

**SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT
THE INAUGURATION OF AN EXHIBITION COMMEMORATING THE 40TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE HELSINKI DECLARATION**

Friday 10 July 2015

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

We are gathered here today to inaugurate an exhibition to commemorate forty years since world leaders came together to sign a unique document, the Helsinki Declaration.

As a nation, we are proud that Malta was not only signatory to this accord, which brought about a revolution in defining security, as purely tied to the concept of military threats, but was a major player.

The Prime Minister of the time, Mr Dom Mintoff realised that the preparations for the Helsinki Conference did not include the Arab nations of the Mediterranean, in the measures being taken to promote peace and security in Europe.

Mintoff strongly believed that there could not be peace and security in Europe, if there was no peace and security in the Mediterranean. It was through his efforts that Israel, Syria, Iran and the Arab Gulf were also given a voice in the conference.

Mintoff insisted that the Mediterranean Sea should not be sea of arms, war and conflict, but a sea of peace and co-operation.

Although facing harsh opposition, Mintoff stood steadfast in his belief, and in the end, was given justification. Mintoff drafted the document called 'The Mediterranean Document' which was signed in August 1975. Mintoff's stance was definitely vindicated through history

The Helsinki Declaration brought forward, for the first time, the concepts of human rights, democracy and fundamental freedoms, as genuine security issues.

The Helsinki Final Act was a historic triumph of cooperation over conflict, bridging the gap between East and West, and setting the stage for the end of the Cold War.

More importantly, it was a commitment to mutually beneficial dialogue rather than resorting to more conflict.

On the fortieth anniversary of the Helsinki Declaration, it is opportune to take stock of its relevance today. Unfortunately, the picture is not bright, as we witness turmoil growing around us, bringing with it loss of life, millions of displaced persons and much suffering.

The crisis in Ukraine has drastically shaken the ideology projected in 1975, as conflict has taken over from dialogue.

The world is raging with trouble and strife; from Ukraine to Gaza, to Syria, to Iraq and to Libya, to mention just some of the serious conflicts around us.

The recent political turmoil in North Africa and the subsequent downfall of institutional regimes from power should have meant that people in different countries in the region wanted a new wave of governance built on democracy, freedom and the rule of law, similar to the principles drawn in the Helsinki Accord.

However, most of the countries which experienced the Arab Spring saw their efforts turn into a long autumn of endless conflicts and disarray.

It seems the world is reverting back to erecting walls that divide people and nations, as well as experiencing violent terrorism and extremism.

It seems that we have once again, forgotten that it is only through dialogue and understanding that many conflicts can be resolved.

I personally believe that Malta can play an important role in this state of affairs.

The geostrategic location of Malta and the Mediterranean enables us to serve as the crossroad of civilisations which encompasses three continents, namely Europe, Africa and Asia.

With its strategic geographic position, and particular historical and cultural ties, Malta is in an ideal position to promote the fostering of dialogue between the EU and the

Arab World, to work for peace within the Mediterranean, and to serve as a centre for conflict resolution and peace.

Malta has already shown the importance that we attach to promote the issue of peace in the Middle East, as is attested by the prominent role that Malta consistently plays in the European Union, in the United Nations, in the Union for the Mediterranean and the Five Plus Five Dialogue.

Let us continue to strengthen our role of facilitating peace in the Mediterranean, through dialogue between peoples, through intercultural and interfaith understanding, and through mediation.

Peace and development can only come about if people are led not only towards economic wealth, but also by a deep sense of solidarity and tolerance inherent by good governance.

The Helsinki Accord is proof that peace is possible when all states make a concerted effort to dialogue and to search for a common understanding.

It is only if the concepts of the Helsinki Declaration are kept alive, that the benefits of peace and development can intermingle to bring about the desired change towards sustainable coexistence.

The ultimate way we may commemorate the 40 years since the signing of the Helsinki Declaration, is by keeping its concepts relevant today, just as much as they were then.

Indeed, Mintoff's legacy should be our vocation in the Mediterranean.