

Editorial: Patient Earth is critically ill

Simon Paul Attard Montalto

If planet earth was a patient she would be diagnosed with multi-organ failure and transferred immediately to intensive care. The list of problems afflicting 'Earth' would include runaway hyperthermia despite numerous attempts to control this, respiratory failure and decreasing ability to maintain proper oxygenation, circulatory failure with multiple thromboses in major arteries, and renal and hepatic failure with inexorable accumulation of body wastes. On top of all of these ailments, intermittent bouts of extreme dehydration alternating with fluid overload as well as sporadic unexpected infections would have contributed to a steady decline in her health over the past few decades, culminating in the need for life support.

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COVER PICTURE

'Veccia at night'

Lino Said is a retired dentist who is also a self-taught artist. His preferred media are acrylics and pastels.

Born in 1962, Dr Said attended St Albert the Great College, before graduating from the Faculty of Dentistry, University of Malta in 1985. He is currently attending a Diploma course in Archival and Ecclesiastical Patrimony.

His other interests include Maltese history and archaeology. He also manages a local boutique winery.

He has been involved in a number of fund-raising activities for various charities.

Real earth, the planet not the patient, is in fact experiencing uncontrolled global warming which, year-on-year is projected to get worse.¹ Numerous major multi-national conventions, profound declarations and pledged commitments have not reversed the trend: indeed, the projected rate of global temperature rise is forever re-adjusted upwards.^{1,2} Climate control conferences have become an annual depressing if not predictable exercise in failed diplomacy and international pretend-cooperation.¹ Erudite and researched orations are inevitably followed by petty squabbling resulting in no meaningful resolutions (or none that are sufficiently supported to make a difference). For Earth, the patient, multiple remedies exist but are unavailable, have expired, are too expensive, not approved . . . etc., etc. Despite the consequences of this temperature rise having been documented scientifically ad nauseam, many continue to ignore or even, incredibly, deny this phenomenon. Sadly, these include some world leaders and significantly influential bodies that, in turn, allow those for whom it is expedient to continue harmful practices to continue doing so. This includes, amongst others, massive-scale logging, mining, burning of fossil fuels, dumping of waste into waterways, etc.³⁻⁵ The knock-on effects of global warming are immense and self-perpetuating: hence, as the planet warms, glaciers and the sea-ice retreat resulting in rising sea levels, havoc for many coastline and fragile ecosystems,⁶ but also warming and release of vast amounts of methane from thawing permafrost.⁷ Methane is a major and more permanent greenhouse gas than CO₂ and billions of tons-worth is currently locked into frozen permafrost in the tundra regions of the planet. Its release, together with fast disappearing rainforests – more than 50% of the earth's total rainforests, the earth's natural lung and greatest carbon trap, have disappeared⁸ – will result in a huge upturn in global warming.⁹ If the downward spiral of further warming causing further melting (permafrost, glaciers, sea-ice, etc.) is not stopped and reversed, it will tip beyond the point of no return within a few decades or less.

Man-driven air pollution 'took off' during the industrial revolution in Victorian times, but has continued apace despite accrued knowledge of its harmful effects over the past two centuries. Indeed, the negative impact of air pollution that had occurred over such a tiny period of Earth's lifetime, around 5.4 billion years, is quite staggering. In practice, in 2024, air pollution in some cities is so bad that the

population are regularly advised to stay indoors!¹⁰ Continuing massive-scale industrial emissions, continuing use of fossil-burning machines, wildfires secondary to global warming etc., will ensure that patient Earth is in dire need of ventilatory support.

Polluted oceans and waterways are the norm in almost all large cities or anywhere where there has been industrialization.¹¹ Many rivers are virtual sewers and plastic and micro-plastics are present everywhere, including in the little-explored abyssal depths of the oceans.¹² The problem of clean, unpolluted water is massive and destined to worsen again, as adequate measures are implemented, sometimes in part only, by just a few countries. In this regard, patient Earth has reached the point of requiring renal replacement therapy.

Arterial congestion is a universal problem particularly to those utilizing these roads, although the pollution ensuing from clogged arteries poses an even greater health risk to the planet. Even emission-free electric transport comes with its own baggage, not least as a result of the extremely damaging and wasteful means of extracting lithium from the earth and problems with its disposal once spent.¹³

A reversal to natural healing remedies may be the answer: solar energy is natural and hugely abundant. But for Earth, is it a suitable homeopathic alternative? Not quite: it remains expensive, not widely available and insufficiently supported by authorities who intermittently offer incentives/grants/sweeteners of varying 'substance/attractiveness'.

Earth, the patient, is undoubtedly sick, indeed, sick enough to be on intensive care. It behoves everyone with a modicum of understanding and in a position of influence, including doctors, to support clean/green measures wherever possible, and to lobby those in power to propose and enforce earth-friendly measures in relation to air quality, waterways, oceans, agriculture, farming, land use, forestry, energy production, etc. In a tiny overcrowded island with multiple apartment blocks, why don't we cover all public buildings of no historical/architectural value, schools, reservoirs, warehouses, etc., with solar panels and lease these to those living in properties who cannot/do not wish to install their own? The energy generated would be passed onto the grid, but offset against the domestic bills of all lease-holders. One small step for man . . . one tiny step towards Earth's recovery!

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