



ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT THE COMMONWEALTH PEOPLE'S FORUM

**WHAT MAKES SOCIETIES RESILIENT?**

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The vision I wish to portray and share with you today in line with the theme of this forum is that I believe that 'Resilient societies are Inclusive societies'. I am convinced that, inclusion, in all its dimensions, coupled with equality, is a vital part of what shall make societies resilient in the face of adversity.

Up to this stage, discourses on resilience have been, and in some ways continue to be, problematic. They have been limited, largely, to economic and environmental concerns. It is therefore with great satisfaction that I note the ways we are now beginning to look beyond these parameters, to explore the relationship between resilience and culture, knowledge, governance, and identity. It is commendable that the Commonwealth has chosen to consider resilience at the People's Forum.

This desire to better understand what constitutes resilience and what makes communities more resilient is inspirational. The Commonwealth is leading by example, exploring a subject that will translate into tangible benefits for its citizens and beyond. Implications of resilience are becoming increasingly relevant on a global scale.

Global because the challenges we now face are indeed global.

Climate change and migration are two of the challenges that must be approached collectively. These are challenges and opportunities for

solidarity that transcend state-bound borders. Therefore, in line with this Forum's theme, finding ways to become more resilient, must be given prominence. We must learn from the knowledge of indigenous peoples in their own experiences of resilience, and ensure that this collaboration is not exploitative, but opens a new space for shared understanding and common exploration. We must join together, to ensure that our perspectives are prioritised on the global political agenda.

Governments are often slow to react, hindered by political calculations that are short-sighted in their vision, due to their need to work in short timeframes to be successful. That is why the role of civil society is central to this vision. Civil society organisations are long term stakeholders, rooted in the love of their work and their communities. Civil society organisations can thus approach these concerns in ways that are more planned, focused, strategic and effective.

This is why I appeal to you today, as representatives of civil society and as individuals that must become and remain agents of change. That is why I share this vision of inclusivity with you. I hope you shall carry this message and continue to work within your communities, lobbying your governments to make all necessary changes to ensure that every individual is afforded an active, respectful, and integrated role within society. Resilience must come from this shared

respect, this shared activity, this shared sense of united strength and hope, for the future.

As you know, inclusivity has many dimensions. We must think about inclusion as a process, in which we must ensure equal opportunities for all. Everyone must be allowed to achieve their full potential in life, and be afforded opportunities that include access to education, employment and political participation.

True inclusion cannot discriminate on grounds of gender. As you know, the achievement of Gender Equality is an agreed Sustainable Development Goal, and as the Commonwealth's Charter states, it is an essential component of human development and a basic human right.

Gender equality is an affirmation of human dignity, and is necessary to create sustainable and peaceful societies. It is a fundamental element in development. We must recognise that issues of gender are strongly linked with other Goals, and will have tremendous effects on the overall success of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Even if some progress has been made, the fact is that women, girls, and gender minorities continue to occupy a disadvantaged position throughout the world. This inequality is not limited to geographical location and is not limited to low income or poor households. Furthermore discrimination occurs in situations of peace with even more devastating effect in situations of conflict.

Reports continuously show that inequalities persist worldwide, affecting a wide range of rights, including health, public and political life, and

access to justice. In looking at a more equal future, we must recognise that gender inequality negatively affects all people, regardless of their gender identities.

The road towards gender equality should be viewed not merely as a transfer of opportunities or privileges from one group to another, but as a fundamental step in the enjoyment of all our rights.

We have to remember that gender equality is not an issue faced by women or gender minorities alone. It is a human rights issue that affects us all. We all stand to benefit from gender equality, liberating us from prescribed social roles and the gender stereotypes of a binary system that must be interrogated, and transformed.

Only with this kind of approach communities can be truly inclusive and individuals can have the chance to reach their full potential. Only then can we consider ourselves truly resilient, because only then will everyone be able to exercise active citizenship and fully contribute to the societies in which they live.

True inclusiveness cannot turn a blind eye to one of the most important challenges of our time – the challenge of migration.

Migration is a reality that continues to create situations of great concern. As an international community we need to continue finding tangible ways of addressing migration, anchored in a rights-based approach. Most importantly, we need to think about every human being risking their life at this very moment. We must ensure that no more lives are put at risk or lost!

Over the past months, we have witnessed change in migration flows, that are now affecting mainland Europe in a more direct way. These events often escalate into tragedies, and the loss of human rights. This situation is sadly replicated, in other parts of the world.

As an international community, we must place emphasis on the human face of migration. We need to continue anchoring our interventions within the framework of universal human rights. We need to appreciate that migrants who live in our community are in fact part of the community we belong to. They too bring added value, bringing a unique sense of life and its potential.

In a truly inclusive society these individuals are welcomed. It is only then, united together to form part of one society, that we can ensure equal and active participation of all, thus contributing to our human resilience. This happens because, only then will we be working together to achieve sustainable wellbeing, grounding our resilience within the values we share as a community.

My message to you, today is a simple and a straightforward one – ‘Resilient societies are Inclusive societies’, that embrace equality.

We must break the cycles of disadvantage, sometimes passed from one generation to the next within particular groups and communities. We must break the cycles of oppression that foster discrimination and exclusion. Most importantly, we must address the cultural and structural causes of these inequalities. We must ensure that systems of exclusion are replaced by strategies of inclusion.

In a post-2015 world, we need to move away from the stereotypes and prejudices that fuel inequalities. To achieve this vision of a new world, rooted in equal opportunities, there must be a strong consensus and a strong commitment from the global community. Change must take place on all fronts, a concerted effort enacted on national and international levels.

Appropriate policy and legal frameworks that protect the interests of all, including the most vulnerable, must take centre stage. These frameworks must be accompanied by a change in social attitudes, a reorientation that embraces the centrality of human rights.

The Commonwealth and the connections it builds between its member states and civil society, on so many levels, could spearhead this transformation. The Commonwealth has all the potential to be a champion of these inclusive approaches.

It shall be no easy task, because this approach is in fact a challenge to the status quo. We have to believe that as an international community, today brought together as part of one family that includes billions of citizens from all over the world, we can make a difference for future generations.

The Commonwealth is today at a crossroads, and for it to be resilient and to remain relevant it has to acknowledge the challenges it faces. We must acknowledge our true potential – which is immense.

The Commonwealth must capitalise on its strengths, turning to a civil society that is active and strong throughout the Commonwealth.

Let's not forget that civil society operates at grassroots level, in direct contact with the lived experiences and realities of all communities. It is essential that we continue to collaborate with civil society. We need to give its input, the weight and importance it deserves.

The points I have made today are part of a vision to create sustainable and peaceful societies, taking resilience as a concept that is ripe for further exploration.

At this very moment, together with my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and a number of international academic and professional partners, we are in the process of establishing an Institute for Peace and Wellbeing.

We are interested in researching, motivating, and inspiring cultures of peace and wellbeing, exploring best practices, and finding the most efficient and effective systems of knowledge sharing. Through this Institute, we shall engage with diverse communities from various parts of the world, learning about the ways these communities can achieve wellbeing as active citizens, effectively accessing and enjoying their rights.

We shall promote inclusive spaces within societies as a direct pathway to the awareness of wellbeing, and the vital place that peace must hold in the discourse of policy motivators and makers. In line with the Commonwealth's values, we believe that this Institute shall be instrumental in fostering understanding and peace on a communal, national, regional and international level. We hope you shall join us in the realisation of this exciting initiative.

Peace and wellbeing are two pillars that provide the most firm foundation for our lives, and the hopes we hold for our future generations. Let us strengthen this foundation, by doing all that is within our power to understand and foster resilience, by eradicating poverty, by diffusing conflict, and by ensuring the equality of all members of our human family.

Thank you for your kind attention.



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