

**Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,**

**Allow me to congratulate SOS Malta and the LADDER consortium for the timely conference you are holding today and tomorrow.**

**Furthermore, I would like to congratulate the consortium for coming together, to develop and to increase the action of local authorities and civil society, in European Union development and awareness raising policies.**

**By doing this, you are truly being agents of change, primarily by informing, raising awareness and engaging citizens in the challenges that the world is facing today.**

**One of these major challenges is, undoubtedly, that of migration.**

**The choice of the topic of your conference today, is very opportune as it coincides with the EU – African Summit being held here in Malta, which hopefully, the outcomes would truly be historic, as we wait eagerly for the much**

**needed changes, in attitude, in approach, in strategy, and in policies, by policy actors in Europe and Africa .**

**I am also pleased that you are bringing together local government and civil society together on an issue that should concern us all, as it affects us all in one way or another!**

**I hope that your deliberations in Birgu, will bear fruit and be an example of good practice, both locally and throughout Europe. I take this opportunity to encourage you to strive to make Malta a model of best practice for Europe and beyond.**

**Indeed, 2015 is a year of unique importance within the migration and development context.**

**It is a watershed year where the Sustainable Development Goals were finally endorsed by the international community after long deliberations.**

**However, it is also the year where migration flows changed, and are now affecting massively mainland Europe, resulting in an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Asia.**

**It is also the year where we are seeing once more, unprecedented loss of life and tragedies, that continue to touch the lives of many directly and indirectly.**

**Some weeks ago, during the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, when addressing the United Nations Summit, I reminded fellow leaders that these are days of great importance, not only for us who were in New York, but more so, for the rest of the seven billion people that make up our human family.**

**I emphasised that, in the decades to come, we will be judged by future generations, on the choices of strategies and policies, we are making together now, and on the commitments, we are undertaking as an international community.**

**Definitely, we will be judged on how many people will be alleviated from poverty; on how many of us will have better access to healthcare; on the improved availability of water and sanitation; on the provision of sustainable economic growth; on the action we are taking in response to climate change, and on our efforts to secure just, peaceful and inclusive societies.**

**More importantly, I believe that, we will be judged by how we are treating fellow human beings in need of help and protection.**

**To me, the focus on the poorest and the most vulnerable is the crux of this very moment in time and, to my mind, includes people on the move, particularly asylum seeking migrants.**

**Migration is fuelled by inequality and poverty; by lack of food and water security; by economic factors such as unemployment; by lack of sustainable practises; by climate change, conflict and war.**

**Thankfully, these are all priorities now embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals.**

**At the UN Summit in September, it was indeed a special moment to observe the international community, with all member states and stakeholders, come together, and agree, to care for the most vulnerable amongst us, including migrants.**

**Now that the international community has agreed to the goals, the next step is undoubtedly, to take effective action on global level, on regional level and on community level!**

**Migration is a crosscutting issue in the three dimensions of sustainable development. The economic, social and environmental dimensions, all impinge on migration. This is why, I believe that any discourse, on sustainable development must include migration, as a cornerstone.**

**It is with great satisfaction, that I see this concern included in the sustainable development goals, and I take the opportunity to commend everyone involved, for having the courage, and the vision, to acknowledge this, from a human rights standpoint.**

**The adoption of the Post-2015 Agenda, undoubtedly, made headlines throughout the world.**

**Nonetheless, those same headlines, also included grim stories about migrants, and their often thwarted journey in search of better lives.**

**News bulletins in Europe, are reporting the horrific loss of human life on a daily basis. Unfortunately, and I say this with a heavy heart, human rights, are all too often sidelined, and ignored. In this context, effective action must be taken immediately and without any further delay.**

**Unfortunately, too much time has been lost in passivity that resulted into the Mediterranean region and mainland Europe facing an unprecedented situation.**

**Now is the time for a turning point. A turning point which hopefully would mean, a new beginning, for so many countless people.**

**There are many factors that influence migration flows towards Europe.**

**Many a time, the pull factor is the opportunities, that exist in Western societies that offer hope of a better life. For some, they offer the promise of life itself.**

**In the minds of these helpless people, these opportunities are seen as strong economies that generate jobs and create prosperity.**

**These opportunities are seen from the benefits that European countries have achieved from coming together, to form free trade areas, economic partnerships, and shared trade policies.**

**These European partner countries, realise it is imperative, that barriers between one other are eliminated, and that policies which encourage collaboration, and an unhindered flow of trade, are accepted as the best way forward.**

**Undoubtedly for Europeans, this outlook has proved largely successful.**

**It creates economic growth, promotes development, strengthens trust between and ties with trading partners, and impacts positively on the day-to-day lives of people and businesses.**

**It positions European economies as some of the biggest and most influential global players, in international trade and investment.**

**This approach is also seen as a way out of economic crises, delivering lower prices, greater consumer choice, and ultimately a higher standard of living.**

**This economic reality, unhindered and free, without barriers or borders, a success on so many fronts, is nonetheless in stark contrast with our current policies on migration. Policies on migration adopted by Western societies are based on a markedly different set of principles.**

**Indeed, existing migration policies seek to hinder and stop this collective sense of cooperation, and mutual benefit for all. Instead of reflecting policies, that promote free trade, and an open economy, migration policies crush all hopes of freedom.**

**This is an essential point I wish to share with you today in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and hence to further stimulate your thoughts and deliberations, I ask:**



**Why are we failing to recognise that migration can be a positive process, adding particular value?**

**Why are we failing to adopt migration policies that facilitate the movement of people rather than restrict them?**

**Why are we putting up walls instead of building bridges?**

**Let us hope the EU – Africa Summit on Migration taking place today and tomorrow in Valletta, will bring about the much-needed change in attitudes, strategies and policies. My hopes are high as I yearn for effective action and positive outcomes.**

**Human migration has always played a part in the story of our world. It will always exist because of humankind's inherent nature and ongoing impact on our planet.**

**Hence, why are European peoples afraid of their historic reality?**

**Why are many of our governments and policy actors not helping with this realisation of humankind's reality?**

**I believe that, it is up to us, to influence the way we deal with migration, and the policies our governments choose to adopt.**

**These policies must be rooted in fundamental human rights, linked with economic and trade policies, that affirm and celebrate the spirit of the United Nations and European Covenants.**

**The demographic change that is underway in many Western societies is one example of the kind of issues that governments must increasingly take into consideration.**

**For instance, in Europe there are real concerns that there will not be enough workers, with the right set of skills, to replace people approaching retirement.**

**Research and statistics, consistently illustrate the fact that migration boosts the working age population. They show that many migrants arrive with skills, that facilitate substantial contributions to human capital development.**

**In the context of the labour market, migrants also play vital roles, in both declining and fast-growing sectors of the economy. In essence, migrants not only help through their taxes and social contributions, but they also contribute significantly to labour market flexibility.**

**The facts paint a very different picture from the distorted scenarios some political actors would have us believe. Some of these actors choose to capitalise, on people's anxieties, and spread deliberate misinformation, so as to be populist, with the result that subsequently, incite hatred and instil fear.**

**Understanding the true impact of migration is crucial if we are to debate the topic in a constructive and fruitful way. Such debates are imperative because they help shape the design of strategies and policies, directly engaging with processes of migration.**

**I believe that n effective information strategy needs to be put in place, raising awareness about the reality, facing migrants and providing a true picture of facts.**

**Here, I appeal to you, as a consortium, concerned primarily with advocating for awareness raising policies, to be put in place, to stress the importance of having correct and adequate information, about the reality of migration, and indeed, migrants.**

**Misinformation and misconceptions, can only lead to fear of the unknown, while, in your own words, initiatives to raise awareness about the migration issue, encourage tolerance and solidarity toward asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection.**

**This is an effective way to fight racism, xenophobia, and all kinds of discrimination against migrants, across Europe.**

**We must reflect on the lessons learnt from economic and trade policies; namely, the need for collaboration, partnership, facilitated movement, and no trade borders or barriers.**

**We must think of how these have resulted in great prosperity for us.**

**We must now be just as generous with people's lives. We must come to imagine a world where migrants are embraced, rather than pushed.**

**Once this is achieved, we may truly nurture a world where peace and wellbeing can thrive.**

**We will be in a position to civilly discuss our differences, in societies that celebrate diversity and opportunities for all humanity.**

**I have to stress the important role of civil society, that is so essential, to effectively address migration, and development.**

**Civil society is key, as it operates at grassroots level, and it is often more in touch, with realities than governments, and policy makers might be.**

**Our approach to migration has to be in a realistic, comprehensive and proactive manner. Migration is an ongoing issue. Migration flows, push and pull factors may change, hence the dire need to be proactive and not passive.**

**Passivity has brought on a crisis which affects people in a negative and thwarted manner.**

**In this context, it is so essential to acknowledge the important role of civil society, for governments, giving its input in the crucial issue that affects us all.**

**In conclusion, I reiterate the need to move from rhetoric to effective action at all levels.**

**There is the need to transcend economic policies to make them relevant to people's lives.**

**There is the need to ensure the safety of people on the move.**

**And, last but not least, there is the need for effective information strategies that portray the true picture of migrants as human beings in search of a better life for themselves and their families.**

**All these strategies and policies have to be construed within a human rights context, as laid down in the European values we treasure so much.**

**I wish you all a successful outcome to the conference.**