



# Għaqda Residenti Sliema

**Sliema Residents Association**

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**Subject : SRA's Reply to Dr de Marco's Press Statement on Villa Bonici**

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The Sliema Residents Association refers to the reply of Dr Mario De Marco to the SRA's press release on Villa Bonici.

Noting the Parliamentary Secretary's concern of the rights of private property, the SRA points to the fact that in every town and village other than Sliema and St Julian's, houses and gardens which are privately owned are designated as protected enclaves. So what is so different about Sliema and St Julians?

SRA questions why the Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism and the Environment should limit himself to the defence of private property, without seeking a solution that satisfies both the owners and the local community, when the sort of development that is being proposed for Villa Bonici, is exactly the intensive over-development that is putting tourists off our shores. With circa 5,000 empty flats in Sliema, 23 more blocks of flats can only wreak further damage to Sliema's strained living environment and attractiveness.

SRA is confident that as Parliamentary Secretary in charge of MEPA, Dr. De Marco would be aware that MEPA has been conscious of Sliema's problems and already 18 years ago recommended that no more development of flats should be encouraged in Sliema, let alone mega-projects such as this, at a time when Sliema is far more over-developed than it was eighteen years ago. The 2006 Local Plan states: "In localities such as Sliema and St Julians further development would increase further noise, traffic, overshadowing, sense of enclosure and degradation of the public realm.

SRA also questions why an outstanding old house like Villa Bonici has not been scheduled yet? Why were Villa Bonici's gardens removed from the Sliema Urban Conservation Area in the 2006 Local Plans (along with other areas earmarked by speculators). Why has MEPA not designated any protected green enclaves in Sliema, as the Villa Bonici gardens should be. Has Sliema been singled out to be sold off to speculators?

SRA reiterates its concerns and proposals regarding the Villa Bonici area were submitted within the holistic context of continued

unsustainable overdevelopment of Sliema that adversely affects residents' health and quality of life and so its representation were made in the "public interest".

The SRA also refutes claims that its concerns and proposals are capricious or exaggerated, as they are supported and guided by MEPA's own NHLP 2006 document, MEPA's own air quality monitoring data and the Transport Authority's professional traffic flow/management reports.

While acknowledging that there may be significant legal and financial challenges, as described in Dr. de Marco press communication on behalf of the Government, and that the MEPA's interventions requested for Villa Bonici site are non-trivial, the SRA strongly feels that such challenges should not override the "public interest" of Sliema residents' right for environmental and planning control to be properly exercised.

The SRA is dismayed that, separately and collectively, OPM, MEPA and other "quangos" (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations) seem to resist decisive action and 'pass the buck' around thereby abandoning Sliema and its residents to a sad fate.

The Sliema Residents Association Committee