts to no less than .08% of Malta's land surface, against an annual rent of €350,000. The pledge was renewed by the leader of the Nationalist Party just before the 2008 elections, by committing himself to "consult with MEPA" on the pending applications.

Presented in 2004 the applications submitted by Armier Developments, the squatters' company, proposes the development of 1,589 rooms, 5 playing fields and a bowls pitch, a minimarket, 3 restaurants, a two-storey garage, 3 community centres and a clinic in an area spanning Ramlet il-Qortin, Ta' Macca u l-Armier, the Barriera tal-Ahrax quarry, Little Armier and the Torri l-Abjad zone.

MEPA Chairman Austin Walker has now claimed that part of the development proposed by Armier Developments is unacceptable because of environmental, agricultural and land ownership issues. However no refusal of the squatters' basic claims has been forthcoming from either political party in Parliament nor MEPA.

**The ENGOs' position is crystal clear. Rampant abusive land seizures, such as that along the Valletta harbour, Gnejna, San Tumas, Ghadira, all of Armier and in Gozeo such as in Dwejra and ix-Xatt l-Ahmar, must be terminated. Turning over such a large expanse of countryside for building in addition to that lost in the Rationalisation Plans encourages further abuse, and makes a mockery of the government's promise of "ODZ is ODZ!"**

**The abuse of partisan politics, the clear source of these illegalities, is corroding the public's faith in Maltese politicians' ability to embrace the 21<sup>st</sup> century and rise above vote-catching tactics to build a political career built on sound ideology and practice.**