

**OPENING SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA,
PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT THE NURSING CONFERENCE 'NURSES: A
VOICE TO LEAD' IN CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL NURSES
DAY**

12 MAY 2017

**Prof. Alfred Vella, Rector of the University of Malta
Prof. Angela Xuereb, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences
Dear delegates**

Let me begin by congratulating the organisers of today's seminar, including the lecturing staff within the Department of Nursing at the Faculty of Health Sciences in the University of Malta, and its Communications Office.

It is my pleasure to join you for this celebration on the occasion of International Nurses Day. Every year, we are celebrating the essential contribution that nurses provide through the diverse roles that they play within Maltese society, and moreover, their potential as active leaders in our communities.

I would like also to show my respects to the late Professor Donia Baldacchino, and the significant contributions she made towards the nursing profession.

I am sure that she is sadly missed by faculty members and students alike, both for her contributions towards the education of nurses in Malta and also for her joyful presence on campus.

I am pleased to note that today's seminar will not only promote the role of nurses within our institutions and communities, but moreover, it will provide a space for further empowerment.

Continuous developments in the healthcare system provide widespread challenges, which impacts the caregiving profession in all its settings.

Some main challenges include increased awareness and screening; an ageing population; further development of specialised areas; and advancing technology.

These challenges are having a real impact on decisions being made for resource allocation, for future employment opportunities, and shall have far-reaching effects on the work environment.

However, such challenges are also creating opportunities for nurses and the nursing profession, to become stronger, more resilient, and more open to innovation.

Furthermore, the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals provide a suitable framework to respond to these challenges.

In particular SDG 3 focuses on good health and wellbeing, but SDG 1, which focuses on poverty, and SDG 4, which focuses on education, offer a way of putting the social determinants of health into practical action.

Indeed, practically all the SDGs impact on peoples health, and therefore nurses have a role to play, as leaders, to promote the mandate of Agenda 2030 through their work.

Through your leadership as nurses, you can be powerful voices against injustice, inequality, inequity, and to promote empowerment.

I believe that nurses have the unique potential to be activists for positive change at all times, throughout our communities, and Maltese society as a whole.

I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to you to be powerful voices for activism in nursing and healthcare policy, to ensure the effective implementation of this United Nations framework for the health and wellbeing of our communities, our societies, our countries, and our world.

In order to successfully make use of this emerging scenario, it is important for nurses to work together with an interdisciplinary approach, alongside all stakeholders, to advocate on behalf of your patients, your collaborators, and your profession.

Nurses are the largest group of professionals within the healthcare sector, and a great deal of trust is placed in nurses by both the public, your professional colleagues, and by national authorities.

Despite the inherent strength of nursing, because of its professional diversity and unique relationship with the public, I believe that the full potential of the nursing profession in Malta can be developed further still.

I believe that, in order to harness your leadership potential, nurses must continue to be influential activists, and continue to advocate for the future you wish to see for your profession.

It is important that all nurses engage in, and become involved in developing, processes which advocate for improvements that respond to the needs of patients.

Let me address the students, in particular.

I would like to encourage you to work together, even from now, to be activists for positive change. It is never too early to begin working together.

When you are activists, you can be leaders within your wards and in your communities, promoting a message of holistic wellbeing, and implementing the practical targets listed in the Sustainable Development Goals.

I encourage you to follow the roadmap set out by the United Nations, to work in solidarity with an international family of activists, to implement the SDGs, and to improve the lives of the people you come across.

The SDGs belong to each and every one of us, and we all have our own role to play and input to make, to achieve their successful implementation.

Whether working within your own employment setting to advocate for a safer work environment, or at the state level to achieve greater authority for career development, the process and skills required for successful advocacy are the same.

Advocacy is a core element in leadership training, and an essential component in increasing the resilience and the potential of your profession.

I encourage you to be activists for change, working together with other stakeholders, to achieve the reforms that will benefit nursing in our islands, and elsewhere, and at all times.

For this reason, as part of your seminar's agenda to address leadership within the profession, in line with the United Nations' Agenda 2030, let me propose some questions to further stimulate your deliberations.

How do you see yourselves addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, throughout your working life and in your profession?

What sort of training would nurses need to make an active input to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?

How can you work in synergy, to achieve the best results?

How can you work together to create a plan of action that mobilises the support of all nurses, to effectively implement the SDGs?

In what ways can you foster stronger synergies with civil society and the general public, to motivate effective partnerships which implement the SDGs?

I believe that, by including a greater focus on advocacy as part of your strategies for leadership development, you will address contemporary concerns and challenges which are in need of innovative solutions.

Nursing, as a profession and moreover, as a vocation, forms the backbone of any healthcare system.

There are few people living in the Maltese Islands whose lives have not been touched by the care and reassurance that our nurses provide.

As you are striving to reach new levels of competency, as the demand for more specialised nursing care continues to increase.

It is important that, if all stakeholders keep working together, then nurses have a greater say in the decisions which affect their professional practice, competence, and safety.

Furthermore, more must be done to continue to promote dialogue between service providers and service users, both of whom have their unique perspectives to share.

In concluding, I must convey my heartfelt thanks to all those in the nursing profession, and to all students who are training to take up this profession in Malta.

Thank you for everything you do; for the passion you bring to your vocation; and for the wellbeing that you are helping to create, in our communities and across our society in the Maltese Islands.

Finally, to the students following their studies in nursing, I would like to encourage you to be the activists of today, so that you shall be the effective leaders of tomorrow.

I am so very proud of you all.