

**TOAST BY HER EXCELLENCY MARIE-  
LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA,  
PRESIDENT OF MALTA DURING A  
LUNCHEON HONOURING TWO  
NEWLY APPOINTED NON-RESIDENT  
AMBASSADOR OF THE BOLIVARIAN  
REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA AND  
HIGH COMMISSIONER OF SRI  
LANKA. SAN ANTON PALACE,  
THURSDAY 29 MAY 2014**

Your Honour Chief Justice,  
Honourable Edward Scicluna  
Excellencies,  
Honourbale Carm Mifsud Bonnici  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to host this lunch, in honour of two distinguished diplomats, which have presented to me their letters of credence this morning:

*His Excellency Julián Isaías Rodríguez Díaz, Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and, His Excellency J. Ashitha I. Pera, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka.*

Having had the occasion, to discuss with each of them, Malta's bilateral relations, I feel confident, that, in collaboration with the Maltese authorities, they will be able, to continue to strenghten the

political, economic and cultural exchanges, of the countries they represent, with Malta.

Although, they will not be taking up, residence in Malta, I am sure, that they, will be committing themselves, to visiting Malta on regular basis, to explore the Island's opportunities, in the fields of, trade and investment, services and social issues, as well as, seek to look into ways, how to enhance commercial flows, between our two countries, for mutual benefit.

As I congratulate them both, on their appointment, I take the opportunity to

wish them, every success in their endeavours.

In the meantime, on this special occasion, I would like to request them, to convey our best wishes, to their respective Heads of State, expressing our sentiments, of friendship, to their peoples.

Excellencies,

With regard to diplomatic relations with the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**, I have the pleasure to note, that these were established way back in 1977. Since then, both sides,

strived to do their best, to strengthen their ties, through the exchange of high level visits, during which, important meetings were held on several issues, ranging from oil procurement, enhanced economic cooperation, collaboration between our respective Universities, and last, but not least, the possibility of appointing an Honorary Consul for Venezuela, based in Malta.

Indeed, Your Excellency, with your appointment as non-resident Ambassador of Venezuela to Malta, we continue to look forward, to more intense cooperation, with the sole aim,

to expand our bilateral relations and friendship, between our two peoples.

This shall obviously include, the start of a sound political dialogue, which could lead to the identification of areas of cooperation, of mutual interest, and benefit for our respective peoples.

As I had the opportunity to discuss with Your Excellency this morning, Malta has a lot to offer to your country.

Although small in size, it managed to establish itself, as a centre of excellence, for the teaching of the English language to foreign students.

Malta is also an ideal base, for international industries, in the field of ICT, and, aviation services and maintenance.

Malta's strategic position, and intimate knowledge of European and North African markets, could offer Venezuelan companies, an excellent base, to penetrate such markets.

From the logistical side, Malta can be an ideal location, where Venezuelan exporters can stock their goods, destined for the European or Mediterranean market.

This can be done through our state-of-the art Freeport.

On a multilateral level, Malta, as member of the EU, attaches great importance to the European Union – Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU-CELAC), bi-regional relationship.

One augurs, that in the upcoming EU-CELAC Senior Officials Meeting, due to be held in Brussels next month, tangible progress will take place, on the agenda laid down on the table of negotiations, in the best interest of all parties.



I am confident, that with the good will of all those concerned, the forthcoming Senior Officials Meeting, will give a clear mandate to the Presidency, to resume with negotiations, on the Foundation of an Action Plan.

Excellencies,

With regard to **Sri Lanka**, this year marks the 12th anniversary, since the establishment of Diplomatic relations between our two countries.

Although geographically, distant from one another, both countries share membership of the Commonwealth,

which steps up our respective countries' mission, towards peaceful coexistence.

In 2011, Malta played a pivotal role in successfully evacuating some 100 Sri Lankan nationals from war stricken Libya.

Furthermore, in the wake of the 2004 Tsunami, which wrecked havoc over Sri Lanka, Malta provided essential assistance to the Sri Lankan population, to alleviate their situation, as much as possible.

I am proud to say, that in that case, Malta gave the highest, per capita,

assistance to Sri Lanka, when compared with the rest of the European countries. In real terms, Malta contributed €8 million worth of assistance, in the aftermath of the tragedy.

This led to several projects, which included the construction of a village complete with a medical clinic, the construction of fishing boats, which are most essential for Sri Lankans to earn their living, the development of water purification system in Madilha, as well as, the provision of education, and recreational facilities, for Sri Lankan students.

Trade wise, there is still much to be done between the two sides, as this, is significantly low. In this regard, Malta could serve as a strategic place, from where trade and investment activity, could take place.

As I said, earlier, Malta's infrastructure, could enable Sri Lankan exporters, to actively engage in the transshipment of goods, to and from Europe, Africa, Asia and beyond.

While Malta, is already assisting Chinese sourced trade to the rest of the world, perhaps more could be done, to make

Asian countries aware of this important shipment platform, situated at the crossroads between Europe and Africa.

Furthermore, our respective countries, attach great importance, to the tourism, and cultural sectors.

I am informed, that at some time, talks were underway with Heritage Malta, and its Sri Lankan counterpart, to explore the possibility, of setting up an Exchange Programme.

This, I believe, should resume as there is much scope, in following up on these initiatives, which will lead to other

sectors of cooperation, in the best interest of our two peoples.

As a member of the EU Malta continues, looks positively at the 2011 EU-Sri Lankan Air Transport Agreement, which in my view, is essential for the nations' prosperity, and direct linkage to the rest of the world.

Your Excellency, our two countries, are members of the Commonwealth, an organisation which brings us closer together, as much as give us the right incentive to work harder towards common objectives of cooperation.

Malta, as you know will be hosting CHOGM in 2015.

In this regard we are looking forward to this big event, with high hopes that tangible outcomes in the form of structured mandates will come out in the direction, of a sound revitalisation, of the role of the Commonwealth in today's world.

My Government firmly believes, that the role of the Commonwealth is pivotal, in addressing issues related to sustainable development.

Our respective experience of the Organisation should lend itself, to better management of the discussions, leading to a re-evaluation of the important role that the Commonwealth should play at global level, especially in post-2015. Indeed we firmly believe, that unless all Member States, unite towards this aim of capacity-building, and knowledge-based initiatives, which will directly empower people to take the lead, no pragmatic progress could be attained.

Your Excellencies,

I believe that we have reason to look forward with optimism, to continue working together in the coming months,



to strengthen our cooperation on the political, economic and cultural levels.

I now invite all present, to stand and drink to the health of the Ambassador of the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela and to the High Commissioner of the Republic of Sri Lanka, and to the excellent relations between Malta and the two countries, represented here today.

