

# GREEN YOUTH MANIFESTO

-proposals by young people for a greener Malta-

2008



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## **LEVELS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY**

We strongly believe that the policies mentioned hereunder should be implemented on both National (local and regional) and International (European and Global) Levels.

We strongly hope that through this policy, youths are encouraged to participate in many of the events taking place in all levels and also projects like Youth Local Councils, National Youth Parliament, National Youth Day, developing a Youth Policy on EU level, engage in a global youth co-operation on issues deemed as threats to peace and stability to the world's existence like climate change, wars and terrorism, as well as taking part in campaigns and international activities like those organised by Member Organisations pertaining to the European Youth Forum and the United Nations.

## **DEFINITION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

When we talk about environment from a GREEN perspective, we include three main aspects: the economy, social issues and ecology.

## **1. THE ECONOMY**

### **1.1 EMPLOYMENT**

We recognise that young people have a right to work and the state should provide them with a wide selection of job opportunities. Work is a major key in a person's self realisation and development.

Unemployment is a common wound in today's society especially affecting young people and other vulnerable groups.

We should ensure that enough opportunities are available in Malta and that wages are comparable to EU standards. If this is not the case, we will be liable to continue suffering from brain-drain. Youths should not be forced to leave the country to seek employment.

Jobs in environmentally friendly companies should be encouraged. Investment in renewable energy should be given priority and careers in this sector encouraged. One option is to create work for people focusing on the need of raising environmental awareness in schools and with the general public. We also encourage further creation of jobs in the ICT sector as it is environmentally clean. And we encourage further job creation like eco-tourism and other innovative and sustainable niches. Gozitan youths have to leave Gozo to live in Malta because of lack of jobs so the government should create jobs in Gozo and encourage companies to set up.

We also recommend that free help and training be given to low-skilled workers and those over 40 years of age who are changing jobs or are facing technological advancements in their workplaces. Such training could involve computer knowledge and practical training in modern technology.

Traditional crafts are dying out. The government should urgently make sure that these trades and skills are safe-guarded for future generations, because it makes economical sense (tourism industry) and also for the preservation of Maltese culture and heritage. The government should assist local trades-people to be more competitive, otherwise foreign companies will continue to take over resulting in the loss of traditional jobs.

Young people should be safeguarded against perils like exploitation (underage employment, wages and benefits), harassment and discrimination, disregard of the Health and Safety Act, as well as abuses in part-time jobs.

Flexitime, reduced hours, job sharing, study leave, sick and vacation compensations and parental leave are all concepts to be highly promoted and seen that they are being implemented.

## **1.2 YOUTH ENTERPRISE**

Young people who wish to become entrepreneurs in order to contribute to the economical sector of our country, should be encouraged through programmes starting in schools and also be given sufficient support when setting up their own businesses (e.g. subsidising of bank loans etc.).

Many youth organisations struggle desperately to raise money for their educational campaigns, activities and administration. To encourage the NGOs to continue contributing to society, they should have incentives to undertake profit-making initiatives. The government should have a subsidy for NGOs that are interested in opening a commercial branch to subsidize the work they are doing. The registration of the commercial branch of the NGO should be significantly cheaper than it is for other businesses.

### **1.3 PENSION REFORM**

Young people should be greatly consulted about this important reform, as it mostly concerns them in seeing how they will be provided for in the future. An adequate reform where equal opportunities are ensured is highly favoured.

### **1.4 HOME CARERS**

ADZ recognizes the role of the home carer as an essential role to Maltese society and economy. We recommend that home carers be given recognition for their contribution to the economy.

## **SOCIAL ISSUES**

### **2.1 THE FAMILY**

The concept of family includes married couples as well as cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual couples who opt for civil unions, living with commitment and responsibility towards each other and their offspring.

Alternattiva Demokratika Zghazagh (ADZ) identifies that one of the main factors in the increase of family breakdowns is the ongoing rat-race to make ends meet. This is mainly due to the price of property, lack of social benefits vis-à-vis children, as well as the fact that in terms of material goods, what was once a luxury has become a necessity.

Young as well as older couples have extremely little quality time together. This is due to too much work in order to meet financial obligations. (refer to affordable housing 2.5). The fact that couples have to have two or three jobs to make ends meet is worrying.

### **2.1 CHILD REARING AND PROTECTION**

While enforcing a zero tolerance towards child abuse, ADZ believes that measures should be taken to aid parents. We propose a 24/7 hotline handled by trained volunteers and/or paid staff specifically for parents that can't cope with certain situations. Child rearing is not an easy job. Well meaning parents might resort to abuse due to stress and lack of skills. Having such hotline offers a safety valve for parents who get trapped in such situations.

Maternity/parental paid leave should be increased from 14 to 26 week, in order to

give parents better career opportunities without having to leave the infant with outsiders at this delicate age.

ADZ proposes that the government undertakes the compiling of a National Action Plan for Children. Malta lacks behind in this aspect. The action plan should include specific attention to migrant children (unaccompanied minors as well as children who come with their families) and their developmental needs.

### **2.3 CIVIL UNION**

ADZ believes that civil Unions be introduced in the Maltese Islands.

Civil unions will give same sex and different sex couples the opportunity to have their relationship formally recognised. ADZ believes that the same rights should be enjoyed to those who choose a civil union and to the *de facto* couples as those who are married, thus meaning that all couples all be treated equally before the law, irrespective of their relationship status. This does not mean the lessening of rights for married couples.

The law should be amended to allow same sex and different sex couples to have their relationships legally and socially recognised. Inequalities in the law have led to problems for some same sex and different sex couples. For example, there are instances where partners have not been recognised as next-of-kin in the event of an illness or death.

A Civil Union Bill gives couples a choice about what sort of relationship they can have. In the case of different sex couples, the choice would be between *de facto* relationships, marriage or civil union. Same sex couples will have the choice between civil union or a *de facto* relationship.

## **2.4 DIVORCE**

Unfortunately no matter what policy is drafted and enforced, some marriages fail. While we aim at prevention as mentioned in the previous chapter as well as better education prior to marriage or union, people in these situations are very vulnerable. We believe that such couples should have the right to attempt to build another family in conformity with state laws. Although ADZ does not want to make limitations as to who can divorce and not, we view the necessity of divorce where one of the partners has become a victim in the relation such as battering and infidelity from the other partner.

*It should be clear that on points 2.3 and 2.4 we are only referring to state laws. We believe in a secular society where no religion can impose laws on the state. However, as long, unless a criminal offence is being done or promoted; neither does the state have the right to impose on any religious practice.*

## **2.5 HOUSING**

Housing should be affordable and the ever soaring prices of houses due to speculation should be stopped by strong taxation on vacant property as well as tax incentives for those who choose to rent their property. Reform on land laws and rent should be revolutionalised. A more meritocratic social housing policy needs to be implemented, free from all kinds of abuses.

## **2.6 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Our country is already moving in the right direction by the latest reforms regarding this sector especially for the fact that police officers can still proceed with investigations if the victim drops charges, and can also force the perpetrator to leave the house to guarantee that the abuse is stopped.

ADZ welcomes these reforms but still believes that emphasis should be on education, both towards the potential victim and the potential abuser who in many cases has problems him/herself. Police officers should be trained on how to handle these cases.

We recommend that doctors and nurses should be trained to observe signs of domestic violence on victims and further more, besides treating the physical repercussions; they should be trained to report such violence, give immediate psychological help, or refer the victim to a psychologist available at the time.

## **2.7 SAFETY**

One of the main problems in today's world is safety. One cannot say that youths in Malta are completely safe. One issue is the fact that due to graduate unemployment, youth cannot feel secure that with all results achieved, and other meritocratic achievements, they will find a job they deserve. Ironically in most situations such as the sectors of nursing, art and culture, social work and teaching there is a need for more human resources but not enough government funding. ADZ proposes more funding in these sectors as this will serve to have society's needs met and for graduate employment. Financially this is feasible given that it will result in reducing social problems.

On another level, many youths face security problems while enjoying their nightlife. ADZ calls upon authorities to make sure that young people are protected from theft and violence and to make sure that those who are responsible to make sure that there is law and order should ensure that they keep it and not act above the law.

## **2.8 Mental Health**

A lot of people, and an increasing number of youths, suffer from mental health problems. We consider this as a social issue apart from a health issue. Many reasons for these problems are social, including the immense pressure imposed on young children to gain high marks at schools, lack of safety (as mentioned above), lack of free time, added stress and anxiety as well as other pressures such as that on women to be thin and men to be physically strong and handsome to satisfy the 'perfect' stereotype.

Unfortunately Malta is one of those countries which deals with mental health problem mainly through medication and institutionalization. ADZ believes that whenever possible medication must be used as little as possible and for minimum time. Institutions like Mount Carmel Hospital needs radical reform in terms of hygiene, specialised staff and the building itself. Even after this reform, this institution should be used only as a last resort, and for a minimum amount of time.

Other services already exist such as Villa Chelsea (a rehabilitation programme) and Home Support for people who only need some monitoring and guidance to live a 'normal' life. These services are provided by the Richmond Foundation. ADZ believes that the way forward is to fund such services (including prevention) instead of investing in the financing of institutions. Eventually the need for these institutions will decrease if people have efficient services available to them, such as rehabilitation programmes and Home Support.

Mental health patients, who have to be under medication, could benefit more with being given detailed information about their own medication – information such as effects of medicine and side effects, dosage and any other relevant information. If the mental health patient has a legal guardian, this information

must also be given to them, along with a pamphlet stating clearly the rights of people with mental health problems.

## **2.9 PEOPLE AND DISABILITY**

Due to the work by NGOs, Malta has made huge leaps in the area of persons with a disability. Gone are the days when these people used to be hidden and enjoyed no rights.

In spite of this, people with a disability still face problems of transportation and access to public places. Government subsidised transportation should come into effect since in certain situations, (especially when the person does not drive or has someone who can take him/her to places) the expenses are huge and due to this some people stay more at home since they are restricted by the financial toll of transportation when going out.

However, the main problem is accessibility to public places. Many of these do not have ramps or other requirements to make the place 'user friendly' to persons with disability. Such reforms in structure should be enforced by law that all public places are accessible so that people disability can enjoy nightlife, employment, cultural activities etc.

## **2.10 ADDICTIONS**

Addictions are usually tackled from four angles: prevention, treatment, harm reduction and punishment. ADZ believes that while the areas of prevention and treatment are being fulfilled through organisations such as Sedqa and Caritas as well as into school curriculum, harm reduction is given much less importance as opposed to punishment.

Harm reduction is a concept frequently misunderstood. Showing people precautions while drinking, abusing drugs or gambling does not mean that society is condoning such behaviour. The concept of harm reduction means that since it is a reality that no matter what the policy is, some people will still abuse, at least they should do so causing minimal harm to themselves and others. This concept is already used in the case of distributing free syringes in order to prevent the spread of diseases such as HIV, as well as methadone maintenance which helps heroin addicts not to resort to stealing or committing other crimes when they find themselves without the drug.

Other types of harm reduction would include campaigns on preventing overdose or other major harms. Informing people that there are contaminated drugs in a particular moment can also save lives.

Regarding overdoses, we believe that the person/s accompanying the victim to hospital or polyclinic should be asked no questions at all. Unfortunately people have been found dying or dead in front of polyclinics which show that who was accompanying them wished to help but was afraid. Thus we believe in a completely 'no questions asked' policy (*Needless to say, a person may be asked confidential questions by medical staff to help save the life of the victim, such as what drug what used, but not questions regarding his own behaviour*).

Regarding punishment, we believe that in the case of simple possession, sharing and 'petty' trafficking, educational and drug rehabilitation services should be given and not prison sentences. On the other hand drug traffickers (or what one could call 'the big fish') should be severely penalised. Drug addicts should not be made to witness against major dealers unless they are provided adequate protection. The use of one-way mirrors, which hide the witnesses' identity, is also a good solution.

In the case of drug possession, the media should not be allowed to publish the individual's name even if he is not a minor.

Regarding gambling, unfortunately opportunities are always increasing, especially through the use of the internet. ADZ believes that in the cases of legal gambling, there should always be the option that a person opts off the source. For example while in casino's one can sign 'not to be allowed in' so that he can control his addiction, many people do not do so since there are many other opportunities outside such as jackpots. In our opinion, these should be completely banned with severe penalties on whoever makes them available.

Laws regarding usury, which can be the result of drug addiction and gambling as well as for other purposes, should be adequately enforced. Prison sentences for loan sharks should be used and in the case that a person was harmed or threatened because of this reason, the perpetrator's crime should be increased by two degrees.

## **2.11 JUVENILE JUSTICE**

There are many factors which lead to juvenile delinquency which are poor social backgrounds, lack of skills, low levels of education, family problems and substance abuse. Living in such an environment does not support their integration and development and most often these youths fall out from the normal stream in society and fail in all systems. This results in an anti-social behaviour and involvement in crime and delinquency where youths feel they do not belong to a society which meets their needs.

This can be prevented by implementing area projects with educational programmes combined with voluntary work and creative projects where youths regain back their self esteem and thus feel they belong to a normal society which accepts them.

Young offenders brought to Justice will be treated and helped to integrate back in the community. Services should be expanded with the aim of creating a

specialised unit for Juvenile delinquents who are under supervision as well as working in liaison with Juvenile Court, the Social Work Department and with psychologists.

Community Sanctions should be promoted and utilised with the aim of preventing imprisonment. Upon breaching the conditions of these sanctions these young offenders should be referred to a residential rehabilitation centre and not prison.

The rehabilitation programme will focus on age groups between 14 and 18 and will be based on discipline in a caring environment with the aim of reforming and teaching new skills for these young offenders to integrate in the community.

#### **2.11.1 Parole**

Parole is defined as the conditional release of a prisoner from prison. We believe that Parole is the bridge for youths coming out of prison to help them re-integrate & live in the community as normal citizens giving their full contribution to society. It is a fact that a good percentage of the prison population consists of young people, therefore Parole should be seriously considered.

There should be a Parole Board to study & evaluate the applicant's social & psychological background, the level of risk of the individual for the community, and the chances of success in complying with the Order.

#### **2.12 ELDERLY**

In many instances, elderly people are as vulnerable due to physical problems as well psychological problems especially dementia. Society needs to prevent any abuse done to such persons which unfortunately is rampant.

While it is true that juvenile delinquents and drug addicts can inflict physical harm and robbery on elderly people, many instances of financial abuse, be it from

relatives, neighbours and others, goes unnoticed. The reality is that the majority of carers for elderly people do their job well and have noble intentions. However some persons pretend to be carers of the individual, and end up taking all their finances. Stricter laws and enforcement on fraud or misappropriation of funds of elderly people are a necessity. ADZ believes that when such abuses take place on elderly people, the crime should be aggravated by at least one degree due to the vulnerability of the elderly.

Respect for elderly people should be instilled in the person as early as possible. In today's world, it is more difficult to care for elderly people because of several factors such as the fact that families are getting smaller (thus there are less children to take care of parents) and multi-jobs. These are not excuses to abandon elderly relatives. ADZ believes that the elderly should take their rightful place in society and the education system should be geared towards this objective.

## **2.13 MIGRATION**

ADZ like AD has a clear policy on this topic. Malta is not open for anyone who wants to enter Europe. Having said this we believe that the government should respect the Human Rights of every individual, especially people seeking asylum. It is very unfair that some countries in Europe face little or no problem with migration while a small country such as Malta has a relatively massive influx of migrants. Maltese MEPs should never stop requesting responsibility sharing through EU countries.

ADZ also believes that detention policy in Malta is definitely not up to standard. We propose that the maximum period of detention should be 6 months and not 18. If there are security problems, any individual who has his 6 months expired can be asked to sign regularly at a police station, as well as obliged to make him/herself available when asked for to by police officers or medical institutions.

*(The 6 months proposal is not applicable in the case where a migrant commits a criminal offence. In this circumstance he should go through the process of criminal proceedings through the Courts of Malta).*

We propose that migrants who have certified Post Traumatic Disorder get professional help when they arrive at the detention centre.

For the benefit of both our Army Officers and migrants, detention centres should be run primarily by trained social workers. An Army Officer is not trained to deal with people carrying a heavy emotional baggage but to keep security. Thus people trained in the area should deal with the daily life of the migrants while a small number of Officers should be on the premises for security purposes. We propose that Army Officers should not wear uniforms as this can create further tension. We also recommend that these social workers should be specially trained in this field through scholarships abroad or else by bringing experts from abroad.

## **2.14 EDUCATION**

Young people today need good quality education as well as a vast choice of learning opportunities to strive towards full self-development – it is our basic right. This means that the education system is required to be dynamic and one which promotes progress, as well as one which recognizes that young people today can learn and develop their personality and intellectual capabilities in different ways and settings. It is also very important that we help the young generation develop a critical mind, rather than imposing indoctrination of ideas. This policy recognizes that education can occur in formal context such as in the classroom, or in non formal contexts.

### **2.14.1 PRIMARY EDUCATION**

With today's growing awareness of conditions and different learning abilities, it is essential that all children's needs are catered for to promote not only tolerance and acceptance of all individuals in society at an early age, but also to educate all children equally.

ADZ believes that the government should establish an Integrated Resources Mobile Unit for schools (even for secondary school level). This unit would comprise of Speech Therapists, Social Workers, Education Psychologists and Public Health Nurses who work as a team. This team would be engaged by the various schools in Malta and Gozo to cater for the needs required by the children during the scholastic year. ADZ believes there should also be a strict continuous assessment of children in primary education to monitor such special needs to able to cater for them adequately.

### **2.14.2 SECONDARY EDUCATION**

At secondary school level, youths start developing their future professional abilities and vocations, as well as their social and communication skills for the present days, and days to come when they will be fully integrated in the adult society.

Thus ADZ proposes that:

- All students should be given equal opportunities to choosing the various subjects offered on a national as well as European level
- The education department should develop a national sexual health strategy, which would include free and confidential health centres for youths, as well as fully implementing sex education programmes in schools – rather have a teacher coming from a medical background
- Homophobia and racism in schools should be prohibited, and instead there should be a programme implanted by the education system which teaches

values such as those of equality and tolerance towards people with different cultures, ethnicity and sexual orientations.

### **2.14.3 TERTIARY EDUCATION**

Everyone – youths and adults – should be given the right to access post-secondary education. ADZ believes that:

- Sixth forms of the state should be kept free for Maltese youths
- Students coming from impoverished families should be given financial help by the government to be able to attend tertiary education (including university)
- Scholarships for studying abroad should be assessed on equal grounds for every student – no matter what profession he/she has decided to undertake, and no matter what sex the student is
- Informal education should be recognized. ADZ proposes a meritocratic system that entails what one knows and is skilled in. Formal certificates from University and other colleges will still be considered important, but people who do not have such documents yet, prove to know their job should not be discarded.

### **2.14.4 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

We believe that this kind of education should be emphasised more and given credit together with certificates obtained from formal education. It should compliment formal education. The recent creation of Youth Pass at European Level should help facilitate this more, as it is a kind of qualifying recognition in the non-formal education sector.

Students who fail in the formal system are to be given the opportunity to enhance themselves through opportunities in the non-formal system.

### **2.14.5 INFORMAL EDUCATION**

This is gathered from oral histories and personal experiences of an individual. Youths should be encouraged and given the space and free time to be active and participative as much as possible and involved in voluntary activities.

### **2.14.6 STUDENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS AS PARTNERS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

With higher awareness of rights of the individual, which ADZ fully accepts, we suggest that there is more co-operation among students, parents and teachers. What ADZ proposes below will allow injustices to surface and be tackled more effectively within the education system, and hence there will be a democratic approach within the education system.

ADZ proposes:

- That all secondary schools have student councils with representatives chosen by the students themselves
- The student council will meet up with the teachers' and parents' council on a regular basis to discuss issues
- There should be more awareness promoted in schools regarding respecting authority figures such as teachers and parents.

## **2.15 ART, CREATIVITY, CULTURE AND HERITAGE**

### **2.15.1 Art**

Artists (painters, craftspeople, actors, writers...) are ever present in Maltese culture but unfortunately do not always have the support by society they require to survive and develop in their profession.

ADZ believes that:

- The state should create more artistic opportunities for youths with artistic talents (in its broadest sense). They should be given the opportunity to expose their work both on the Maltese Islands and abroad
- There should be more information available regarding funding for youths for artistic development, training and exposure
- That there should be more sponsorships and aid for artists to be able to work as artists
- Works of art should also involve in cultural dialogue.

### **2.15.2 CREATIVITY AMONG YOUTHS**

It is worldwide notion that creativity and innovation among youths should be encouraged, developed and used in a positive way.

ADZ believes that:

- The State should encourage youths to use their creativity, in many aspects such as learning. Thus the education system should continue to promote creativity and creative thinking as part of the curriculum
- Creativity could also be encouraged among youths through rewards for students performing artistic work
- Art of various diverse ethnicities, cultures, religions, sexual orientations, ages should be promoted, used and involved within the public sphere to promote diversity and tolerance towards different cultures.

### **2.15.3 CULTURE AND HERITAGE**

In this day and age of globalisation, ADZ believes that Maltese culture should be preserved, promoted and remembered from one generation to the next.

- A solution to this issue is that the education system should include lessons on Maltese culture (perhaps together with history lessons).

- ADZ also believes that more cultural events should be organized on a public level to promote Maltese culture.
- Maltese History should also be emphasized as an important aspect of Maltese culture, and this should be made compulsory in schools. History should be taught in an interactive manner and within social contexts as to make it more interesting.
- History should also be promoted with more re-enactments of important historical events which are normally hosted by NGOs, which should receive financial backup from the State, to carry on this important duty.
- Archaeology is an important aspect of Maltese culture and history. ADZ believes that the state should invest more finances in this field, and employ more archaeologists, historians, and other people in similar specialized fields, to carry out research and publications, so that Maltese heritage can be preserved and passed on to the public, as a right to the inhabitants of Malta and Gozo.

It is of utmost importance that we preserve and promote Maltese culture to preserve Maltese identity.

## **2.16 HEALTH**

If we are attentive to the environment that we are a part of and live in, it will bring about better health for all and the prevention of diseases and illnesses.

High levels of pollution result in poor quality of air, water and food. Reduction of noise pollution means less stress. Fewer or no antibiotics used in the production of meat and strict controls of pesticides result in better resistance to illnesses. A better quality of life and thus a healthy one depends on investment in prevention and education.

### **2.16.1 HEALTH AND SPORTS**

Malta and Gozo are among the top five European countries with one of the highest obese child rate. It is essential that physical education during school hours and after should be promoted and encouraged. When it comes to children and youths, it has been noticed that these individuals struggle to find time to practice sports after school hours due to the constant pressure by parents and the education system to maximise academic results. Schools should be as concerned about all students' physical well being as much as their intellectual capabilities.

Promiscuity, unprotected sex, addiction, malnutrition, fast driving and other risky leisure styles are all considered as hazardous and should be addressed in a very delicate manner by qualified professionals.

ADZ believes that:

- The State should provide increased investment in physical education at all school levels
- There should be incentives for promising young athletes. Promising athletes find difficulty to obtain the necessary funding and resources they need to raise their level to international competitions. Provisions for this should be allocated (professional trainer, training resources, funding and sponsors, time etc.)
- The State should introduce a comprehensive physical education programme for secondary schools whereby various sports are promoted and practised within the school education time frame
- Health education should be part of the curriculum of every student during primary and secondary school level, to promote well being and to discourage certain unhealthy trends such as eating disorders.
- Youths and adults too should be assisted with obesity related problems, especially since in this day and age life is ever stressful, fast and short often leaving people with less means to ignore their own wellbeing and health.

ADZ proposes that the state promotes well-being and creates centres within the working environment to allow workers to do physical exercise in their breaks or outside work hours.

### **2.16.2 SEXUAL HEALTH**

Sexual matters concerning young people should cease from being considered as issues of taboo, instead a study of more realistic approach to sexual activity among young people should be made and sexual safety should always be given priority.

ADZ proposes that clinics should be promoted for free sexual health advice by medical professional, free health checks, for the distribution of information on sexually transmitted disease and sexual health, as well as the distribution of free contraceptives.

### **2.17 HUMAN RIGHTS**

There's a need for a National Human Rights Action Plan requested by the UN Decade for Human Rights. Malta's biggest problem in relation to human rights is the lack of knowledge in the general population to what their rights are. Recently there have been education campaigns about individual rights (e.g. – consumer rights) however, there needs to be more information given about more basic rights given out to more people.

#### **2.17.1 PROMOTION OF DIVERSITY**

Diversity is considered the factor that gives added value to the world we live in. We human beings are different from each others and we are to make sure to accept diversity and all the human dignity it brings with. Learning about others is an enriching experience together with a great amount of understanding

sensitively to each others' diverse behaviours. Diversity helps to build a healthy democratic society when it is reflected civilly and politically as well as culturally.

The role of young people as key actors in promoting diversity should be given more strength. We believe that discriminated young people should be educated and empowered to help them become active citizens on an equal basis.

### **2.17.2 SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The reason why social exclusion happens is because of the fear of the unknown. Minority groups usually are the most that suffer at its' hands.

We are strongly in favour of the adoption and enforcement of rules and regulations that combat discrimination and phobias based on gender, race, ethnic, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation.

### **2.17.3 LESBIANS, GAY, BISEXUALS AND TRANSGENDER**

People belonging to the LGBT group should be given maximum protection against discrimination and any kind of torment.

The state should also protect and recognise in some way or other unions between same sex persons.

We agree that education about sexual minorities issues should be provided at school.

#### **2.17.4 PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Every public place should be accessible for persons with a disability.

School staff properly trained to help young people with disability should be available in all schools thus ensuring that no streaming is done and no special schools are created that cause more isolation for the individuals.

The barriers facing disabled people to enter employment should be removed by law regulations stipulating the adaptations of work environments and means of transportation for greater accessibility.

Problems of attitude and prejudice against disabled people in the workplace are to be combated through educational campaigns.

Media here plays an important role. It needs to be encouraged to incorporate more images of disabled people in commercials, TV programmes, magazines, enjoying a love life and being capable of becoming parents, in order to help young disabled people identify themselves as part of society.

People with disabilities should be trained to participate in the media.

#### **2.17.5 PEACE AND STABILITY**

We are totally against the use of weapons in trying to solve conflicts and military service should not be enforced. An individual must have the right to refuse to participate in military operations and training and we consider conscientious objection as a positive value.

Conflicts should be resolved by seeking discourse and dialogue and conflict resolution methods.

## **2.18 CIVIL RIGHTS**

### **2.18.1 DECISION MAKING AND CIVIL PARTICIPATION**

Democratic participation is in itself a process that brings together people from a variety of backgrounds to support and build an inclusive community life. We stand for the promotion of activism and ensuring freedom of speech to give young people a sense of belonging in society. Participation is about building the future of society and the country through the present generation.

We agree with the involvement of young people in a representative democracy. Young people have the opportunity to express themselves and be part of the decision making in all matters that affect them.

Citizenship should not be linked only to one time every five years at the ballot box but throughout by voicing opinions and participating actively.

ADZ recommends that the minimum voting age for local council elections should be lowered to 16 years of age. This will definitely help youths to be more open to politics and decrease alienation. We believe politics should be made with youths and not for youths. By encouraging such active citizenship we are also encouraging youths to shoulder a small degree of responsibility and thus indirectly making them more responsible in everyday life.

### **2.18.2 LEISURE AND RECREATIONAL RIGHTS**

We agree with restoring the rule of law which has been undermined in certain recreational places. This will help to safeguard more our nightlife, thus putting parents' minds to rest. The law regarding the prohibition of selling of alcohol and cigarettes to minors needs to be enforced, as well as patrolling of entertainment areas by police in plain clothes is highly recommended.

### **2.18.3 MOBILITY**

We believe mobility to be an important issue, as it destroys insular mentality, strengthens values such as human rights, combats racism and xenophobia and develops a sense of social conflicts. We believe that the state should continue to encourage and support youth mobility, through national and international programmes.

### **2.18.4 CRIME VICTIMS**

Crime victims are often used to give evidence and then discarded. The State is to make sure that their safety is given priority, together with compensation donated from a fund which pools the money from the offenders.

### **2.18.5 CULTURAL RIGHTS**

We believe that every youth has the right to practice his/her cultural and ethnic traditional activities and customs, as long as they are not detrimental to the whole society at large.

Young people have a right to learn about and appreciate their cultural heritage. They should also be encouraged to dedicate some of their leisure time to creative work and participation in cultural activities.

Culture is also an essential means to promote diversity. We strongly agree that dialogue between cultures is a tool to fight hostility, confrontations, clashes and misunderstandings. By first getting to know oneself and one's own cultural background, then it is easy to approach others and getting to learn about them and lastly when this happens and similarities that bond everyone together are established, it is easy to create bridges and respectful dialogues.

Mass media also plays a crucial part here especially when it tries to depict realities that are more inflated and problematic than they really are. Cultural rights should be promoted through educational campaigns.

Globalisation has led to the world to become smaller, which can give rise to conflicts easily. Adopting an attitude conducive to accepting different cultures that enrich the world will help reap off the benefits of a globalised world.

#### **2.18.6 VOLUNTEERING**

Volunteering facilitates the transition from youth and education to work and adult life, while reinforces young people's solidarity and engagement as responsible citizens.

Voluntary activities contribute to the enhancing of solidarity, social inclusion and community development and they should be encouraged, developed, facilitated, promoted and recognised at all levels.

This can be done in a number of ways by removing existing obstacles, enhance existing voluntary activities by broadening the categories and range of possibilities, and encouraging the creation of others.

A lot more emphasis and promotion should be given to the European Voluntary Service (EVS), further within the framework of the current Youth Programme.

Voluntary experience should be recognised as an ongoing process of life-long learning strategy and part of informal education and credit should be given to it.

#### **2.18.7 GENDER ISSUES IN MALTA**

Participation of Women in both civil society (women representatives in parliament) and the labour market is still very low compared to men.

Gender Pay gap is about 15% in the employment market, where women are paid less than men for the same kind of jobs they perform as well as lose some of career advancement benefits especially when having to leave the job for a period of time due to maternity leave.

Women also are deprived from the rights of education, employment and civil participation, due to domineering families or partners and suffer domestic violence and exploitation. Trafficking for prostitution and slavery binding is also a common thing nowadays.

We strongly favour the enforcement of law against all kinds of discrimination on gender grounds as per above.

#### **2.18.8 RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE**

- Malta is a country full of religious diversity but for the most part the average person isn't aware of the fact that we have places of worship belonging to other faiths – Mosque, Hindu temple, Orthodox Church etc.
- There is a lack of knowledge of other faiths so we propose lessons in all public, church or private schools whereby children can learn about other faiths including their own and call it World Religion. This would serve to shed light on the similarities in the faiths rather than the differences.
- Weekend retreats where children with different beliefs could share their experiences and interact with each other. This applies to students from secondary education onwards.

#### **2.18.9 WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS?**

Human Library – this idea has already been practiced on a few occasion and proved to be a success. This idea can be developed including experts in certain fields who give information on topics which people want to know about.

Knowledge of the Maltese constitution and what their rights are should be given out to the public in pamphlets as part of an education campaign; this should also involve information on where the public can go and what they need to do if their rights are trampled upon.

Overall, however, the most important aspect of human rights education is promoting activism, for people to get involved in issues which not only affect them but that interest them.

## **2.19 ANIMAL RIGHTS**

A strong stand on Animal Rights reflects a society's respect for life. It should be stressed that animals are not toys/private property belonging to individuals but possess their own rights. Unfortunately this is not a widespread concept in Malta so this is where more education would be needed.

We need to lobby for serious law enforcement regarding animal fights, as well as raise the minimum penalty from Lm100 to Lm2000 for whoever is convicted. In the case of illegal bird hunting we suggest better law enforcement, as well as the revocation of licences.

Anyone caught mistreating animals in his/her care should not be allowed to keep animals anymore either for a period of time or permanently depending on the case.

We suggest that the "microchip" for pets be introduced in Malta.

Prevention implies focusing on education. School children should have at least a topic on animal rights in some particular subject such as PSD. At university level, animal rights should be a compulsory credit for B.Educ students, and an optional credit for the rest.

## 2.20 TRANSPORT

Everyone deserves to be able to get around safely and efficiently, even more so in the case of people with special needs. It is often taken for granted that everyone is in possession of a car, which is certainly not the case. Realising that Malta ranks second place as regards the amount of cars per capita (after USA)<sup>1</sup> and that only a minority use public transport in Malta a serious national action plan to address this problem must be undertaken.

It is manifestly evident that the lack of quality service offered deters commuters from using public transport. Basic mass transport services that are expected in modern countries, such as predictable time departure and bus route, delays in payment of bus fares, uncomfortable seating, unwelcoming and short-tempered bus drivers, are rarely collectively found in one single journey.

Furthermore a great majority of Malta's public transport bus fleet are simply not adequate for pregnant women and mothers with children, the elderly, or people with special needs (steps entering buses, careless driving). More efficient public transportation would also have other benefits such as reducing air pollution and traffic (big problem here in Malta; see below in ecology section).

Also, walking should be encouraged, pedestrian/cycling zones/or pavements created (see below in ecology section). As the country with the highest child obesity rate in Europe, this would have other positive effects.

Incentives should be introduced like free transportation during peak traffic times or free transport for those who opt not to have a driving licence.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unecce.org/stats/trends2005/transport.htm>

### **Chapter 3: ECOLOGY**

*States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem.*

*In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities.*

*The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.*

*To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.*

*(Principles 7 and 8 of the Report on the United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development , held in Rio de Janeiro 1992)*

We feel that the majority of the people are feeling the need to take care of the preservation of the environment both for us and for the generations yet to come. A healthy environment is closely associated with a better quality of life. The state is encouraged to invest more in this sector. An awareness and respect to the environment should be instilled in children from the early ages. The subject should also be included, in our opinion, as part of the curriculum in schools.

We feel that in our country the biggest challenges from the ecological aspect are:

- The use of land and free spaces
- Preservation of our environmental heritage and Bio-diversity
- Energy and transportation
- Waste Management
- Water Management

### **3.1 THE USE OF LAND AND FREE SPACES**

As youths thinking about our present and future, we must ensure that certain laws and regulations are implemented regarding land conservation.

One of the main queries that young people ask is about the issue of property and the ever rising high prices on the market. We are at present ready to collaborate with the government and to contribute by forwarding our proposals.

Among many examples, empty property is not put on the market and instead more land is being developed which many a time leads to the destruction of the natural environment. A reform in the rent law is in our opinion necessary.

### **3.2 NATURAL HERITAGE AND BIODIVERSITY PRESERVATION**

We believe that if no measures will be taken to preserve that which we call our natural heritage, our Biodiversity will become extinct.

As regards the issue of hunting, we understand that a tradition which has been with us for years is difficult to eradicate. We recommend that very strict measures and regulations are implemented, especially when it comes to birds that are in danger of becoming extinct. Also we believe hunting should be abolished in spring.

We propose that the few coastal areas that have not suffered greatly from human impact should be declared areas of conservation. Empowerment should be given to Local Councils through more budget funds for environment preservation, rehabilitation of valleys in their locality and afforestation.

### **3.3 ENERGY AND TRANSPORTATION**

In this area a lot of debates and discussions take place in trying to find a solution for such a huge problem. According to the report by the UNFCCC, Malta emitted about 2600 kilo tonnes of Carbon Dioxide in 2003. The majority of toxins generated themselves from electric generation implants and from the transport.

We belong to a generation that not only faces and experiences natural disasters but is continuously questioning what other worse environmental situations the near future has in store for us. Youths would like to see action taken and are also ready for consultation. This all was confirmed during the youth summit held in Rome in 2007 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the European Union.

Climate Change is one of the biggest challenges the whole world is facing.

Air pollution is leading to a lot of respiratory illnesses, which a large percentage of the population including a high number of children, are facing. Traffic congestion is also giving rise to sometimes uncontrollable situations.

We demand a reform in public transport. Public transport as we know it is inefficient and environmentally unfriendly. We propose that the monopoly on public transport be removed so that local transport will be more efficient, environmentally friendly and follow EU public transport compatibility.

We propose that a culture is introduced to our youths to start using bikes to travel – this could be encouraged with incentives such as lower VAT rates on bikes. We cannot expect youths to start using bikes rather than vehicles before good roads are built and maintained to provide proper lanes for pedestrians, as well as a road system that incorporates bike lanes.

An emphasis should be made on the Green Public Procurement that offers environmental guidelines, in respect to buying of equipment for the public service like incinerators etc.

We favour an Eco Tax on products that are not Eco friendly, though we prefer that the first option would be to educate the public. We strongly believe that Eco Taxes collected should be invested and used for the environment and nothing else.

Energy consumption can be highly reduced in a country like ours which offers an ideal climate, and other natural resources such as wind and sea. The Maltese climate is ideal for the implantation of solar energy, which reduces the use of energy generated from oils. The natural wind resources we possess being an island, should in our opinion be used to produce energy through wind turbines. As the youths of the Green Party we are ready to advise the government on ways of using the natural resources we possess on the Maltese Islands, for the benefit of energy creation in a more environmentally friendly way.

### **3.4 WASTE MANAGEMENT**

We believe that the problem of waste management is ever present on the Maltese Islands and should be tackled urgently. We propose schemes to reduce packaging, and implement the use of recyclable containers. We believe it is necessary to support the education of the public so that they are aware of issues regarding waste management.

Corporate Social Responsibility is found on every agenda of any respectable business entity nowadays. This can be taken as an opportunity to legislate more laws, as well as giving incentives to firms through awards to those that are most environmentally-friendly in their productivity.

Social partners comprising those representing the enterprising section and environmental NGOs, should be encouraged to meet up together, so as one they can work out solutions on waste management problems.

We agree with the idea of a recycling plant, given that it is chosen after a professional study and a planning process done on a transparent public consultation.

### **3.5 WATER MANAGEMENT**

We agree that in a country where water is not a commodity, every drop counts.

Aquaculture should be taken care of and managed well, to ensure that it will not prove to be detrimental in the sustainability of our beaches, which is one of the most recreational past times of a lot of youths throughout the year, together with the thousands of tourists that visit Malta each year. The destruction of our beaches could lead to a negative impact on the tourist sector which will definitely affect our economy.

## **Conclusion**

While Alternattiva Demokratika Zghazagh-Green Youth (Malta)'s youth policy focuses on young people's needs; it is completely in line with Alternattiva Demokratika's policies and proposals.