

Toast delivered by HE Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta on the occasion of the Independence Day of the United States of America.

Honorable Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries,
Excellencies,
Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you, Your Excellency Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley for your apt illustration of the strong relations between our two countries.

May I take this memorable opportunity to ask you, on behalf of my husband, in my name and on behalf of the Government and the People of Malta, to convey to His Excellency, President Barack Obama and the People of the United States of America, our sincere best wishes on the occasion of American Independence.

This year marks the 238th anniversary of US Independence. As is normal in such occasions we come together to celebrate this important achievement, as well as, to reflect on the overarching significance and relevance to our time.

I hold particular admiration, to America's acquisition of freedom. It is impressive how, from a humble cordon of 13 colonies, America evolved into a vibrant conglomeration of 50 states.

It is noteworthy that, in the process of this struggle, America and its people, laid down the solid foundations, of what were to become the principles of a fully-fledged democracy – a democracy, that with conviction one must say,

that it stood the test of time, only to come out stronger, and more resilient in its aspirations.

It must be acknowledged, that this success would not have been possible, if people of different ethnicities and religious creeds, did not feel the need to unite and follow a common aspiration to realise a peaceful co-existence and hence achieve quality of life.

American forefathers were driven by a combination of social and economic aspirations and forged their names on the Declaration of Independence which until this day continues to inspire not only the American people, but also many of us with its vision and focus on the well-being of the human person.

I would like to quote the following statement as enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, which I personally regard as a thorough reflection of life; this statement should inspire all those who believe in peaceful co-existence and effective quality of life and it says:

“... that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Today, America celebrates diversity in its 300 million inhabitants who are true custodians of the inherent ideals of freedom, respect to human rights and the rule of law.

On the other hand, we must acknowledge that much of America's success was only possible, thanks to generations of immigrants, who over the years came from all over the globe, to settle in the US.

Amongst them were also Maltese immigrants, who first arrived in the United States in mid-18th century to settle in New Orleans. At the time the number of Maltese who immigrated to the US was very small. However after World War I, Maltese immigrants to the US increased substantially.

I am committed to work closer with the Maltese communities scattered all over the world, to make them more aware, that they should always feel, that Malta was, and will continue to be their home.

2014 is a special year for Malta and the US, as we celebrate 50 years of excellent bilateral relations. Our resolve to make our relationship a successful story, is evident in the broad sphere of cooperation, that both our countries embarked on, over the years.

Indeed, since the start of institutional relations between our two countries, a number of significant agreements were signed, primarily to facilitate mobility of people and investment, some of which are:

The Visa Abolition Agreement, the Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreement and the Foreign Accounts Tax Compliance Act Agreement which were significant milestones, in the enhancement of our mutual trade, and investment relations as well as people-to-people contact.

Furthermore, Malta remains grateful for the unique assistance provided by the US government in the resettlement of refugees.

In fact in 2012 a total of 307 persons resettled in the United States, while since 2007, the number of resettlements was more than 1,300 persons.

We believe that the US has deeply understood Malta's situation with regard to irregular immigration. As I had the opportunity to reiterate on other occasions, we firmly believe that people crossing the Mediterranean sea, hoping for a better life should be assisted with all possible means.

These people risk their lives over the desert, some are abused along the way and literally put their fate in the hands of criminal organisations who relentlessly stake their lives on unsafe vessels across the Mediterranean sea.

On the other hand, Malta and its neighbouring countries cannot take and support more than their fair share of people arriving irregularly on our respective shores. Malta in particular has constraints in all aspects, be it space, be it infrastructure, be it human and financial resources. In the sense, Malta is truly a special case.

Here Malta forcefully calls on the European Union and the International community at large to come together to find pragmatic and long-lasting solutions to this humanitarian problem.

Excellency,

As a country geographically situated in the midst of the Mediterranean sea, Malta remains committed to serve as a hub for dialogue and peace in the region.

Its Mediterranean vocation as well as membership of the European Union continue to make it the ideal setting for more coexistence between countries and their respective peoples.

In this context, I am pleased to note the significant opening of the Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law in Malta last month. The Institute, an initiative of the Global Counter-terrorism Forum supported by the US to open in Malta, aims to provide rule of law-based training to lawmakers, law-enforcers and other justice stakeholders on counter-terrorism and related transnational criminal activities.

The Institute, like the rest of Malta's initiatives at regional level, is yet another example of the important role Malta plays in the Mediterranean, especially by continuing to act as a bridge between mainland Europe and North Africa.

Malta geographical location makes it both a natural agent of dialogue amongst peoples as well as an ideal base for foreign investors wanting to penetrate North African markets. For sure, Malta's state-of-the-art Freeport and maritime and air services continue to make Malta a true centre of trade and investment encounters.

At this stage I welcome the recent developments on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the US very positively.

There is no doubt that further liberalisation of all sectors of the transatlantic economy would increase trade flows between the two sides, giving way to new employment opportunities and the widespread containment and recovery from the economic crisis.

Unfortunately, when speaking of North Africa one cannot do so without mentioning the political instability that is still hampering neighbouring Libya from establishing a working democratic system of governance. On the other

hand Syria remains at a stalemate, with the death toll of innocent lives on the rise and the recent uprisings in Iraq does not augur well to the stability of the region.

Such widespread instability is causing people to flee from worn-torn areas to neighbouring countries, adding more stress and tensions to an already decaying situation.

It is my firm believe that unless we all join forces towards a more social globalisation, any attempts towards economic growth stands to fail.

When I think of the millions of displaced families, and in particular, children, I truly feel that it is time for women of the world to stand up against this scourge that is depleting our societies. This is a situation that is eroding our hope and our aspirations, of our fundamental human rights, inparticular the right to life, and the right to family life.

All this has nothing to do with ethnicity, religion or culture. This is all about the right for peaceful co-existence. Let us not waste more time as onlookers. Let us all in our own peaceful, democratic way, stand up and voice our support and solidarity to those women who have lost their family and children.

On the other hand, access to education, health-care and nutrition for all remain basic goals which on the eve of the 15th anniversary since the launching of the Millennium Development Goals by the United Nations remain lacking to many people around the world.

Teaching our children the art of solidarity as well as listening to their aspirations is one way of how we could ultimately realise that all that we do

and say, is nothing more than an attempt to make their lives better. As Martin Luther King jr. rightly said: *“All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence”*.

Excellency,

July Fourth represents all the manifestations against injustice and indignation suffered by people around the world. It transmits a message of hope without imposing anything on anyone.

We must remember that the Declaration of US Independence was only the start of a long process, towards forging a Constitution and a Bill of Rights, the abolishment of slavery and the right to vote for women.

In a way, July Fourth is still an evolving process up to this day as we continue to witness thousands of people deprived of their rights and dignity all over the globe. Such is the relevance of this important day that we all feel connected to an ideal which is possible only if we engage further towards becoming more prepared to listen to what others have to say, to reach out to those in need, to support those who are persecuted and deprived of freedom and basic needs.

T.S. Eliot, a nineteenth century American poet and literary critic, somehow manages to illustrate the spirit of this day when he says that: *“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”*

May all our work manage to go the extra mile towards the development of all the potential that we all possess and that we can all use to be of service to others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please let us raise our glasses and drink to the health of H.E. President Barack Obama and H.E. Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, as well as to the excellent relations and friendship between Malta and the United States of America.