

SDGs Breakfast, 24 April 2017

It is my pleasure to open the launch of this campaign, 'Business with a Heart', which aims to increase awareness, within Malta's business sector, about the United Nations' 2030 Agenda.

This United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development includes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, which are further subdivided into a total of 169 target areas.

While this may seem like an overwhelming number of goals and targets for us to reach, in reality each of these goals is tailored to address many of the areas which we, whoever we are and whatever our sector, are already engaged in.

We are already active participants in making many of these goals and their targets a reality. While there is still more that must be done to ensure that equity, equality, and sustainability are further strengthened, we should acknowledge our important commitment to achieve these essential goals.

Therefore, let me take this opportunity to commend the campaign's coordinators, Deloitte and SOS Malta.

I must also commend the support that they have received from SKOP, and from CORE. The CORE platform is an entity established under the auspices of my presidency, with the remit of promoting efforts for corporate social responsibility in the Maltese Islands.

It is exciting for me to see that businesses in Malta, through initiatives such as this one, are reaching out to engage, and to create synergies, with civil society activists.

Thanks to campaigns like 'Business with a Heart', we shall continue to work together, making the SDGs a vibrant component

of our strategies. Thanks to your united efforts, we can work to build a more sustainable future, for the benefit of our nation, our Mediterranean region, and our world.

As the engine of our national and international prosperity, it is crucial for the business community to work closely, alongside governments and civil society, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

We must be bold, taking action to ensure that certain goals, which appear critical of our status quo, are not ignored.

We cannot continue with ‘business as usual’, if that means that we are perpetuating inequalities, damaging the environment, or failing to secure the full dignity and active participation of each and every member of our society.

Let me mention some important indicators, from a 2015 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, entitled, “Make it your business: Engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals”. According to the report, 70% of businesses formulated a five-year strategy to embed the SDGs within their operations.

Moreover, the report states that an overwhelming 90% of citizens believe that it is important for businesses to implement the SDGs in their spheres of influence.¹

In light of this reality, I believe it is essential for the Maltese business community to do more to respond to the SDGs. Furthermore, I am informed that an encouraging number of Maltese companies are already engaged in some form of CSR efforts.

¹ http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/sustainability/SDG/SDG%20Research_FINAL.pdf

Therefore, incorporating a more explicit focus on the SDGs would be of tremendous benefit. There is no need to ‘reinvent the wheel’.

Rather, we must focus our efforts in line with the United Nations’ goals, to achieve more tangible results, together.

Every business should strive to be more aware of the impact that their influence has upon the communities and the societies around them.

For this reason, the SDGs provide an ideal roadmap from which to increase awareness and make a proactive change.

By working in synergy with the authorities, and non-governmental organisations, businesses can identify and effectively measure their contribution to achieving selected SDGs, which are of relevance to their particular sector.

For example, I recently hosted representatives from the Coca-Cola Foundation at an event held in San Anton Palace, where the Foundation sponsored the renovation of the palace’s historical reservoir.

Not only do these efforts reflect an investment in Maltese heritage, fulfilling SDG 11, and target 4 specifically, but also contribute to water conservation, thanks to an improved grey water system, thereby highlighting SDG 6.

The importance of water conservation in our island is equally visible in the work being done by HSBC through their ‘Catch the Drop’ water programme.

Furthermore, work by the Alfred Mizzi Foundation, in partnership with Caritas, to provide shelter for the homeless, is directly

responding to SDG 1, which lays down a clear message to tackle all forms of poverty and precarity.

My own Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, through the collaborative community of learning which we have created at the President's Secret Garden, is informing children about the importance of the SDGs.

I am also taking this information into the many schools and colleges that I visit, by sharing information and inspiring active citizenship, to make the Sustainable Development Goals a reality in our own lives, and an intrinsic part of our civic duty.

A focus on the SDGs would give a powerful mandate to communities, to businesses, and to civil society, encouraging us to work together alongside government and international authorities, in a powerful spirit of solidarity.

Malta's businesses have the opportunity to show strong leadership, by engaging on issues of global concern and responding, visibly and effectively, in support of the UN's 2030 Agenda.

Business that take an active interest in addressing social concerns, and can see the limitless opportunities which empowered citizens bring, are the kind of business that we should promote.

Businesses which place the wellbeing of the individual, the family, and the community at the centre of their activities are the kind of businesses that contribute to the long-term prosperity of a country.

Businesses which value the sustainable development of our united family of nations are capable of ensuring growing profits, because

they are aware of the fact that peace and wellbeing are essential components to achieve prosperity.

I am confident that, with the assistance of civil society collaborators, many of our businesses will feel more comfortable responding to the needs of society in a practical way. They will be better able to choose the goals and target areas which most closely align with their interests and abilities.

It is often better to have well placed impact in a single area, than to engage in sporadic efforts which are broader in scope, but less effective.

For this reason, I encourage you to work together, as businesses, NGOs, and authorities. When we work with one objective for prosperity in mind, inspired by the 2030 Agenda and guided its Sustainable Development Goals, we shall we be nurturing new relationships and promoting innovative improvements throughout society.

Most importantly of all, we shall contribute towards building a culture of positive peace and meaningful wellbeing, for the benefit of both present and future generations in our islands, our Mediterranean region, and our world.

Thank you, and I wish you all every success in your endeavours to make the SDGs an active part of your work.