



Press Release

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Speech by President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, at the International Symposium on Promoting Values of Peace and Dialogue, Sousse, Republic of Tunisia

Your Excellency, Mr Habib Essid, Head of Government of the Republic of Tunisia,
Your Excellency Dr Neji Jalloul, [Minister of Education, President of the Tunisian National Commission for Education, Science and Culture],
Your Excellency, Mr Ahmed Mohamed Al Jarwan, President of the Arab Parliament,
Your Excellency, Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri, [Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO)],
Your Excellency, Dr Abdullah Hamad Muhareb, [Director General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO)],
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to join you all here today.

Let me begin by conveying my heartfelt thanks to His Excellency, The Minister of Education Dr Neji Jalloul. My heartfelt thanks go to the Governor of Sousse, for the friendly welcome and great hospitality in this beautiful Mediterranean Seaside city, which is an example to the region and beyond, as it withstood the scourge of terrorism in favour of the democratic values that Tunisians cherish and continue to tirelessly work for.

My heartfelt thanks also go to ISESCO and ALECSO, that together with the Tunisian Government have brought us together for this important symposium.

I bring greetings from Malta and the Maltese to you all, and in particular to the friendly people of Tunisia.

This Symposium presents us with the opportunity to share experiences and discuss ideas that will help us develop strategies for the promotion of peace and dialogue in our region, and beyond.

Before I begin my contribution to this symposium, I must acknowledge the long-standing historical relations between Tunisia and Malta, and our excellent bilateral relations that continued to strengthen over the years.

The Maltese have traded with the coastal towns of Tunisia and with the island of Jerba for centuries. They established settlements, worked on farms, on the railways, in the ports, and in small industries.

Families were formed as Maltese and Tunisians married, creating legacies that continue to this day. Perhaps this sharing of knowledge and resources is best illustrated by the different types of fruit trees, brought historically by the Maltese from Malta, which have taken root and flourished in Tunisian soil.

I am proud to note that today, a number of Maltese entrepreneurs have successful investments in Tunisia.

Through culture, through trade, and through dialogue, Malta takes seriously its participation in processes of peace with our neighbours. Malta celebrates and embraces its friendly relationship between the Muslim Arab world and Europe.

The agreement of cooperation signed between ISESCO and my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, earlier this year, emphasises the key themes of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, social wellbeing, issues of peace and human rights that shall be explored in this Symposium.

This agreement to promote universal values among cultures, is proof of the success which we hope to achieve.

If we are to work and achieve a global transformation, grounded in sustainable peace, we must explore non-violent responses to conflict, at all levels of our societies.

We must reverse the global culture of violence that has dominated our communities and nations for too long, and challenge the narrative of division that frustrates our attempts to build lasting peace.

It is imperative to seek new responses to the many situations of conflict that have become seemingly uncontrollable, and which are too often addressed in a sporadic manner.

Let us endeavour together, so that everyone will appreciate the fundamental human rights we share in common.

Let us acknowledge that the kaleidoscope of human cultures presents a source of enrichment, offering new opportunities for us all, both within our region and globally.

Let us educate our diverse communities together, and make clear that there are many opportunities to discover mutual enrichment, from which we all stand to gain.

Let us embrace full transparency and the free sharing of information, and uphold the importance of the democratic participation of our peoples.

Let us remember that real authority comes from a long-lasting relationship between those in positions of strength and the vulnerable; between the people, and those whose duty it is to ensure respectful governance.

Let us acknowledge that the goodwill of those who are engaged in peacemaking is essential, as through their example, we are invited to consider the wellbeing of our world in new and inspiring ways.

Let us be encouraged to consider what messages we send by our actions, as leaders and decision-makers.

Let us strive for education systems that prioritise respect, dignity, and education for peace. I feel certain that all of our children, in whatever community or country they may live, if given the choice between violence and peace, they shall call for peace and wellbeing.

Therefore, we must find ways to make the transition from a world of division to a world of unity, within our communities, our regions, and our nations. This is of vital importance for us, for our children, and future generations.

We must discover new ways how to deal with our relationships. We must discover and create new opportunities for ongoing dialogue between the communities and peoples of our region and the world to bring about a meaningful and peaceful change.

Just as importantly, we must bear in mind the precariousness and the suffering faced by millions of migrants and refugees, as a consequence of wars and conflict.

We must be resolute in reminding the international community to adopt more pro-active approaches to end the illicit activities, that see networks of organised crime take advantage of the most vulnerable, often with deadly consequences.

Unfortunately, conflicts in Libya and Syria have had an effect on areas beyond their immediate region. The Central Mediterranean crossing, used by migrants from the Sahel and Maghreb regions, remains the deadliest border crossing to Europe. Individuals and entire families are dying in the Mediterranean Sea or in the Sahara desert, as they risk everything in search of safety, and a better life.

This humanitarian crisis has prompted actors and authorities to try to address the push-and-pull factors of irregular migration through policies that explore the root causes for migration, as well as the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking.

The EU has also adopted a 2015-2020 Action Plan for the Sahel, committing itself to support regional and country-led initiatives.

The Plan underlines the importance of finding common spaces for dialogue and cooperation on issues of migration and security, among countries of the Maghreb, Sahel, and the EU.

I must also refer to the comprehensive frameworks provided by the Rabat Process, which, together with the Khartoum Process, is central to the implementation of the actions agreed at the Valletta Summit held in Malta in November 2015. Such a platform for dialogue, has allowed for serious discussion about facilitating medium and long-term actions, which, hopefully, shall achieve sustainable impact.

However, there is always more that we, together with the international community, can commit to doing. I look forward to moving faster from words to actions.

Malta's upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union, during the first semester of 2017, will see migration become a key priority area. Malta is committed to keep migration high on the European Union's agenda, and visible in the international fora.

I believe that we, as members of the international community, must be more committed to diminish the prospect of violence and threatened dignity, and committed to secure the wellbeing of all. We must also consider the effective implementation of strategies for peace.

Peace can no longer be defined as the simple absence of violent conflict. Rather, it must achieve positive values of mutual respect, of sharing, of incremental and sustainable progress towards the fullness of dignity and respect, that we all deserve as human beings.

Our commitment towards peace-building should mean further engagement with each other.

We must work to raise awareness and ensure that more and more individuals and communities come to see the benefit of committing their lives to the pursuit of dignity, respect, and tolerance, to acknowledging and appreciating each other's cultures, ways of life, ethnicity, and faith traditions.

We must believe in ourselves and in others. I believe that trust and friendship, are of the essence in our efforts to bring about a peaceful transformation of our communities, our regions, and the world. Trust, friendship and dialogue between cultures is of utmost importance, and must be the guiding light in our individual and national journeys, for the present and for our future.

I believe that our dialogue during this Symposium must focus on constructive and sensitive messages that present effective and credible alternatives that are sensitive to the realities of our cultural heritage and our shared aspirations.

In this context, I would like to pose some questions to stimulate further thoughts for our deliberations. Let us, throughout this process, ask ourselves:

How can policy makers and community leaders, governments and civil society, participate together in a viable change for peace?

How can we harness new technologies and attitudes to affirm the importance of human wellbeing?

In what ways are we creating a fertile foundation, aware of the past, and yet oriented towards the future, in which the seeds of wellbeing may flourish and grow strong through us and for our children?

Let us keep in mind also that, the threats of regional instability, in particular the situation in the Sahel and Libya, are having detrimental effects on many nations.

We have only to look at the example of Tunisia, where great strides forward were achieved for a vibrant democracy, and which however, were threatened by terrorism.

At this moment in history, it is imperative that the international community comes further together to assist and support Tunisians in addressing such challenges.

Malta, and indeed the European Union, continues to encourage the Tunisian Government in its continuous efforts to ensure stability and security in the country. We must fully support the recent political dialogue between the EU and Tunisian authorities, to achieve counter terrorism measures and renewed cooperation.

Malta also applauds the pivotal contribution being made by civil society in Tunisia.

Together, we must speak a message of peace that challenges the mounting shadow of misinformation and conflict, wherever it appears, threatening our region and our world. Our counter-narratives must dissuade violence, while promoting practical and long-term peaceful solutions. We must encourage governments and civil society to formulate strategies that foster sustained cooperation among diverse stakeholders, drawn from all strata of society.

The world cannot afford to exclude anybody from our dialogue, especially those who have, for too long, been absent from our global discussions. The world must extend a hand of friendship to all. As much as the world continues to strive for economic globalisation, we must also strive just as hard for global social inclusion. Let us replace exploitation and oppression with effective access to justice, from which we all derive our universal human rights, and democratic processes of participation, which secure our dignity.

I am sure that our message of peace, emanating from this Symposium, will manifest itself in different ways, in different languages, and various contexts. Yet, it must be a united effort which will connect with each community and group, in a voice and a form that is meaningful to them. Peace must be the message that fills our news headlines and our classrooms. Peace must motivate the beginning and the end of all our endeavours.

There are no short-cuts to building durable institutions within nations, which are capable of addressing sustainable peace. The World Bank estimates that effecting positive change in key institutions can take between one or two decades, at a minimum.

This is why long-term and consistent support is crucial, by creating and providing continuous opportunities for dialogue, accessible to all members of our communities, our societies and our nations.

The need for a process to establish peace and dialogue is acutely felt in the Sahel region. I must express my deep concern about the surge of violent extremism and terrorism.

Violent extremism is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality, or faith tradition. Nevertheless, in recent years, terrorist groups have shaped the international community's perception of violent extremism and the debate on how to address this threat.

Definitely, horrific terrorist attacks around the globe demonstrate that we are all vulnerable. They remind us of the urgent need to join forces to fight radicalisation at a global level.

As a Mediterranean country embracing the values of sustainable development and justice, Malta condemns these attacks as horrific acts against humanity, irrespective of where they happen and whoever is responsible.

They are offences against democracy that will have ripple effects on neighbouring regions.

It is crucial that peacemaking strategies are coherent and tailored to the specific needs of each country, taking into account the prevention of, and the fight against radicalisation, border management and migration, and the struggle against transnational crime.

We must recognise that we are each connected, and that success or failure in any region impacts on respective neighbours, and the world in general.

The Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism, held by the United Nations earlier in April, acknowledges the urgent need to counteract the insidious messages of violent ideologies. It provides a general approach, as part of a larger Action Plan, to end the spread of violent extremism. It encourages nations to implement preventive strategies that directly address the drivers of violent extremism, and strengthen good governance and human rights.

Counterterrorism is also at the forefront of the European agenda, both externally and internally. A comprehensive response must be formulated not only from an internal security perspective but also within a common foreign and security policy. Ultimately, the EU understands that the challenges of radicalisation, and recruitment to terrorism, will not be met by governments working alone. There must be sustained collaboration with communities, civil society, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. It requires a joint effort at local, regional, national, and international level. In fostering this unity, Malta is deeply committed to encourage Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and cooperation.

Malta's regional policy is best regarded as a continuation of the constant support which Malta has given to a succession of trans-Mediterranean security initiatives, and as an active member of the Union for the Mediterranean, and the 5+5 Western Mediterranean dialogue.

Malta considers the Union for the Mediterranean to be an ideal platform for confidence building and cooperation, particularly in the wake of recent turmoil and violence throughout the South Mediterranean. The uniqueness of the Union is that, it brings a number of stakeholders in the region together.

In this regard, Malta supports the efforts undertaken by the Union alongside other regional actors, including the Arab League, the work of ISESCO, ALECSO, and the work of the European Commission-League of Arab States Liaison Office.

We must work together to define new policies, and build peace by entering into ongoing dialogue with communities on both sides of the Mediterranean and beyond. We must seek to engage all stakeholders in a dialogue that is aware of the various layers of oppression, hardship, and exclusion, that have for too long denied the dignity of so many.

This multilayered engagement is the work I envision for the International Institute for Peace and Wellbeing which is being set up in Malta, alongside my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. The Institute shall be dedicated to fostering processes of peace and wellbeing within the Mediterranean and beyond.

We are encouraged by the tremendous interest shown in these efforts by a number of partners, including ISESCO and UNESCO, George Mason University, the University of Columbia, and the University of Cambridge. We invite you to join us in this endeavour, contributing your expertise

and your enthusiasm to our efforts. It is by working together that we can address the risks of extremism that are emerging across our region and beyond.

By working together to achieve a strategy based on global social inclusion, we will strengthen the rule of law, overcome discrimination, and implement policies, that can effectively combat marginalisation and exclusion. These must be our goals if we are to offer a healthy response to the threats posed by violent extremism.

Let us also bear in mind the unique role that women have in addressing the scourge of radicalisation, becoming a motivating force, in the cessation of violence, and the peaceful transformation of entire communities.

Women are peace-builders.

I truly believe, that it is only when we are united in pursuit of truth and justice, that we stand any hope of making a real change. We must come together as one human family, respectfully united in our differences of culture, faith, ethnicity, and nationality. We must stand in solidarity, to ensure that our message of peace overcomes irrational discourses of hatred and violence.

We must make our message of peace a compelling narrative, which unites us.

Let me conclude by saying that *Peace, Salaam*, and in Maltese, *is-Sliem*, must be the first and the last word in our hearts and in our minds, as we struggle through today's uncertainties and challenges. Let peace be the measuring tool by which we determine our success and direct our future.

Let our striving for wellbeing and sustainable peace be the precious gift we offer to our children, our communities, our nations, and to our future generations.

Thank you.