



4TH DECEMBER 2015

Good morning to you all. I would like to congratulate the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association for convening the Mediterranean Tourism Forum for the third time. The convening of this Forum once again shows a determined commitment towards a sustained innovative vision for the future of tourism in Malta and the Mediterranean region.

This year's choice of theme "Empowering Tomorrow" is indeed very powerful. To my mind, it conjures images of a vivid reality that analyses deeply the circumstances of today and the potential of tomorrow.

I believe that tomorrow's success for the tourism industry must be based on the stability of the region and on the upkeep of peace and wellbeing for our peoples. A continuous process of dialogue between nations, cultures, communities, is essential to achieve long-lasting stability.

Tourism can play a tremendous part in building a continuous process of dialogue, through its very nature, that of bringing about the people-to-people contact, in the most harmonious of ways.

Tourism is a catalyst in the creation of employment, and hence, develops and is committed, to wellbeing. Tourism not only enhances economic growth, but also helps in sustaining understanding and respect between peoples. Tourism can be an effective medium in building peaceful and stable societies.

Just as importantly, Tourism has a positive social impact, through, for example, the preservation of traditional customs, handicrafts and community events that would otherwise be forgotten. I believe that exchanges between visitors and hosts can create a better cultural understanding, and can raise global awareness of issues such as poverty and human rights abuse.

There are over one billion tourists that is, one of every seven people, travelling the world every year, making tourism a worldwide, social and cultural experience engaging people of all nations, in their capacities either as guests or as hosts.

51% of the total international tourist arrivals are enjoyed by Europe. This is, by far, the highest market share.

Malta received almost 1.7 million tourists last year, a year on year improvement, with major hotels enjoying high occupancy rates in the second and third quarter of the year, but less so, in the first and fourth quarters. I am certain that your ongoing endeavours, to be creative, to improve the industry's performance during the shoulder months, and hence, sustain employment in the sector throughout the year, will never diminish.

The widespread effects of the tourism industry is further emphasised by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, when it called for a change in the perspective of how we look at tourism. In fact, Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, stated, and I quote:

"Tourism is about more than enjoying life on a beach, and it is also more than a powerful economic sector. Tourism is a positive force that can transform societies".

On the other hand, the innovative ways in modes of travel, have made it possible, and easier, for people to travel widely, and hence, the opportunity to encounter a wide variety of cultures, has grown tremendously.

Such connectivity is a catalyst to stimulate dialogue and exchanges between people, break down cultural barriers, and promote the values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect.

In a world which is constantly struggling for harmonious coexistence, these values can be supported by the tourism industry from its very nature. Tourism can be fundamental in building a more peaceful future.

A more interconnected world can draw benefits from cultural diversity, and can be more respectful of human rights, while providing individuals and societies with innovative ideas, skills and tools to live in harmony together. I truly believe that contact and exchange

between people, as happens in tourism, truly have the power to diminish prejudice and build more harmonious, peaceful and prosperous societies.

I believe that Tourism offers a profound experience, through visiting a new place, meeting new people and appreciating their diverse cultures. I believe that Tourism can be an agent of peace and social inclusion.

While on a macro scale, peace requires active investments, enlightened leadership, powerful educational values and a progressive approach from the media, at people-to-people level, peace is living together with our diversity, be it that of gender, race, language, religion or culture.

In today's increasingly diverse and globalised world, the message of peace that can be transmitted through the tourism industry has become more significant.

I encourage you to enhance your endeavours as stakeholders in the industry to perceive the industry not only from an economic, financial perspective, but also as an agent of peaceful coexistence, so as to effectively help in the realisation of our shared vision of a better world.

Since coming to the Presidency, peace has been central in my vision for a better tomorrow. With this in mind and together with my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and a number of international 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 values of the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation, we believe that this Foundation shall be instrumental in fostering understanding and peace on a communal, national, regional and international level.

I invite you to join us in this initiative, and the exciting activities and research the Centre shall carry out. We believe there is much need for dialogue. We also need to come together as partners from all over the globe to explore ways of how all of humanity can enjoy an existence truly based on respect for human rights and human dignity.

We also believe that change needs to start in the individual minds of men and women, and through this initiative we hope that individual changes can eventually result in a collective change that benefits all of humanity.

Peace and wellbeing are two pillars that will determine our future and that of our children.

We need to strengthen these pillars to eradicate poverty, relegate war as a part of history and effectively address issues afflicting the international community which we are an integral part of.

Indeed, this Forum will be a milestone, as you celebrate the official birth of the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation. I would like to convey my heartfelt congratulations to the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association and to Mr Alfred Pisani, as the founding member, on the launch of this Foundation.

Your vision of increasing the potential of sustainable tourism growth in the Mediterranean Region, is, to say the least, highly commendable. I have no doubt that the Foundation will increase opportunities for further education in the Tourism industry, as well as promoting and encouraging tourism to and within the Mediterranean.

However, may the Foundation also be an opportunity for dialogue and peace as a catalyst of increased understanding between the states, regions and peoples of the Mediterranean and the world.

The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, currently taking place in Paris, is crucial for the existence of our world. Particularly at this time, we need to acknowledge and promote tourism to and within the Mediterranean, as an incentive for the preservation of the environment and the protection of cultural and historical assets within the Mediterranean.

This Forum therefore, offers the opportune moment to discuss the effect of tourism on the environment. This is mainly because there is this inherent need to

preserve the world's natural heritage for future generations.

This is in line with the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism published by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's states, and I quote:

"All the stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations".

In order to promote further the positive impact of Tourism on the environment, there must be an increase in knowledge about the effects of tourism on the environment, including sustainable development and ecotourism, among others.

I encourage the private and public sectors to collaborate to revitalise efforts to transform the Mediterranean into an area of peace, cooperation and prosperity by investing and promoting sustainable tourism growth across the region.

I envisage that the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation will truly live up to its name by bringing together stakeholders from across the whole Mediterranean region, to strengthen the image and the brand of the region.

With its geostrategic position right in the centre of the Mediterranean region, Malta has an obligation to play a leading role in negotiating pressing issues affecting the Tourism industry of the region. Malta has all the requisite to be, a centre of excellence in the Mediterranean region for tourism and hospitality education and continuous professional training.

On concluding, I take this opportunity to augur the Foundation much success in achieving its aims and objectives within its Mediterranean context.

I have high hopes for the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation to transcend to its wider perspective, its work towards peace and stability in the region. I eagerly await the positive outcomes of this innovative initiative.

I wish you all a successful Forum.
