

28th April, 2008

To the Prime Minister of Greece, Mr Konstantinos Karamanlis  
Maximos Mansion  
19 Irodou Attikou St.  
106-74  
Athens Greece

Your Excellency,

The World Archaeological Congress would like to express its strong opposition to the development proposed by the British company Minoan Group in the archaeologically rich, arid, windswept, uninhabited north-east corner of Crete, called Cavo Sidero. This letter is to draw your attention to the archaeological richness of this area, and to the threat posed to this area by the proposed development.

The Minoan Group wish to build a resort for 7000 visitors, including golf courses, holiday 'villages' and hotels. However, this area is of the greatest archaeological importance, as it has been uninhabited for more than a thousand years. In consequence it contains remains of the terraces, fields, check-dams and roads of Ancient Greek and Byzantine farmers on a landscape-wide scale, not disturbed by the activities of later cultivators. This is unique in Crete and may well be unique for the Mediterranean as a whole.

It is also of the greatest ecological importance for its special, drought-adapted vegetation. Crete is one of the world's biological hot-spots, and this corner includes important stands of several of the world's rarest plants, such as the world-famous grove of Cretan palm at Vai. The peninsula is designated for conservation under the Natura 2000 scheme (GR4320006 & GR4320009).

The recommendations of the archaeological impact assessment that has been carried out are inconsistent with the findings of leading archaeologists who have worked in the area for years. This report singles out for protection a few, poorly designated localities and fails to recognise others, when virtually the whole landscape is, in effect, an archaeological site.

Proposed for protection are the site of Itanos itself, two scraps of landscape, and five isolated sites (one of which is the Minoan villa at Vai already heavily damaged by bulldozing). On the published map two of the sites are in the wrong places, which indicates a poor standard of investigation. Furthermore, the survey of the French Archaeological School of Athens has found more than 100 sites with standing architectural remains (<http://webefa.efa.gr/prospection-itanos/>). The well-preserved series of Final

Neolithic/Early Minoan I hilltop sites (a minimum of seven) are especially interesting, particularly given that many are with architecture. We are concerned that many of these sites along with the unusually well-preserved ancient agricultural landscape will be destroyed by the proposed development.

The World Archaeological Congress supports the hundreds of archaeologists working in Greece and the many thousands of others from all over the world who oppose this development.

We urge Your Excellency to use your influence to prevent the proposed development from going forward as planned, and to instigate appropriate study of this archaeologically rich region of your country.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Claire Smith, President