



ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT A RECEPTION HELD AT THE MALTA HIGH COMMISSION IN LONDON COMMEMORATING THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE UK-MALTA HEALTH AGREEMENT

1st December 2015

Your Excellency

Distinguished guests

It gives me great pleasure to be with you here this evening, as it is an excellent opportunity where we can meet briefly and share a few words. This year is particularly significant as we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the UK Malta health reciprocal agreement which gives hope to so many people.

Since the beginning of my Presidency, I have tried to be in touch with the people of Malta and Gozo, wherever they may be living. I constantly seek the wellbeing of all people in our society; especially people who are vulnerable, people who are living in poverty or social exclusion, or people whose lives are touched by illness.

In this regard, I have created a number of entities to ensure the sustainability of the initiatives we undertake.

The President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society was established last year. The Foundation offers space for dialogue and consultation on what affects people's lives, where the people themselves express the needs and aspirations of Maltese society, and what needs to be done to foster and maintain the wellbeing of our society.

Within the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, there exist various fora that address specific issues such as the community, environment, childhood, disability, arts and culture, family and the elderly.

This year, I founded the National Cancer Platform, in an effort to bring together all non-governmental organizations working with cancer patients, and their families.

The National Cancer Platform coordinates the efforts of its members in order to ensure their full support, together with a holistic and sustainable service, to cancer patients and their families.

Moreover, the platform ensures added value is given to the generosity of the Maltese and Gozitans, who support financially the Non Government Organisations.

Earlier this year, the Malta Community Chest Fund was established as a Foundation, with the aim of continuing to provide financial and material assistance, as well as professional support, to people in need, in order to improve quality of life and care of individuals and society in general.

This year, I also launched the President's Trust with the aim of supporting vulnerable young people who are unemployed or struggling at school, and are at risk of social exclusion.

Furthermore, I held meetings with the Prince's Trust, both in London and in Malta, where we discussed our potential collaboration and the way forward. The discussions bore fruit, when Malta, through the President's Trust, became the first country to be an International partner of the Prince's Trust.

I am proud that we have created a structure that can give support to young people, to empower them to gradually change their lives, and to aim for a brighter future. I am convinced that, when we invest in our young people, we are investing in our present, and in the future leadership of our country.

We established all these entities with one aim in mind; that every member of our society may live with dignity, and that they can achieve their aspirations without fear or hindrance, and ensuring their wellbeing.

As you may know, I visit London to meet with patients who are undergoing treatment here. The possibility afforded to our patients for treatment came about following an agreement negotiated between the Ministry of Health in Malta and the Ministry of Health in the UK.

In fact, the Malta UK Health agreement was signed in 1975, making this year the 40th anniversary of this event. The agreement provided for the free treatment of Maltese patients in UK for special care and treatment not available in Malta.

The 1975 agreement initially provided for the treatment of 150 patients, but was eventually augmented to 180.

The bi-lateral health agreement has saved many lives of Maltese citizens and provided a better quality of life, at a time when people are most vulnerable. Since 1975 it is estimated that around 15000 Maltese patients benefited from this agreement.

As the facilities within our own hospitals were upgraded and improved, consultants and specialists from the UK visit Malta regularly to treat patients in Malta, rather than in UK. In fact, we were able to

have the first kidney transplant operation in 1983 and the first open-heart surgery also in 1983, with both operations carried out by English surgeons. I proudly note, however, that since then, Maltese consultants are providing more and more specialised health care services in Malta.

Nonetheless, there are still many instances where people need treatment and care in the UK.

My heartfelt gratitude go to the many doctors, specialists and health care teams that provide brilliant treatment and care to our dear patients.

I am sure you appreciate that, while treatment is being offered for free, patients travelling to the UK encounter difficulties, for example to fund travel for anyone accompanying them. I have seen firsthand the trauma these people go through, some travelling to the UK for the first time, some experience language barriers, the need for accommodation, sometimes over a long period of time, and others not being able to cope with the situation.

The Malta Community Chest Fund provides financial assistance in this regard, and we are currently looking into providing psychosocial support to patients and their families.

Besides supporting patients going abroad for treatment, the Malta Community Chest Fund provides financial, material and professional support to people experiencing difficulties because of severe chronic illness, including cancer, as well as to persons with disability, people in poverty, unemployed or having no resources. The Fund distributes over a quarter of a million Euros every month.

In order to be in a position to do this, the Malta Community Chest Fund needs funds that are

collected through the generosity of the Maltese and Gozitan people, as well as the good will of businesses.

It is through the spirit of solidarity that we can support patients and their families in their moment of need.

I must say a final word to all the Maltese professionals, mostly from the medical field, present here this evening. May you continue to develop your professional expertise for the benefit of patients under your care, while treasuring the values we embrace as a nation.

Malta is proud of you. I am proud of you.

Enjoy your evening.



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