

SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT THE STAKEHOLDER MEETING ON THE IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS ORGANISED BY INIZJAMED AND THE NATIONAL OBSERVATORY FOR LIVING WITH DIGNITY

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for coming here today, and for giving your time and efforts towards sharing your expertise in this particular field.

Your participation today has been most valuable and appreciated, as it contributes to existing knowledge and awareness of this issue.

Trafficking in human beings poses a significant threat towards our shared aims of securing protection for all persons, respecting their dignity and freedom, and promoting wellbeing across all society.

These core aims certainly lie at the heart of the National Observatory for Living with Dignity, and the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society more broadly.

Awareness on the topic of human trafficking is often limited amongst those who work outside of the field.

Trafficking in human beings is thus destructive and detrimental to human well being.

Trafficking can take many forms, including sex work, child trafficking, and work exploitation. It is a manifestation of modern day slavery.

It is an unacceptable and gross violation of human rights, and harms its victims deeply, many of whom are often the most vulnerable members of our society to begin with, and who deserve our protection the most.

We must strengthen our resolve to address the issue fully and comprehensively, fostering awareness, improving our responses and identification efforts, increasing support to victims, and co-ordinating all efforts involved in putting an end to trafficking in human beings.

To this end, I thank you all very much for the work you do, and urge you to continue persisting in your efforts, to put an end to this affront to human dignity.

As you are all well aware, very little research has been conducted in this field, perhaps mostly due to the illicit nature of these activities.

This results in a significant gap, leading to an incomplete understanding of what is really happening.

Your presence here marks another vital step in building a clearer and more accurate picture of the issue of trafficking in human beings - a grave violation of human rights, and a concern to us all.

Through sources such as the US Trafficking in Persons Report 2014, we are made aware that Malta is a source and destination country for women and children subjected to sex trafficking, primarily originating from countries such as China, and Eastern Europe, as well as African migrants.

We also informally know of Malta to be a transit country for trafficked persons.

However, no official statistics exist to support this, increasing the difficulty of knowing exactly what it is we are dealing with.

Your work is crucial to this process, particularly in working on the front line, acting as an initial point of contact for victims of trafficking.

There is need for a co-ordinated and consolidated approach in this area, in order to prevent and combat this serious crime.

Populations who we already know to be susceptible targets for human traffickers, must especially be afforded the necessary protection, and safeguards must be increased so as to ensure that nobody falls victim to this grim phenomenon.

Given the fact that we are dealing with vulnerable individuals in the first place, even prior to the act of trafficking and subsequently exacerbated by it, it is all the more crucial that cases are treated with the sensitivity and attention that they deserve.

Trust needs to be established in order for adequate support to be given, since victims of trafficking often come to live a life which is characterized by fear.

They must feel safe in the knowledge they can approach available services for help, without fear of punishment or reprimand for the illicit activities they have been involved in through force, coercion and/or deception.

All individuals working in this field, and particularly on the front line, should receive appropriate training on how best to support and assist victims of human trafficking, approaching them with sensitivity and respect.

To this end, your sharing of knowledge and expertise in the areas is of the utmost importance.

Any present victims should be identified as quickly as possible, and this is another area where your work is instrumental, given your regular contact with vulnerable persons.

It is important that all actors, whether they are state authorities, NGOs, or service providers, work hand in hand to identify victims at the first opportunity, and without any delay.

They must be given immediate and continued assistance and support, and their traffickers apprehended and swiftly prosecuted.

The US Trafficking in Persons Report goes on to support such recommendations for Malta, including the strengthening of efforts to identify trafficking victims proactively among vulnerable populations; the swift investigation, prosecution, and punishment

of human traffickers; the provision of victims services; and training for the authorities in various sectors on standard operating procedures for victim referral.

Some measures have been incorporated into Malta's Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons; however more remains to be done.

More can be done to ensure that victims of human trafficking are safe, and out of harm. However, that in itself is not enough to guarantee the wellbeing and respect for the dignity of each person.

It is crucial that in addition to all else, all those who work in the area of trafficking in human beings does everything possible to achieve true and meaningful wellbeing for the persons they assist.

Victims deserve nothing less.

Thank you so much once again for all that you do in continuing to work towards this goal.