

## Ramblers association covering good ground

George Cini

During the short time it has been founded, the Ramblers Association of Malta has been working hard to bring to the attention of the authorities the great need to make accessible pathways in the countryside, particularly to scenic and other spots harbouring historic remains, RAM president Lino Bugeja said yesterday.

"Members of the public have to understand that the association was not set up to organise groups for walks in the countryside.

"Our sole aim is to get the backing of the authorities as well as the legal backing so that trekkers and walkers - who usually are in pairs or in very small groups - will be able to enjoy the open countryside without the fear of being confronted by packs of dogs or by armed sentinels," Mr Bugeja explained.

He noted that the association had found a champion in Parliamentary Secretary Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici with whom the RAM has already held several meetings.

A delegation from the association has also met the Prime Minister when by means of photos and maps indicated to him what is known among ramblers as the Bahrija walk and how impossible it is to follow because of chains, gates and other unsightly contraptions that hinder the right of way.

"The situation of less trodden ways is much worse.

"This state of affairs ridicules our nation.

"The Ramblers' Association cannot be expected to resort to court action on behalf of ramblers every time complaints about such obstacles come to light, in view of the lack of legislation in this sphere and lengthy court procedures," Alex Vella, the association's secretary explained.

He added it will be important for green wardens to be empowered to remove gates, chains and other objects presently hindering the right of way to places of natural and cultural interest and to the coastline.

Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi expressed concern at the sad state of affairs mainly because of the lack of adequate legislation.

"The association pointed out to Dr Gonzi that Malta is the only EU country that lacks legislation dealing with accessibility to the countryside.

"Dr Gonzi agreed that successive governments had avoided this for 'fear of stirring up a hornets nest'".

"Experience has shown that such procrastination has brought about only injustice and abuse, irreversible damage and in a number of cases, the loss of historical and natural heritage," Mr Bugeja said. During the meeting the association presented the Prime Minister with a petition that was approved with a show of hands by all those who attended the launch of the association on February 19 at Din l-Art Helwa premises in Valletta.

All those members of the public who attended the first meeting will shortly be informed by means of a circular letter of the ground that the committee has managed to cover so far.

The associate's website is [ramblersmalta.jointcomms.com](http://ramblersmalta.jointcomms.com), which was set up by J.C. Sullivan, a Rambler from Canada who is a frequent visitor to Malta. E-mail: [ram205@gmail.com](mailto:ram205@gmail.com).