

**11 June 2015**

**From the Mediterranean, the most important Threat for Europe is now coming! The Mediterranean becomes a human underworld for thousands and thousands of desperate and exploited migrants condemned to die – among them numerous children. On the northern side of the sea, just in front is the European Union ... how can we manage this terrible situation and put an end to this nightmare?**

**The real problem lies in the countries of departure where things must change! African women play a crucial role at the local and national levels. How can women help in improving the situation and change the things? The solution must be sound at first in the local communities. It is time to empower the new generations. The current situation in the Mediterranean is the consequence of a global mismanagement of social affairs in Africa. The new leaders are the new decision makers: they may create hope for all. How to shape the strategies allowing the Youth's vision to impact on the national policies?**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Migration is the story of the world. People have left their homelands and travelled into new territories since the beginning of times. Sometimes people travelled in search of better opportunities; sometimes they travelled to escape danger.**

**I come from an island in the Mediterranean Sea that stands halfway between three continents. Malta and its location in such a strategic geopolitical place means that visitors from near and a far have visited and moved there since time immemorial. Our history and culture are deep.**

**Our language is Semitic but written in the Latin alphabet. Our variety of family names, originating from different parts of the world, is testimony that migration was a fact of life in times gone by as well.**

**This melting pot of ideas, culture and traditions is not unique to Malta.**

**I am sure you can relate to some of these notions within your home countries. Migration throughout history therefore shaped who we are today and what we believe in.**

**Nonetheless, migration touches deep feelings in many people. Feelings of concern that migrating people might come and deplete limited resources; fears that they might take jobs and livelihoods.**

**We have all heard these comments, sometimes expressed with great passion because of fear and concern. Even if these feelings are misguided we need to accept the fact that they exist.**

**Decoding why they exist is certainly worth looking into. People often fear others with different customs or cultures because they interpret these differences as a threat to their own ways. This lack of understanding often translates into misconceptions about migrants.**

**It is also sometimes difficult for migrants to adapt to their new surroundings. This sometimes results into detached migrant communities and this failure to interact and adapt can sometimes escalate and fuel tensions.**

**This is of course a simplification of the situations that exist. For a more comprehensive understanding we also need to examine how these fears are manipulated by some politicians and individuals with specific agendas.**

**Instigating hatred can be convenient for some actors whereas capitalising on peoples' fear of migration can be politically strategic.**

**It can be also said that advocating for migrants' rights is a risky business. I can attest to this as I often come under attack because I advocate in favour of migrants' rights. After all, migrants' rights are human rights; as embedded in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the number of European Union regulations and frameworks that uphold human rights.**

**This is the reality today. Nonetheless there are more layers to the story. The stories of migrants are very distant from many of us here today. But many of us know how it feels to see human suffering in front of our own eyes. Boat people risking their everything have been trying to reach safe shores in increasing numbers over the past years.**

**Sometimes they land in Malta. Injured, sunburned, and stripped of human dignity, on the verge of giving up. Women, children, vulnerable people are in search for safety, dignity and a better life. Sometimes dead bodies are brought on the boats.**

**The approaching summer might mean a period of rest for many. But for others it means a chance to risk their lives and attempt at reaching a promised land full of opportunity and a better future.**

**For many it will mean that they will never be seen again, as news of yet more tragedies in the Mediterranean reach us. For others it will mean that their promised destination is human trafficking and being traded like any other commodity. For these people, escaping wars, conflicts, persecution, absolute poverty and the effects of climate change, travelling towards Europe right now, in this very moment, the future is not that bright.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**This grim picture needs to motivate us in changing the way things are. We need to think strategically and come up with comprehensive solutions that are based on respect for human rights and dignity for all.**

**We need to think about ways how these people in peril are protected and their human rights upheld. We need to think long term so that future generations are spared these tragedies and the loss of life is transformed into respect for diversity and inclusion at all levels.**

**So what can we do? What can we, as individuals, as leaders, do? What can policy makers, states and regional and international organisations do?**

**There is no silver bullet to this situation. The reasons why people choose to leave their homeland or are forced to migrate are many. The ways how migrants are treated in host countries are varied and complex. Proposed solutions therefore need to be comprehensive and need to act on many levels simultaneously.**

**Education is one asset we need to use and fully exploit in our favour.**

**We can facilitate education about the different cultures that exist beyond our borders.**

**The more we know about each other's traditions, customs, culture, religions and more, the more we can understand each other and live in harmony.**

**This effort at education goes two ways. Migrants also need the opportunities to educate themselves about the customs of their new location and learn to appreciate what is considered as acceptable or not. In this sense specific training and language training can be facilitated so to foster interaction and inclusion with the greater community.**

**Education can also be used to empower migrants. If education in specific skills is facilitated, migrants can become more employable and as a result more empowered. In consultation with migrants themselves, training can be provided in a variety of languages, professions and skills that will ultimately translate into more control of their future.**

**Furthermore, by becoming employed, pressure on the host states' financial assistance will be relieved and transformed into an asset.**

**Hence, migrants will not be considered a burden sharing but as an opportunity sharing that will impact positively on our depleting workforce in Europe and subsequently, our concerns regarding the sustainability of our welfare and pension systems.**

**Education also needs to reach our children. Children today are already benefiting from having migrant schoolmates. They can understand, in perhaps the most innocent and honest of ways, that their migrant companions are children like them.**

**This instilled sense of inclusion needs to be highlighted and celebrated throughout the education systems so that future generations see diversity as an asset that adds value to the society we live in.**

**States and international and regional organisations also need to fulfil their international legal obligations and do their part in tackling migration. Attention needs to be focused on the push-factors that are ultimately driving people away from their homelands.**



**Where there is instability, war and conflict to the detriment of innocent people, states need to take concrete action and facilitate reconciliation and peace.**

**Where the push-factors are economic, the international community needs to do more so to facilitate trade and development. If the economic situation improves there will be more prosperity and therefore less incentive to leave. Assistance given needs to economically empower these countries so that their trade and their economies can develop and flourish, for the benefit of the people.**

**In this context, the concept of South-South cooperation needs to be supported because it provides a viable path to balancing economic growth and equity that can ultimately promote prosperity for all.**

**Encouraging this kind of cooperation will help move toward sustainable development that in time will eradicate extreme poverty, inequality, malnutrition and an overall vulnerability that affects millions of migrants today.**

**Migration may also be the result of climate change with dwindling access to water, demolition of forests and rural areas and rising sea levels. Migrants must be helped to migrate into dignity in such circumstances.**

**States and regional and international organisations are also obliged to fulfil their legal obligations to help migrants that are trying to reach our shores. Civil society and NGOs need to remain updated of the situations at hand so as to offer their assistance and cooperate with governments in joint efforts. They also need to put pressure where necessary and bring to the fore issues that need to be addressed, acting as advocates for the most vulnerable.**

**Having said that, one needs to remember that we need to address the causes rather than the effects of migration. We can't just agree to destroy the traffickers' boats because that is just addressing one peripheral aspect of migration. We need to look deeper and decipher what is making these people risk everything and take perilous journeys in search for a better life.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Upon reflection on these points I just mentioned and the title of this plenary session, I do not see threats coming from the Mediterranean.**

**I see people, human beings like you and me, risking everything because they are forced to. I see potential in their skills and in their diversity which I believe will strengthen the societies we belong to. I see a future where we live and prosper side by side.**

**The deaths in the Mediterranean can stop. If we adopt inclusive migration policies, migrants will no longer choose risky journeys in the hands of murderers.**

**If the European community recognises the added value these individuals bring, migrants will be able to reach their destinations in a safe way with the rights and protection we all deserve.**

**The situation at hand has many angles. As noted earlier, the situations in some of the countries migrants originate from definitely need attention.**

**In some countries the ravages of war make it imperative for people to seek safety and flee for their lives. In other countries people need to be empowered so that they can, at grassroots level, start to make a difference.**

**Women and men need to work together to improve their situations and create a more prosperous future for themselves and their children.**

**Global leaders and the international community also need to act. They have to provide real tangible solutions that are not driven by short term objectives.**

**Solutions must not only address the effects of migration or just provide hope. They need to be based on intelligent, cohesive policies that are comprehensive in nature and pinned on a human rights-based approach.**

**In conclusion, we have to see what we, as individuals, can do. Last year, I created a Foundation, based in Malta, which focuses on the wellbeing of society.**

**Through the various consultative fora and activities it organises regularly, we had the opportunity to meet numerous migrants living in Malta.**

**Recently we met a group of asylum seeker children and they shared with us the difficulties of the journey they made and the challenges they still face.**

**Only some weeks ago, we supported the launch of a booklet that featured the stories of women from Somalia and their experience with migration. We have facilitated discussion regarding an end to detention for children and will continue to do more.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, we can all do something that can better the prospects of the thousands of people that are risking everything for a better life. Let us be bold and ambitious in what we advocate and do - together we can make a difference and ensure a peaceful region for all.**

**Thank you for your kind attention.**