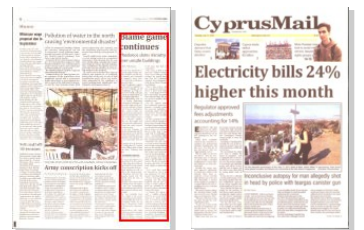


1. BLAME GAME CONTINUES

Μέσο: CYPRUS MAIL

Ημ. Έκδοσης: . . . 12/07/2022 Ημ. Αποδελτίωσης: . . . 12/07/2022

Σελίδα: 6



Blame game continues

Phedonos slams ministry over unsafe buildings

By Nick Theodoulou

THE row has deepened between the Paphos mayor Phedonos Phedonos and the interior ministry over unsuitable and dangerous living quarters, as both sides continue to blame each other.

A lack of legislation regulating the need for landlords to prove that buildings are fit for habitation and high demand from foreign nationals for cheap accommodation are seen as aggravating factors.

The long-standing issue of old or poorly constructed and maintained buildings has taken centre stage as two incidents were recorded in Paphos in just 24 hours, injuring five people – three of whom seriously, and remain hospitalised.

Yiannis Koutsolambros, secretary of the Paphos wing of Cyprus Technical Chamber (Etek), has also argued that the issue would be taken more seriously had it been Cypriots who were injured.

For his part, Phedonos on Monday morning said that the announcement sent to him by the interior ministry does not assign blame but instead is “90 per cent copy paste from CY law”.

“It simply has in the first and final paragraphs the request for us to inform them of what we’ve done,” Phedonos told Sigma.

CUNNING MOVE

The mayor described it as a cunning move by the ministry, reiterating that it did not assign blame for responsibility, as it was unable to do so.

Asked whether he will respond to the interior ministry, Phedonos said that the statement issued over the weekend must be seen as their response.

Phedonos also argued that the ministry had no authority over the municipality, only the attorney-general and auditor-general having such oversight.

The two incidents have shone a light on the major gap in legislation which gives room for landlords to rent out old buildings which are not subject to inspection, which has always been a grievance of Etek.

Koutsolambros told Alpha that the law must be changed so that buildings are inspected and reviewed, a process which must happen at least

15-20 years after they are constructed.

“The issue is that it has taken the collapse of balconies for us to wake up to this problem,” he argued, saying that Etek has consistently called for strict legislation to tackle the problem of dangerous buildings.

“We’ve had serious injuries, it would have been even worse if there were fatalities – and perhaps we would have acted faster if Cypriots were amongst them, if it was our cousin, a relative,” Koutsolambros said.

But the Paphos mayor has complained that even if deputies eventually passed the necessary legislation – something which will take time, he said – the provisions would be made incredibly complex.

He also said that he would proceed with the expulsion of 300 people currently living in buildings deemed dangerous, even though this raised many ethical issues. He conceded, however, that such a move could still be challenged in court – and perhaps rightly, as it was very serious and further complicated matters.

Phedonos was also asked as to why he was focusing so much on the foreign nationals who are the tenants of such dwellings, to which he replied that 90 per cent of such cases concern that demographic.

He pointed to very high demand amongst that group which is granted €80 rent allowance by the government, meaning that they are generally unable to afford much else.

“How could four people be expected to rent a normal apartment for €320 a month?” the mayor asked.

The low rents paid at these buildings was the reason landlords did not have the money to make repairs, argued the president of the property-owners association, Giorgos Mouskides.

On Sunday, the mayor issued a lengthy statement which hit out at the interior ministry for doing nothing since 2019 when a building collapsed in Nicosia. He accused it of aiding and abetting greedy landlords by allowing them to pack third-country nationals and asylum seekers into unsuitable buildings by paying the rent directly to the owners through the welfare department.