



Press Release

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‘United in one purpose, let us continue to proactively promote, to nurture, and to develop access to justice for all our children and our young people’

This morning, the President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca delivered the opening speech during the 2nd National Conference on Child Wellbeing, organised by the President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. The theme of this year’s conference is ‘Access to Justice for Vulnerable Children’.

In her opening speech, President Coleiro Preca said that in matters of justice, there can be no difference between the access which is available to adults and the access available to children.

“Access to justice is a fundamental human right, and a basic need that must be met for us to continue nurturing and protecting the dignity of all. However, the right to access to justice still seems, in the minds of many, disconnected from the realities faced by children”.

The President appealed to all those present that their efforts should be guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which all nations, except the United States of America, are signatories, adding that “we must follow the CRC’s emphasis on the need for powerful guarantees which make sure that every child is able to enjoy his or her human rights”. President Coleiro Preca said that if the guarantees and safeguards of the CRC are not taken seriously, ‘then we are failing our children from enjoying their rightful freedoms’.

“Access to the mechanisms of justice is often kept beyond children’s reach”

President Coleiro Preca stressed that we all must strive to ensure that human rights violations, especially those that occur to children, need to be immediately addressed. While doing this, the President said that the provision of credible and active assistance to children needs to be a priority, making the best use of the resources available, and creating child-sensitive processes (which empower the children), where resources are lacking.

“Justice is not simply an issue which concerns the courts of law”

The President said this in light of the fact that justice also consists of the ways in which professionals, who work in the justice system, interact with children. The President stated that the police, child protection services and psychosocial carers need to be properly trained ‘to facilitate our united vision of a world in which children and young people have full access to justice’.

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The President also appealed that the media, the parents, the guardians, and civil society as a whole need to be made aware that children's involvement is essential 'in our efforts to ensure access to justice for all'.

“We must be voices for clarity, for respect, and for meaningful change in this important sector”

President Coleiro Preca said that the necessary structures and resources must be created, to ensure that children, whoever they might be, will be provided with effective access to justice.

“We must do all that we can for children to understand, to use, and, most essentially, to trust the legal systems that protect and facilitate the children's rights and their wellbeing”, the President said, whilst adding that children must know that when they need justice, it will not fail them, and they should be aware that the legal process is readily available to them, and that it is capable of delivering their best interests.

With all this in mind, the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society has set up a Children's Council and a Young People's Council. These councils are intended to support the Foundation in all its works. President Coleiro Preca praised this initiative and said that by facilitating these groups, a space is being created in which the contributions of children and young people can be shared with others and built upon.

“Let me conclude by affirming that access to human rights is a right in itself”.

In conclusion, the President said that every child should also have access to appropriate means by which to enjoy their rights, and to address their important legal needs, and also appealed that 'we must work together to ensure that vulnerable groups are given our focused attention, and receive equal rights and opportunities'.

President Coleiro Preca said that access to justice for children can no longer be dream, but it should be a goal that must be achieved

“United in one purpose, let us continue to proactively promote, nurture and develop access to justice for all our children and our young people. In this way, we shall share a powerful commitment to ensure the full dignity and the meaningful wellbeing of every member of our communities, our societies and our world”.

The 2nd National Conference on Child Wellbeing was also addressed by Dr Ruth Farrugia, Director General of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society; Ms Maria Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children; Ms Regina Jensdottir, Council of Europe Coordinator for Children's Rights; Ms Astrid Podsiadlowski, Head of Sector on Rights of the Child in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights; Ms Danielle Douglas, Lecturer in Social Care in the School of Humanities within the Waterford Institute of Technology; Ms Norah Gibbons, Social Work Practitioner and Manager in both the statutory and NGO sector in England and the Republic of Ireland; and Mr Sean Downey, a Youtuber who pushes boundaries to deliver his message about children's rights.