

## NGO'S.....WHAT ARE THEY?

What do these three letters mean?

As part of our fortnightly series on the environment we have elected this time to discuss the role that NGO's play within our society. NGO's, or non-governmental organisations, have evolved to fill a niche that governments, inter-governmental organisations, private sector, the scientific community and other major groups cannot fill.

The ESG, or the Environmental Safety Group, is an NGO, apolitical in nature and supported through fundraising activities. The ESG is proud to function as an NGO seeing this as the preferred platform to support the pressing need for environmental change. However, major issues such as global population growth and globalisation bring with them a complex number of problems that cannot be addressed by any one of the different entities mentioned earlier alone; rather, it is through co-operation that any "solutions" can truly be pursued.

We will, this time, focus on NGO's, whose presence, for a variety of reasons, is increasingly being felt and who appear to be growing in number. NGO's and other campaign groups can influence international environmental policy, by applying pressure, communicating and sharing information; this all made possible because of information technology, such as the worldwide web. NGO's have also been able to promote their issues through media networks providing their arguments are well researched and prepared. The NGO platform must remain honest to its cause unlike other entities that need to respond to political, economic, or more partisan interests.

NGO's are involved in all sorts of humanitarian, environmental, social and cultural projects- their aims being to contribute to the world becoming a better and fairer place to live. Action Aid, Greenpeace, Medicin Sans Frontier and others carry out sterling work in their particular field and their presence is a constant reminder to Governments to "pull their socks up" whenever our planet is affected by environmental or humanitarian disasters.

The value of NGO's presence in Gibraltar should not be under estimated. Gibraltarians ought to be proud that in such a small community as ours a reasonable number of NGO's have become established making their presence felt in no uncertain manner. Among these are:

- **AFH** (Action for Housing) has, throughout many years played a vital role by persistently pointing out the needs of many in our community with regard to housing, especially those less well off in our Community.
- The **GHT** (Gibraltar Heritage Trust) is a force to be reckoned with and we should all be grateful for their unswerving efforts in preserving important aspects or monuments in our homeland that make up our identity for future generations.
- **GONHS**, (Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society) is equally to be praised and recognised for defending and preserving our natural wildlife and habitat in Gibraltar from the potentially devastating effects of uncontrolled or unsupervised development, often judged as "progress".
- **ESG's** role is to promote awareness of environmental issues so that our own community can help our environment at a personal level, and also support any govt. or policy that seeks to make necessary change to promote a greener and safer environment, both locally and as part of our planet. Pollution, consumerism, reliance on oil energy are but a few examples of the many campaigns that fall within the ESG umbrella. The ESG views the Bay as a collective environment and ecosystem which is vulnerable to activities on both sides of the border.

In this context it is worth mentioning that far from opposing progress for the sake of it, NGO's acknowledge that *Progress* is an unstoppable fact of life but by the same token will protest and respond to any damage threatened by uncontrolled development or activity done in its name. Openness and acknowledgment of the environmental pressures facing the world today would encourage the necessary co-operation by all the entities mentioned at the start of this article. This would render protest unnecessary and would see long term planning in sustainability and conservation to be in its place.