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**Joint Statement by the Aquatic Sports Association of Malta,  
the Malta Basketball Association, and the Malta Football Association**

**Resume competitive sport responsibly**

**5th April, 2021:** The Aquatic Sports Association of Malta, the Malta Basketball Association, and the Malta Football Association have today jointly renewed their appeal to the Government and the local health authorities to allow the return of competitive sport, albeit in a gradual way.

In view of the government's plans to ease measures currently in effect until 11 April, the three governing bodies of waterpolo, swimming, artistic swimming, basketball, football and futsal respectively, have reiterated the limited impact sport has in the transmission of COVID-19. Referring to data issued by the Public Health Department, it was pointed out that sport has consistently ranked last in terms of activities leading to clusters contributing to the transmission of the virus, with negligible impact. These figures, as presented by the health authorities, have remained constant before the partial lockdown announced in mid-March and now that its effects are there for all to see and when sport cannot be practised at all.

Sport – which is mostly practised in large outdoor spaces, should not suffer once more, especially when the Associations involved have proved that it can be practised in a safe way. All three associations stated that they agree to a gradual return to competitive activity but insisted that the lifting of the prohibition on contact sport as of 12th April is crucial for athletes and teams to resume with appropriate training. Experience from last year proves that this is very important to avoid injuries.

“While the health and safety of all remain the overriding priority, athletes must be able to practise their sport while observing all applicable precautionary measures”, said ASA President Joe Caruana Curran. “Best practices from other countries have shown that the requirements of elite sport in this context have been addressed with top-tier competitions all over Europe going ahead with the necessary safeguards”.

“Top-level sport is equipped to contribute towards keeping the situation under control, rather than the other way round”, explained Paul Sultana, MBA President. “So far there have been significant efforts to sustain our competitions through the application of thorough medical protocols and continuous testing. In this sense, our Associations have responded well to the added responsibilities put on them”, he said.

“Malta is the only country where all sport, including the elite level, has been stopped”, said Bjorn Vassallo, President of the Malta FA. “This is the professional level which represents the livelihood of many players and technical staff. Furthermore, this prolonged period of inactivity will impact fitness and technical levels both at club level, where our clubs will in a couple of months' time compete on the European stage, as well as the National Team, which has important international commitments in the windows of June and September”. He maintained that failing to resume training as of the 12th

April would almost certainly mean that the BOV Premier League will not be completed within UEFA-imposed deadlines.

The three Associations emphasised that the priority is to be given to senior level rather than junior or amateur competitions, which involve a much larger number of participants. We are still in time for domestic competitions to be terminated naturally in a way that values the efforts made so far by associations, clubs, and athletes to sustain their activities in such challenging times.