



Press Release

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SPEECH GIVEN BY THE PRESIDENT OF MALTA MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW OFFICES OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN, IN CELEBRATION OF ITS TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY.

Inauguration of the new offices of the Ombudsman and celebration of its twentieth anniversary

5 November 2015

It is with pleasure that I accepted the kind invitation from the Office of the Ombudsman to inaugurate your new offices, as you celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of this crucial institution in Malta.

I extend a warm welcome to the foreign delegates who came to Malta specifically for this occasion.

I do hope that you are allowed some time to visit the beautiful historic and natural sites of our island, and be able to take with you happy recollections of your visit.

The enactment of Ombudsman Act (Act 21 of 1995) and the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman was indeed a major step forward in the history of the administration of our country.

For the first time, persons were given the opportunity to seek redress against maladministration if they believed that it affected them personally.

The law empowered people to take action, and the Office of the Ombudsman provided them with the mechanism to be able to do so.

The institution of the Ombudsman in any democracy is of utmost importance, as is the responsibility to foster good governance in the interest of the general public, autonomously, and independent of the Executive.

In fact, the Office of the Ombudsman in Malta responds directly to the House of Representatives, and encourages and supports, the proper behaviour of public administration.

It therefore seeks and demands the accountability, of the State, and the public service, in the proper execution of its mandate.

Every country needs a public service that is dedicated to its mission, fair in its proceedings, accountable and committed to the people. The Office of the Ombudsman in Malta is there to ensure the proper functioning of the public service, for the people, and to ensure, good governance.

I believe that, furthermore, the Office of the Ombudsman needs sufficient resources, whether human or otherwise, in order to function properly and efficiently.

I also believe that the concept of democracy has changed drastically, since the creation of the Office of the Ombudsman.

The predominant ideas in a democracy are the rule of law, equality before the law, and equal protection of law. Attainment of justice, and in particular redistributive justice, is another pivotal concept in a liberal democracy. Neglecting or not properly maintaining such concepts, has serious implications.

No matter how rigorously such democratic concepts are upheld by the state, the ordinary citizen, has no control over government and administration.

Negligence of public administration or wrong policy of the government leads inherently to the victimisation of the ordinary man in the street.

Hence, through the Ombudsman, the government unconditionally respects the rules of the national and international order particularly human rights, and strives to fulfil its responsibilities properly, in the service of the general public, free of corruption.

It is my belief that in the span of twenty years, people of Malta and Gozo have continued to change and evolve into more mature and active citizens, a more learned society, demanding to be heard and be reckoned with, and boasting a rich array of professionals and services addressing the needs of a modern society.

I believe also that throughout the twenty years of the existence of the Office of the Ombudsman, it also has evolved.

I consider a major advancement is the specialisation created within it. We have witnessed the appointment of Commissioners in various areas of need within our society, including the Commissioner for Health, the Commissioner for Education and the Commissioner for the Environment.

The Office of the Ombudsman now is to look to the future. So I ask: is there scope for further specialisation? Is there scope for strengthening the Office of the Ombudsman, to enhance its status and give more voice to the citizen?

Lately, there has been some debate on the setting up of a Human Rights Body.

I believe that the individual should be central to the Human Rights issue, especially as we mark the 60th anniversary, of the signing of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In the process of this debate, I continue to ask, to stimulate further thought.

How can we ensure that a Human Rights body functions to its fullest potential? What does past experience tell us about the need for autonomy and independence?

To what extent does the relationship between Human Rights bodies and the Executive affect their performance, and subsequently, the public's trust in them?

Would the independence of Human Rights bodies promote a better relationship with the people for whom they are often the last resort?

Are Human Rights bodies also intended to promote a culture of human rights?

I put these questions forward as food for thought, to encourage further healthy debate and learned contributions, to the discussions currently taking place, so that, finally, any decisions taken are based on solid scientific evidence as well as popular thought.

I augur the Office of the Ombudsman further success in its endeavours for the benefit of our citizens, with the aim of enhancing democracy.