

Organisations unite to protect environment

Claudia Calleja



Analise Falzon, surrounded by members of the 18 organisations and local farmers, reads her statement at Bahrija, overlooking Fomm ir-Rih bay (Picture by Chris Sant Fournier)

Eighteen organisations spoke with one voice yesterday and called on the authorities to commit themselves to "rigorously fulfil their duty" of protecting the Bahrija area and the adjacent coast and countryside.

"After the horror of losing Kalkara Valley it comes as an alarming shock that the continuing siege on the environment is ongoing in places we always thought would be protected," Analise Falzon said on behalf of the 18 organisations.

Members of the organisations, who met at Bahrija square and then walked down the road leading to Fomm Ir-Rih, were: Moviment Graffiti, Nature Trust, Friends of the Earth Malta, Ceratonia, Pembroke Residents Association, Grupp Arkeologiku Malti, Din l-Art Helwa, Malta Organic Agriculture Movement, Ramblers' Association of Malta, Driph, Zminijietna, GAIA Foundation, the Archaeological Society Malta, Inizjamed, Save Wied Garnaw Action Group, Siggiewi Action Group for the Environment, Alternattiva Demokratika, AD Youths and the Rabat council.

Before starting her address to the media, Ms Falzon asked for a few moments of silence to honour the memory of journalist Julian Manduca and photographer Alfred Giglio who passed away this month.

In her statement she said the organisations were alarmed to note that a Website had been set up to mislead potential buyers into thinking that permits were available in the Bahrija area for large-scale developments and projects - such as theme parks, five-star hotels and golf courses.

The area, which is outside the development zone, supports EU priority habitats and a rich biodiversity in its cliff and valley areas which host numerous endemic and rare species, not to mention the archaeological sites.

The organisations called on the authorities to ensure that there was no room for any misunderstanding or misinterpretation and to commit themselves to protecting the area.

They also called on the government to declare the coast, including the cliffs, public property and enforce the Structure Plan Policy which states that "public access around the coastline immediately adjacent to the sea or at the top of cliffs... will be secured".

Rabat mayor Frank Fabri publicly clarified that, just like everyone present yesterday, he did not have any personal hidden interests in the issue other than to safeguard the environment and area in question.

He appealed to the authorities to make it clear that they were interested in safeguarding the land and the heritage which was being threatened.

"We are not here to defend a wall, a shrub or a snail, as had been alleged by some, but to defend that which we have inherited from our fathers and which we are in duty bound to pass on to our children," he said.

Lino Bugeja, from the Ramblers' Association of Malta, concluded yesterday's meeting by announcing that on July 14, Bastille Day, a peaceful demonstration will be held with the aim of opening up Fomm ir-Rih to the public.

This, he said, will be a symbolic demonstration to awaken people, and some government sections, from the indifference they have been wrapped in until now.

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