

**ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA,
PRESIDENT OF MALTA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXCHANGE OF
THE NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS - THE
PALACE, VALLETTA**

WEDNESDAY 14TH JANUARY 2015

Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,

Excellencies,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

I am so pleased to have this opportunity to extend my heartfelt greetings for the New Year to you and your families.

Furthermore, I would like to take the opportunity to convey my heartfelt greetings too, on my behalf and on behalf of the People of Malta, to your respective Heads of State.

The past year was an eventful one, both locally and internationally.

It is evident that the economic crisis across the continent continued to show signs of cautious recovery.

However, there remains much to be done, especially in the European employment sector, where many young people are still finding it difficult, to join the workforce.

The issue of the 'long-term unemployed' and the 'working poor' still persist on Europe's agenda. A solution must be sought urgently to this social scourge that is effecting the wellbeing of one in four Europeans, and 1.4 billion people globally.

In the meantime, Malta employment figures, remain encouraging and one augurs that this momentum, will be sustained with more investment opportunities.

Poverty, unfortunately, not only persists among us, but is a growing concern both in Europe and globally.

As Europeans in particular, having social values so much at heart, we cannot remain complacent, in the ongoing struggle against poverty.

I have stated elsewhere, that I am under no illusion that poverty can be readily solved, given the society in which we live, the policies that inform it, and the economic interests that drive these policies.

However, poverty is not a matter of individual, family or community choice or deficiency; but is rooted in political, social and economic injustices.

That is the reason why we must, and should, all act within our remit, to address effectively this social menace.

During 2014, much to our disappointment and outright condemnation, bloodshed continued to spill in

neighbouring Libya, Syria and Iraq, with conflicts in the latter two giving rise to the gruelling emergence of the Islamic State; which has intermittently committed mass atrocities against humanity.

Of particular significance are also the biblical numbers of displaced persons fleeing from these war-torn countries, mostly women and children, who have either found refuge in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan or crossed borders to Libya to proceed with their journey towards mainland Europe.

My thoughts are constantly with these people, and especially with the thousands of people who lost their lives along a difficult journey, which was meant to give them a dignified life in safety.

Malta's plight, together with that of other Mediterranean countries like Italy and Greece, should be heard by the international community, so that the movement of people, so much a reality today, should

be a quality experience, and not a tragic end to many hopes and lives.

This human devastation is then further compounded by the fact that, those who survive the ordeal are faced by poverty.

Migrants' poverty is also increased by racist discourses which render them as the perceived threat to jobs.

In addition, the exploitative nature of their serving as a grossly underpaid and possibly even non paid, 'reserve workforce', and the process of marginalisation, breeds further poverty and becomes complete.

The only outlet for most migrants, seems to be, the low paid and insecure informal economy which constitutes an important feature of a number of European countries.

We need to shift the discourse, enabling people to realise why migrants leave their country, if we are to

even attempt to change the lives of these persecuted people.

Furthermore, 2014 was a year in which unrest in the Middle East took a new downturn. Both sides traded ground and air attacks at the expense of many innocent lives, and another deadlock in the Middle East Peace Process.

On the other hand, the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa is still a great cause of concern, especially since vaccination to mitigate its spreading to other countries, has not yet been produced and the risk of contamination remains high.

During last year a series of commemorative events took place across the world to mark the 100th anniversary since the outbreak of the Great War and the 70th anniversary since the end of the Second World War. Both anniversaries served the collective memory to

come together and declare itself against war and in favour of peace.

This year, we commemorated the 100th anniversary since the beginning of the Great War; the war that should have ended all wars.

Millions of lives lost, sacrificed on the altar of ambition.
What utter waste!

Hundred years since the destructive war, and twenty five years since the fall of the Berlin wall. Both anniversaries commemorated last year reminded us that there are still those who believe that wars and walls are still viable today.

Throughout 2014, notwithstanding the knowledge gained from the deadly events, man still sought to attack life, destroyed cultural symbols and collective memories of communities seeking the right to a peaceful existence.

From Gaza to Syria; from Iran to Afghanistan; from Pakistan to Libya; from Ukraine to Nigeria, and now in Paris, horrific scenes, pools of blood, human slaughter that terrify and sadden all those who believe in human dignity.

In the face of this reality, it is immoral to remain silent. The Presidency condemns, without any reservations, every attack on life and human dignity – violence starting at home, in the virtual world and ends in the streets and squares, in institutions and any other spaces.

Shocked by the massacre of children in learning institutions in Pakistan, saddened by the abduction of young people in Mexico and girls in Nigeria, worried by the attack on life of free journalists in Paris, I appeal for 2015 to be a year where people who cherish peace, speak out on the failures of man, where violence superseded kindness and reason.

Both anniversaries also contributed to shed more light on the horrors of intolerance and lack of dialogue, especially at a time of rapid change and the swift emergence of extremism in many new forms and attitudes.

On an EU level, while the usual high-level meetings continued to engage European leaders all year round, of particular relevance were the European Parliament elections in May and the change at the helm of the European Commission and the European Council respectively.

It is expected that with the newly elected European Parliament and Presidencies of the Commission and the Council of the European Union, firmer steps will be taken towards enhanced economic growth, while effectively addressing the most imminent problems faced by the European people, that of unemployment and poverty.

One augurs that with these changes in place, the European Union will be capable of regaining the required confidence to re-establish itself as an important catalyst of change, worldwide.

Malta, like the rest of the world had its fair share of events in 2014. While continuing with its programme of economic consolidation, and the identification of new avenues of cooperation in several vital sectors, such as Energy, Health care and Education, it also strived to maintain its record successes, such as in the tourism sector, financial services and transshipment services and connectivity amongst others.

Suffices to note that while aware of the aggressive competition surrounding it, Malta faired extremely well, when compared with other European partners.

This is mostly devoted to its able workforce and its ability to pre-empt elements of risk, that may have tarnished or hampered progress from taking its course.

The Libyan conflict continued to have negative socio-economic impacts on Malta as last year two rival parliaments emerged in Tripoli and Tobruk respectively.

This unfortunately mounted further tension to the already chaotic situation in the country; paving the way to more immigrants crossing the Mediterranean sea for want of a safer place.

Malta as a country in the midst of the Mediterranean has every interest to see neighbouring Libya regain its political stability through democratic ways that will safeguard freedom and restore constitutional governance for all.

On the other hand, Malta looks favourably at the successful legislative and Presidential elections that took place in Tunisia at the end of last year.

This historic event provides tangible evidence to the fact that whenever all parties come together and agree on what is best for the country and its people; they succeed with establishing order and good governance in the best interest of all.

May this timely occurrence become contagious to all Mediterranean countries ensuring stability and peace in the region and beyond.

While 2014 was for Malta a year of anniversaries which brought us all together to celebrate, as one nation four of our national festivities, namely the 50th anniversary since Independence, the 40th anniversary since becoming a Republic, the 35th anniversary since the closing of the last British military base in Malta, and the 10th anniversary since accession to the European

Union; it was also a year that pledged to give more rights to minority groups, while ensuring an effective implementation of those already in place.

It was a time in the political history of our country where we managed to seal a 'moral pact' for future generations to never falter in honouring and give homage to all those who beyond political belief, strived to make our country become a fully-fledged nation; proud of its hard-earned achievements, and always forward looking to new aspirations for further development.

This year, Malta will again be hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

This important event that would be hosting fifty four Heads of States, representing more than 2.2 billion people around the globe, is an opportunity for Malta and the Commonwealth countries, to review the

relevance of the organisation, and make it respond to the challenges and opportunities that the digital world is pushing forward.

May this event resolve to devise a roadmap that will kick start the shaping up of the Commonwealth of tomorrow, that have an effective voice and be a useful catalyst to influence change in a world that we will need more and more dynamic government to respond to the continuous aggressive socio-economic and political changes.

Another event for 2015 which I wish to particularly mention due to its overarching significance in the economy of regional development is the 50th anniversary of Malta's accession to the Council of Europe.

Malta's membership to this important institution enabled a better understanding of the different facets of the region, including the Mediterranean.

In fact, Malta's resolve that we cannot aspire for security in Europe unless we have peace and security in the Mediterranean, remains a firm commitment which Malta has, and will continue to promote forcefully in the best interest of all countries and peoples of good will.

Precisely at a time when we were all wishing each other peace and goodwill, the world was shattered by the news of the unprecedented terrorist attacks in Paris.

This was an attack on freedom and on democracy.

I was particularly impressed by German President Joachim Gauck, when on the 9th of January, just after the Paris horrific attack, he said, 'We will not limit our freedom; we will use it. I am sure that our democracy is stronger than terror. We will not allow ourselves to be divided by hate.'

Yes, we must not allow ourselves to be divided by hate.

The aftermath of these horrible events should not be a clash of cultures, but the realisation that fundamentalism, no matter where it emanates from, can only destroy what has been gained through so much suffering and endurance by our forefathers and fathers to make democracy our way of life.

Let us then use our freedom to make our voices heard, to spread love instead of hatred, to unite and not destroy, and to celebrate our differences, not let them tear us apart.

I am convinced that out of terror, we will emerge stronger. Let us stand up and make sure that we will not allow our democracy to be weakened by extremists coming from wherever they come.

May this year be a year that can be remembered and celebrated in time for our strong commitment to establish ongoing peaceful dialogue between peoples of different cultures.

May this year see us achieve wisdom in acknowledging each other's potential, whoever we might be to ensure a truly effective co-existence.

Coming back to Malta, may this year provide us with the basis for more successful chapters in the history of bilateral relations between Malta and your respective country of representation.

So far I am glad to note that the meetings I had with most of you were frank, fruitful and marked by mutual respect.

In the coming year, I look forward to more cooperation and positive outcomes, especially in view of the State and Official visits which I will undertake in the course of the coming months.

Finally, while I thank you all for doing your best to strengthen the diplomatic relations of your respective countries with Malta, we look forward to working

closer with you in the best interests of our countries
and peoples.

Thank you.