

**SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA ON  
THE OCCASION OF THE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY, 2017**

**Excellencies**

**Honorary Member of Parliament**

**Dear friends**

**We are honoured by the presence of Franz and Petra Michalski, and Sami Modiano. I would like to convey my very best wishes for a speedy recovery to Dr Nico Kamp.**

**I would like to thank our special guests for agreeing to share their experiences and thoughts with us this evening, and for visiting so many schools across Malta and Gozo.**

**I pray that the living evidence provided by these survivors of the Holocaust will create a transformation, in the hearts and the minds of all the people who have heard them speak.**

**We know, unfortunately, that human memory is short, and so are the memories of entire nations.**

**We have only to look at the erosion of human rights, being signalled by the growing presence of far-right populists across the world.**

**Ideologies of division and egoism are washing over us, threatening the peace and wellbeing of our communities and our nations.**

**We often talk about the power of change.**

**However, I ask:**

**Have we been truly changed, by the legacy of our past?**

**Have we been transformed by those images of Auschwitz,  
and other concentration camps?**

**Have we been changed by the images of Alan Kurdi, the  
three-year-old Syrian refugee who drowned in the  
Mediterranean Sea?**

**Have we been changed by images of Omran Daqneesh, the 5-year-old Syrian boy who was unearthed after the home of his family was bombed in Aleppo?**

**Have we been changed by the images of so many young people wounded and killed while relaxing at the Balaclan Night Club in Paris?**

**What about the experience of Haji Abdulwahid Nur, the Somali migrant who was left to die alone, under a bridge in Mosta, a few short weeks ago?**

**Have we been transformed, into more caring and loving people, by the weight of all this terrible suffering?**

**Our memory of the Holocaust cannot be only words.**

**Our acknowledgement of the suffering endured by the Jewish People, and by so many others, cannot simply be thoughts, which do not translate into a sense of active commitment, in favour of peace.**

**We must commit ourselves to create a deep change within ourselves, extending it throughout our communities, and across our society.**

**Remembering the liberation of Auschwitz, should give us the impetus to struggle, together, to be liberated from our egoism; from our disregard for others; and from our inaction in the face of injustice.**

**I often speak about peace, because I believe it is the very foundation of our meaningful existence.**

**When I speak about peace, it is not simply one word among many.**

**I am speaking about a living reality which each and every one of us has a duty to ensure.**

**The work of peace means that we must do everything we can to build connections with one another.**



**We cannot let our fear make us complacent.**

**We cannot be afraid.**

**There is nothing we should fear more than this devastating lethargy, which seems to have closed our minds to one other, and which seems to have hardened our hearts.**

Looking around us, I get the feeling that humanity is forgetting the atrocities of the past. We all know that, unfortunately, these atrocities are being repeated, in real time.

Affluent and democratic societies can be more vulnerable than we like to imagine.

We must nurture the roots that anchor us to the memories of our past. Peace can easily fade away, if we do not make an effort to embrace the lessons that we should have learned from the past.

**In Maltese, we have a proverb: “Il-passat mera tal-futur”, which means that the past is a mirror of our future.**

**The links which connect us, which build positive dialogue amongst us, must be nurtured and sustained.**

**Channels of communication between our diverse communities, must be kept open at all times, encouraged and cared for.**

**If we are not vigilant, the friendships between us will easily disappear.**

**We cannot allow the angry rhetoric of demagogues and opportunists, to gain power and subdue the positive voices advocating solidarity and peace.**

**We cannot waste any more time, thinking that nothing will ever happen to us.**

**We cannot be complacent.**

**We must respond, now.**

**We must cultivate a common culture of peace.**

**We must practice empathy in our daily lives, striving to understand the experiences of others.**

**Each and every one of us must be ready to reach out, to build bridges across the barriers which divide us.**

**Different communities, cultures, and faith traditions, are able to live together in harmony, when they are united by the strong desire for meaningful peace.**

**This has been the experience of many nations in the past.**

**This can happen again.**

**We can make it happen.**

**We must admit that events unfolding across the world, particularly in countries which we once believed were strongholds of democracy, are a cause for grave concern.**

**There is no time for silence, my friends.**

**We must all take action.**

**We must all stand up to be counted.**

**We must do everything we can, in all the ways we can, to preserve our precious heritage of universal human rights and freedoms.**

**We cannot afford to be vague, because cruelty is not vague.**

**Cruelty is not an abstract concept.**



**Cruelty is an active force in our world, damaging the lives of real people.**

**Cruelty is a choice, which we make, when we ignore, when we deny, when we eradicate the dignity of others.**

**I believe that we must do more to promote the concept of “dignity” in our lives.**

**It is a fundamental component of all the work we do, as people of good will, to secure peace, solidarity, and wellbeing in our communities and our nations.**

**The reality of human dignity rests at the heart of universal human rights. It cuts across the barriers of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, and religion.**

**When we fail to acknowledge, to respect, and to celebrate the dignity of others, we are the ones who are diminished.**

**We are the ones who lose our dignity.**

**Faced with increasing global uncertainty, we must respond with action, with powerful conviction, with courage and strength.**

**We must be tireless champions for the dignity of all people.**

**I shall close with the words of the great philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, who died last month.**

**He wrote, and I quote, “The overwhelming majority of Germans preferred to close their eyes and plug their ears, but first of all to gag their mouths. Mass destruction was accompanied not by the uproar of emotions, but the dead silence of unconcern. It was not public rejoicing, but public indifference which became a reinforcing strand in the noose tightening around hundreds of thousands of necks.” End Quote.**

**We must never allow that terrible silence and fatal indifference to be repeated again.**

**We must be united, across our different generations, cultures and communities, as active champions in pursuit of one shared, and universal, culture of peace.**

**Thank you.**