



Press Release

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Speech by President of Malta, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, at the 7th UN Alliance of Civilisations Global Forum, “Living together in inclusive societies: A challenge and a goal”

Excellencies
Distinguished participants
Dear friends

It is my pleasure to join you here in Baku, at this seventh global forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations. Six years ago, Malta hosted a regional ministerial meeting of this Alliance that focused on building collaboration within and among the countries of the Mediterranean.

It gives me great hope to note that the UNAOC Baku Declaration to be agreed by all of us, as leaders present here at this Global Forum, will take forward the message of peace through promoting inclusive societies.

Several commitments at ensuring peace are outlined in the declaration, including the Sustainable Development Goal for just peace and sustainable development. Let us develop the commitments made, into consolidated action for peace.

My remarks today shall centre on the importance of human wellbeing. Aspirations for human wellbeing can only become a reality in a shared culture that recognises the deep desire for peace in our lives.

The goals to achieve these aspirations grow from our commitment to the safeguarding of fundamental human rights, the upholding of solidarity, a global social inclusion approach, and the building of a culture of peace.

The growing cultural diversity of global communities and societies is often portrayed as a cause for concern, at a time when citizens in many countries are worried by persistent unemployment and growing inequalities. Unfortunately, the threat of extremism and intolerance, breeds a dangerous atmosphere of fear and suspicion.

We need to uphold a global social inclusion approach which brings with it an associated system of values that describes how our societies can best provide opportunities, nurture prosperity, act sustainably, promote social harmony, and ensure greater equality and justice for all.

We must strive for resilient societies.

Attachments: photos

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It is only by striving towards a culture of peace, by prioritising the tools and the institutions that are necessary to ensure the full and free participation of each person as an active member of society, that we can truly hope to effect a sustainable and positive change for ourselves and our children.

We must believe that peace is always possible.

We must understand that it is our duty, in our roles as leaders and decision-makers, to foster political will and civil society participation in building a social architecture. Through our words and our actions, we must respond to the diverse hopes and aspirations of all citizens across the globe.

I am sure that, when given the choice, people will choose peace for their families and their communities.

I would like to pose some pertinent questions for further deliberations during this global Forum:

Are the peoples of the world being given the opportunity to make a free and real choice for peace?

Or are structural and systematic oppressions, embedded within the fabric of our lives, holding us back?

If so, are these oppressions hindering us from securing the inclusive, peace-oriented societies we want to live in?

What must we do to ensure that our efforts for peace and inclusion dominate over the confusion of prejudice and violent conflict?

We must foster synergies between all stakeholders; between actors working at community level, on a national and regional platform, and globally.

We must work towards achieving a stable framework for the inclusion of all individuals. This depends on society's recognition of each person's potential as an active social, cultural, and economic contributor.

We cannot afford to ignore our responsibilities towards one another. We cannot afford to be small minded in our endeavours, prioritising the short-term gratification of the few over the sustainable wellbeing of the many.

We cannot become indifferent to the precariousness of those who are suffering, and shut ourselves from the opportunities of peace.

On the other hand, processes of economic globalisation have made us more interdependent, and within this context, I also believe that we must ask ourselves these questions:

Has globalisation united us in more profound ways? And if not, why?

In response to the many situations of inequality, poverty, and injustice around the world, has an ethic of global social inclusion emerged with equal vitality?

Are we able to address the challenges posed by ideologies of prejudice, egocentrism, and materialistic consumerism, which hamper our efforts to achieve true social inclusion?

In what ways shall our sustained commitment to the culture of peace, to the work of solidarity, to the promotion of human dignity, translate into tangible efforts that can transform lives throughout our nations?

Rather than approach one another with distrust, let us acknowledge that there is much which we share, and can share. I am reassured to see participants at this global forum from every sector; political leaders, representatives of international and regional organisations, civil society, academia, the arts and the media, that come all eager and willing to participate in constructive debate.

It is only by standing together that we can face the uncertainties of contemporary life.

Each one of us must also be a bearer of the promise of dignity, illuminated by the fundamental human rights we hold in common.

Each one of us is called to defend principles of social inclusion, the free sharing of information, and the centrality of respectful governance.

We should effectively promote these principles and encourage the role of the media, to be a force in facilitating a culture of peace.

As one of the target areas proposed by the Alliance of Civilisations, the media can have a decisive role in determining the openness of communities and nations to the benefits of inclusion.

Although some of our peoples appear to be well informed, as they listen to the radio, they watch television, they read newspapers and use social media, on the other hand the general state of indifference we see in the world, to the struggles of the vulnerable, becomes all the more alarming.

Stories of inequality flood the media every day. We are confronted by the experiences of people who are denied their most fundamental rights; individuals and groups facing discrimination; stories of extreme poverty; those at risk because of the impact of climate change; the suffering endured by those fleeing persecution and conflict, and those whose sight of their aspirations of safety and a better life, disappear, as they lose their lives en route.

The explosion in access to information has not directly led to an increased concern for other people's problems. This concern, at the heart of our goals for inclusion, demands openness and a sense of global solidarity.

We must speak a message of peace that challenges the misinformation and prejudice threatening our world. Our counter-narratives must dissuade violence, while promoting practical effective and long-term solutions. We must encourage our governments and NGOs to continue formulating strategies that foster social inclusion and effective cooperation among communities, societies, and nations.

We cannot afford to exclude anybody from our dialogue, especially those who have, for too long, been absent from our discussions or been pushed to the margins of society. Let us extend a hand of friendship, replacing exploitation and oppression with effective access to justice.

To build a culture of peace, we must also respect the participation of young people. Let us strive for an education that prioritises peace, respect, dignity, tolerance, and the acknowledgement and appreciation of diversity. This is the only way forward to end persecution, violence, and conflict.

It is by investing in better education for our children, and by working to learn from their experiences, that we will put an end to the cycle of violence. It is in this way that we can send a strong message for sustainable social inclusion.

We must act on our moral responsibility to protect all members of our societies, including people such as refugees, asylum seekers, and temporary visa workers. We cannot allow the humanitarian catastrophe currently underway, in my own region of the Mediterranean and beyond, to continue.

We must act now.

The refugee crisis unfolding around the world shall only continue to grow in importance. It shows that presenting migration and diversity in a one-sided way, as simply a source of costs, risks, and conflicts, does not help our efforts to build a culture of peace. We must also acknowledge the positive aspects and potential of this multifaceted phenomenon.

As international migration increases in scale and complexity over the next decades, governments and civil society must take a more active role in addressing the challenges of diversity and inclusion.

At the level of public perceptions and attitudes, we must improve public communication about diversity and migration, through social networks. We must mainstream diversity in public policies, and provide incentives for an increasingly inclusive workforce in the private sector.

Diversity brings enrichment and new and innovative opportunities to our communities and societies.

Alongside these efforts, social inclusion must encompass a strong cultural dimension. It must involve a genuine investment in, and celebration of, peoples' religious, cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. These are assets that should enrich and strengthen civic life.

On the other hand, building a strong culture of peace must also demand the equal participation of women. Let us bear in mind the unique role women play in bringing about the transformation of entire communities and nations.

Just as women are often at most risk of coercive and violent paradigms, women can also become a motivating force in the cessation of violence and the move towards inclusive peace.

Women can be effective peace-builders.

Let us commit ourselves to move from words to actions. Let us recognise that empowerment at community level sows the seeds for a transformation that transcends borders.

The Alliance of Civilisations has a central role in nurturing these endeavours, through outreach, through understanding, through education.

I am confident that this Global Forum shall contribute significantly to an international dialogue around social inclusion, reminding us all that social inclusion offers another way of exploring important areas of fundamental human rights.

Let us strive for the transformation of our world, and in the process, let us be transformed. It is by allowing the message of peace to work within each and every one of us that we will attract other individuals, communities, and societies to peace-building.

Let us remember that social violence can be avoided within our communities and societies.

Let us do all that we can to end the scourge of violence, wherever it occurs.

Let us be true catalysts of social inclusion, of peace and wellbeing, within our communities, our nations, our regions, and the entire world.

Thank you.