

# Doctors for the Environment Malta

Most of us are now aware of the dangers resulting from climate change, which include a whole raft of medical conditions. Most of us also feel impotent in doing something about this situation, hoping that our elected politicians would deal with the problems that we, and particularly our children, will be facing in the not too distant future.

The medical profession is still considered to be one of the most respected professions in Malta, and while this may be considered flattering, it imposes certain obligations on us.

Without any doubt, as emphasized by the WHO, climate change is 'the defining issue' of our time. Scientists have emphasized the catastrophic scenario that we can expect if we don't take action to redress the issue.

We, as medical professionals, are also well aware that prevention is the crucial motto, advising our patients to do everything in their power to take all possible measures to prevent the emergence of medical disease and its complications.

While individually one may feel powerless, there is strength in unity. A novel association, 'Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA)' was created in Australia in 2002, aimed "to utilise the skills of members of the medical profession to address the ill health resulting from damage to the natural environment at local, national and global levels" (<http://dea.org.au>). It is now a thriving organisation, and it uses its influence to lobby government and politicians on the need to appreciate the gravity of the situation.

They point out that '*Political ideology has proved to be the greatest obstacle to DEA's ability to reduce the health hazards of climate change*'.

Although these hazards become obvious, and include droughts, deluges, and rising sea levels which will eventually affect our lives, there seem to be resistance in certain quarters to appreciate that an unsustainable doctrine of continuous economic growth might be incompatible with life on earth in the long run.

It is also my impression that the Maltese public seem to be on the whole rather apathetic towards appreciating the challenges we are faced with.

It is a false premise to dismiss the action of the few nations as having little impact on the final outcome, on the assumption that small nations can have a minimal impact on world scenarios. It is a fact that nearly 50% of global change results from those nations which are not considered to belong to the highest polluters on earth.

Likewise, it is a mistake to dismiss the actions of groups of individuals, even a prominent group like the medical profession. It is a case of thinking globally and acting locally, and this holds for all nations and all individuals on earth.

My strong recommendation is for the medical profession in Malta to follow the lead of DEA and organise themselves, perhaps within the Maltese Medical Association, with the specific aim of forming a group, 'Doctors for the Environment - Malta' to advise and promote our views relating to dangers to health resulting from global warming.