

As we head towards the next round of annual “**World Earth Day**”, “**Environment Day**”, “**Clean up the World**” Weekend and others it is useful to note why these global campaigns are necessary- not only in themselves as opportunities to raise local awareness but also because throughout the year, and every year, our global environmental problems continue to worsen.

To give you some examples of these I would like you to consider the impact the surging human population is having on freshwater supplies; in Africa, for instance, 300 million people’s survival depends on access to the river Nile for water. A recent meeting held by representatives from 10 African countries agreed to launch a joint awareness campaign to protect the Nile waters.

Another is climate change, a term often heard described as posing a threat greater to world stability than terrorism. Climate change is contributing to existing environmental problems as well as causing extreme weather conditions or drought leading to widespread famine.

Resource use is also continuing at breakneck speed resulting in unsustainable harvesting which means it will all run out sooner or later. The energy crisis, or depletion of fossil fuels, is mentioned in the world media on a daily basis. Gibraltar produces all its electricity and drinking water from fossil fuels. When are we going to address this issue? We need to develop practical alternatives using renewable energies and we need to do this NOW!

There are many positive initiatives being announced also almost on a daily basis for alternatives to the way in which we currently support our lifestyles. From innovative technologies to weighing up our individual impact, to seeing less exploitative practices everywhere – such as **Fairtrade** products seeking to help local farmers and manufacturers get a better deal for their hard work. What is needed is for political will to support private initiatives ensuring major changes necessary will be able to take place over a short time-frame.

It is very positive too that a growing number of NGO’s and Governments everywhere are now focusing on these issues. Gibraltar must also do what it can to lessen its environmental impact by reducing pollution, recycling and planning towards a future that will survive beyond the challenges which global warming and resource depletion will undoubtedly have on our quality of life.

The ESG hopes to see the Environmental Charter in place with further delay – this wide ranging document of environmental guidelines and principles will not directly change anything but will be a major stepping stone in setting out Gibraltar’s Environmental Action Plan. This will need strong Govt support in policy making and planning and clearly this is an area which is still far from satisfactory.

A sign of political will could be that our Environmental Charter will be launched on World Earth Day as a signal that we are now ready as a community to tackle these very important issues. We hope that you will all do your bit in supporting local efforts on Earth Day, World Env. Day and Clean up the World weekend, **your help is needed.**