

Joint Office

INTRODUCTION

The Joint Office manages and administers the estate transferred to Government by the Ecclesiastical Authorities in terms of Act IV of 1992. It forms part of the Ministry for Home Affairs.

PROPERTY ADMINISTRATION

Ixtri Darek jew Ifdi c-Cens Schemes, 1996

These Schemes, introduced in 1996, involve the sale of leased property used by tenants as their ordinary residence, the redemption of temporary emphyteusis of over 30 years duration and of perpetual ground rents imposed on property used for residential purposes.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond this Office's control, not enough progress has been registered in the implementation of these schemes.

Other Schemes

In July 1998 a New Scheme entitled Joint Office - Scheme Number 1 was launched whereby tenants who lived in property leased from the Joint Office could apply to purchase such property. This Scheme has no closing date for applications. 31 applications were received in 1999, bringing the total of applications received since the Scheme was launched to 86.

Late in 1999 the Ministry for Home Affairs announced that a new scheme was in the pipeline. This refers to agricultural property.

Transfer of Properties

In 1999 the Joint Office sold 52 leased properties under the above-mentioned schemes. 93 perpetual revisable ground rents and nine temporary ground

rents were redeemed as a result of the 1996 Schemes. Sixteen ground rents were redeemed on terms stipulated in deeds originally signed with the Ecclesiastical Authorities. Two properties were sold following the issue of a call for tenders.

During 1999 the redemption of ground-rents where the emphyteuta is obliged to redeem within the 25 years period from the date of contact remained suspended pending a decision on whether such properties should have been retained by the Church.

One hundred and ninety-four plots were transferred to the Housing Authority to be developed for Social Housing. Other plots were leased to Enemalta Corporation to build substations to improve electricity supply in certain areas. Land was also transferred to the Roads Department for widening or building of new roads.

The Department continued with its policy of transferring vacant premises to the Department of Social Housing. Vacant premises, which were not suitable for social housing or which required extensive repairs, were issued for sale by tender.

In the same year the Joint Office commenced the process of transferring a number of vacant premises to the Housing Authority to be allocated to the Welcome Home Organisation, which provides shelter for the homeless.

Request for Recognition or Repairs

The Department also received and processed requests from tenants for recognition. Those covering agricultural leases were approved once these complied with the provisions of Chapter 199 of the Agricultural Leases (Reletting) Act.

In 1999, the Department also incurred a substantial sum of money on the repair of ex-Church property.

The Ombudsman

A number of cases regarding ex-Church properties administered by the Joint Office, were submitted by the public to the Ombudsman during 1999. The majority of these concerned ground rents, which, owing to a lacuna in the Agreement, the Joint Office could not process although the emphyteuta was entitled to redeem them. Contacts with the Office of the Ombudsman have resulted in more co-operation in tackling complaints.

RECONCILIATION, VERIFICATION AND REGISTRATION (RVR)

Transfer of Information on Properties

During 1999, the transfer of information from the Church Administrative Offices to the Joint Office regarding the properties transferred to the Government by the Church continued at a steady pace. Up to end 1999 about 80% of this information was forwarded to the Joint Office by the Ecclesiastical Entities.

It is to be noted, however, that a large number of corrections had to be raised or confirmed regarding this information, which corrections had to be approved by the Control Committee in terms of Section 4(2) of the Agreement. This inevitable procedure necessarily slowed down the work involving reconciliation, verification and registration. These corrections entail additions of properties inadvertently left out of the Annexes to the Agreement, deletion of others that were erroneously included, and corrections to the capitalised amounts of properties.

Registration of properties

During 1999, the Department continued with the registration of property with the Land Registry. Seven hundred and eighty-seven (787) properties were registered during the year under review. This brought the total number of registrations as on 31 December 1999 to 3,338. Owing to an internal administrative problem, no more properties could be registered.

However, during the latter part of 1999 the Joint Office successfully utilised Land Registry staff to work in synergy with this Office. In a few months, over 4,000 files were inputted on the Land Registry system for eventual registration.

ADMINISTRATION

Revenue Collection

The table hereunder shows the comparative figures of revenue collected in 1998 and 1999:

	1998	1999
	Lm	Lm
Rent	366,166	408,948*

Sales	<u>197,215</u>	<u>604,882</u>
Total	563,381	1,013,830

* The Estimate of Revenue for 1999 from rents, ground rents and burdens was placed at Lm350,000. However at the end of 1999, the sum of Lm408,948 was collected, i.e. Lm58,948 over the targeted sum.

During this year the Joint Office gave particular attention to the collection of arrears of ground rent.

Computerisation

By the end of 1999, every staff member of the Joint Office was equipped with a PC, enabling faster access to the different programmes.

Progress was registered in the electronic transfer of data from the previous Land Management System to the new Property Management System. MITTS were requested to include enhancements to the new system. The Joint Office continued to issue manual receipts. The electronic transfer is earmarked for early 2000.

Geographical Information System

Through the link-up with the Land Registry's Geographical Information System (G.I.S), the Technical Section of the Joint Office is able to download and print data from the G.I.S. This will continue to facilitate and speed up the process of drawing up plans and accelerate the work in connection with the registration of properties with the Land Registry.

The Control Committee

The Control Committee is a body set up in terms of Article 17 of the 1991 of the Agreement between the Holy See and the Government of Malta. The Holy See nominates two Members of the Committee and two Members are nominated by the Government of Malta. Meetings are chaired by one member of each side alternately.

The functions of the Control Committee are promoting and monitoring the correct and timely application of the provisions of the above-mentioned agreement with particular reference to the approval of corrections to the Annexes and the alienation of property in particular to bonds that have to be issued to the Foundation for Church Schools.

The Secretary of the Control Committee is a senior official at the Joint Office. The Control Committee met 12 times during 1999.

Joint Office Gozo Branch

The services offered at the Gozo Branch are restricted to the collection of rents, ground rents and burdens, and the provision of customer care services.

Another official was assigned to the Joint Office Branch in Gozo. As a result this Office could be opened every day for the benefit of the general public. This service could not be guaranteed in the first half of the year under review.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Although the staff complement should hover around the 47 mark, actual staff at the end of 1999 was 31.

In its efforts to increase its output in connection with the registration of ex-Church property, the Joint Office tried to farm out these functions to private contractors. Another attempt was made through synergy between experienced personnel from the various departments within the Ministry for Home Affairs namely, the Notary to Government, the Public Registry and the Land Department. The latter seems to be more feasible if the two concepts are combined.

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