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# Press Release

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PR 160829

19.04.2016

## **PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

### *Speech by President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, delivered to women Parliamentarians in Tunisia*

Honorable Mohamed Ennaceur [President of the Assembly],  
Honourable Members of the Assembly,  
Dear friends,

I am so pleased to be here, among neighbours and friends. I feel honoured to have the opportunity to address you today, as a fellow woman of the Mediterranean, and to commend you, and all Tunisians, for your longstanding endeavours to achieve democracy and stability.

I feel so proud to be among such a significant number of female members of parliament of a Mediterranean country like Tunisia.

I am convinced, that my hopes and aspirations for the present and the future, of my people and the region, are very closely linked with yours.

Our longstanding excellent bilateral relations and friendship enjoyed between our two countries, can be strengthened by working closer together as Mediterranean women, for the mutual benefits of our families, children and peoples.

Clearly, the recent developments in our region, and beyond, show us that it is imperative for all of us to work together to achieve sustainable peace for the effective development and progress, that we all need, for our countries to flourish.

We must stand united as women and humankind in general, against violence, and in favour of peace and wellbeing.

Peace is fundamental to our wellbeing.

Our participation as women and that of our girls in achieving peace is essential, because we are key drivers of change in mentalities, institutions, and ways of life.

I'm sure that many of us, like me, are mothers, and our children's future is our main aspiration. The potential success of our children's future is determined by peace and stability.

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I believe that our empowerment as women, is crucial in advancing peace through a global social inclusion approach, through a universal system to educate for peace, through sustainable economic and social development, through democratic participation, and through the upholding and safeguarding of fundamental human rights.

As women of the Mediterranean, we have a key role for peace-building in our region and beyond. We must be active and engaged citizens to ensure an ongoing process of dialogue, which is fundamental to peace-building.

We must be united in our work to achieve peace and maintain it. Definitely, sustainable peace must revolve around four central concepts: justice, human rights, equality and sustainability. Peace-building exists when we create educational and economic opportunities for all, and in particular, for marginalised communities.

We must be aware of the unique contributions that we, as women peace-builders, bring to the dialogue table. In this context, we need to reach out more to women in areas of conflict; to share their experience and, above all, to support their endeavours to reach across the baseless divides created by short-sightedness and selfishness.

There are already many women and women's organizations, that are working hard to create spaces of empowerment, for women peace-builders. Our challenge is to find ways for nurturing and supporting their efforts. More women and organizations need to unite to bring about change, while, where possible, we need to move in more strategic directions through legislation and policy.

We must remember too that we, as women, play a vital role in employment and economic growth. Definitely, when women's contributions are undervalued, the whole economy suffers and is constrained and impeded from reaching its full potential and growth.

Definitely, our contribution, as women, is crucial for economic growth.

The right policies for women's participation in this context, are also truly important and do reach the desired effect. Let me give a typical example from my country. These last years, there has been a significant increase of female participation in the Maltese workforce. This was due to the right strategy, with the subsequent effective policies of affording free childcare centres for all and the introduction of an in-work benefit. Hence, the female participation rate in Malta, in the last years, increased from 36% to 52%.

We must also acknowledge the importance of popular wisdom, of tolerance and understanding, that women can make possible at all levels of society; within their families, communities, countries, regions, and the world.

In order to create opportunities for women's participation, we must be aware of what women are doing, at community level, and what their true concerns are. As a former female parliamentarian myself, and as a believer of community-driven policies, I urge you, as people's representatives, to indulge deeply, into your respective communities, to listen and collect all the available popular wisdom. This will surely guide you in your policy direction, to ensure that everyone, including women and girls, benefit from your country's policymaking and decision taking.

Let me share a personal experience with you, from when I was Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity, regarding the positive effect of community-driven policies. At the time child poverty in my country was and unfortunately still is, a great concern. However, through the needs shown, as a

result of my belief in community knowledge and wisdom, I introduced a Child Benefit, which, while giving financial support to families, is conditioned to the child's education, health and cultural participation.

I am proud to say that for the very first time in years, poverty rates in Malta started to decline. On the other hand, I also believe that the importance of men supporting women's participation is vital. It is only when men and boys work alongside women and girls, that effective and sustainable equality, development and peace, can fully materialise.

Definitely, it is also essential that significant numbers of women are important to be present everywhere, where policies, and especially decisions are shaped and taken.

Our societies cannot afford to do without our perspective as women. It is only when women's perspective is added to the context of the subject matter, that we can ensure a holistic approach, and effectively represent society, as a whole.

I realize that achieving women's participation at all levels is easier said than done, due to our traditions. However, we need to be brave in moving forward. I will leave you with some questions to stimulate further, our thoughts, and also our vision to take the necessary positive actions.

Hence, I believe that, we must be brave and ask ourselves:

How can we best identify the opportunities and barriers faced by women in our communities, in the twenty-first century?

How can we build supportive networks that unite people of all genders around our shared goals for peace and wellbeing?

And ultimately, how can we, in every way we can, strive towards the sustainable wellbeing of our nations, our communities, our families, and ourselves?

On concluding, I would like to augur you, as Tunisians female Parliamentarians and all Tunisians, more and more success in bringing about your wonderful vision of an avantgarde and progressive North African and Mediterranean country. Tunisia is an effective example of determination and bravery, to achieve stability, democracy and peace, at a time when, unfortunately, many around us are inundated with divisions and conflicts.

Malta will continue to stand by Tunisia to support and assist in this wonderful mission.

Finally, let us, as women of the Mediterranean continue to show our strength in our unity to encourage others to join us, in our mission to bring our communities and peoples closer to each other in respect, in friendship, and to share the enrichment that our diversity presents to us, through new opportunities for all of us and our future generations.