

**OPENING SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA,  
PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT THE “ENDING MODERN DAY SLAVERY  
CONFERENCE”**

**13 JUNE 2017**

**Mr Amersi**

**Mons Sanchez Sorondo**

**Distinguished guests**

**Dear friends**

**It is my pleasure to welcome you to Malta, and to this historical palace... San Anton Palace. Let me begin by thanking the Amersi Foundation, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, for facilitating today's important event.**

**This conference will focus on the sharing of experiences and good practice, to end the scourge of modern day slavery. Two days ago, the International Labour Organisation - ILO, observed World Day Against Child Labour, which focuses our attention on ending the exploitation of children, particularly in areas of poverty and conflict.**

**Too many children and adults are still being confronted by the scourge of modern day slavery. It is estimated that 11 percent of the overall child population is still affected, and more than half of them, that is, 85 million, are engaged in hazardous work.**

**Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest rate of child labour, with 21 percent of children employed as child labourers.**

**Although the phenomenon of child labour is more commonly associated with non-EU countries, in spite of a lack of reliable comprehensive statistical sources, there is evidence, as declared by the European Parliamentary Research Service, that child labour persists in the EU and Europe as well.**

**Tens of millions of precious lives, including both children and adults, are being caught up in a multibillion-euro industry, which derives its profits from the destruction of human potential, and the debasement of human dignity.**

**Men and women, girls and boys, are being objectified, traded, and coerced into forced labour.**

**They are being made to live as labourers, commodified for organ transplants, abused as sex workers, and forced to be soldiers.**

**They are being exposed to the threats of violence, of alienation, and of radicalisation.**

**Furthermore, over half of all forced labourers, and nearly all victims of sex trafficking, are women and girls.**

**These examples of modern day slavery are serious crimes. Let's be courageous, during this summit, and call these serious crimes by their name.**

**I believe that the international community cannot continue to be complacent, in the face of such serious crimes against humanity.**

**It is not enough for our international authorities to be aware, and call for observance days. We must all increase our efforts to put words into practical action.**

**This is precisely the importance of today's summit.**

**In Nelson Mandela's words to world leaders, in 2015;**

***“Do not look the other way. Do not hesitate. Recognise that the world is hungry for action, not words. Act with courage and vision.” End quote.***

**We definitely cannot let our societies pretend that slavery is a thing of the past, or that it is a shameful part of humanity’s history, which we can afford to put behind us.**

**Especially not when the Head of Operations and Emergencies for IOM, Mohammed Abdiker, recently said, and I quote;**



***“The latest reports of ‘slave markets’ for migrants can be added to a long list of outrages in Libya. The situation is dire. The more IOM engages inside Libya, the more we learn that it is a vale of tears for all too many migrants.” End quote.***

**A 2017 report entitled “The Human Conveyor Belt: trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya”, published by The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, identifies human trafficking and smuggling as an endemic concern in contemporary Libya.**

**This report states, and I quote, “*There are clear signs that some criminal networks have developed into transnational consortia, able to handle routes and volumes of people, requiring substantial logistical and financial capacity.*” Furthermore, “*different networks are sharing facilities [...] to guarantee access to multiple territories.*” End quote.**

**Moreover, there are shocking reports of organ trafficking, taking place in Lebanon, as migrants, in strict poverty, are forced into selling their organs, to get money to live on.**

An organ trafficker in Lebanon, speaking to the BBC, recently said, and I quote;

*“Those who are not registered as refugees are struggling. What can they do? They are desperate, and they have no other means to survive but to sell their organs.”* End quote.

Reports from Reuters, dated April 2017, state that, and I quote, *“trade in illegal organs is a booming business in Lebanon.”* End quote.

**This is made worse, as desperate Syrian refugees are being exploited, through interlinked phenomena of conflict, poverty, and precarity, and subsequently, migration.**

**Thinking that a great number of human beings are being subjected to the slave trade, a few miles from where we are now, on the southern shores of our Mediterranean Sea, with repercussions for Europe, and humanity at large, makes me feel, and should make Europe, all the more responsible to do much more.**

**When we acknowledge this reality, we must feel compelled to do all that we can, to raise public awareness about modern day slavery, and to take proactive steps to end this human scourge.**

**I believe that we must drive home the severe repercussions that contemporary forms of slavery have, not only within our nations and our regions, but across the entire globe.**

**The atrocity of modern day slavery is diminishing the lives of countless individuals. It is denying them their dignity, by eroding the wellbeing of their families and communities.**

**Modern day slavery is having a negative and a far-reaching effect, on the peace of mind, and wellbeing, of entire societies.**

**A recent report by the UK Centre for Social Justice, entitled “A Modern Response to Modern Slavery”, which was endorsed by the European**

**Commission, states that a huge amount of contemporary slavery, in Europe, is being driven by organised crime groups.**

**These groups are directly profiting from the relentless exploitation of vulnerable people.**

**These highly sophisticated criminal networks are avoiding detection and prosecution.**

**They are taking advantage of the grey areas, and the complacency, in our systems.**

**They are moving men, women, and children across international and national borders.**

**Moreover, modern day slavery thrives on extreme poverty and disadvantage.**



**Making modern slavery a thing of the past will require a fight against organised crime, but we must also fight the root causes, of poverty and precarity, which make a person vulnerable to exploitation in the first place.**

**The United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its Sustainable Development Goals with all its targets, creates a clear framework, to work together in solidarity for the benefit of humanity.**

Let me once again quote the inspiring words of Nelson Mandela, who said;

*“Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is manmade, and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”* End quote.

The first of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals is the eradication of poverty. It is upon this goal that all our hopes for sustainable peace, prosperity, and wellbeing depend.

Furthermore, Goal Number 8 specifically calls for economic equity and wellbeing. One of its targets, that is, Number 8.7, calls for an end to slavery, and I quote;

*“[We must] take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025, end child labour in all its forms.”* End quote.

**It is a source of encouragement, to recognise that the United Nations' General Assembly has elevated the moral duty to end slavery to the level of global policy, by giving us a clear mandate.**

**It is also encouraging to note that the United Nations University, in collaboration with the United Kingdom's Modern Slavery Innovation Fund and the International Labour Organisation - ILO, alongside the US Department of Labour, have created an alliance entitled the "Alliance 8.7 Knowledge Platform".**

**This is an example of a practical initiative, to focus our attention on ending modern day slavery, to collect knowledge, and to direct our efforts in more systematic ways.**

**We must take action, now, as one world, to end all forms of slavery, but we must also cooperate, across our nations, to achieve this important target within a clearly delineated timeframe.**

**This global focus, to end slavery, has been on our international agenda for many years.**

**It is even a cornerstone of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it has featured in subsequent United Nations' protocols and conventions.**

**However, thanks to the impetus generated by the Sustainable Development Goals, we must take advantage of the growing momentum, to achieve meaningful change, now.**

**The scourge of slavery shall only keep growing, unless we take immediate action.**

**We must take further action, to address growing concerns, experienced in our various nations, about the exploitation of vulnerable people, particularly women and girls, through illicit prostitution.**

**I believe there is a need for us to engage in discussions, around these important issues, including the long term effects of various national models, such as those followed in Sweden, France, and Germany.**

**Inspired by such consultations, we must find ways to encourage directives to be developed, at a European level, which effectively tackle**

**the challenges of illicit prostitution, and which provide support for victims.**

**The experiences of women caught up in cycles of abuse and exploitation through prostitution, must be heard and values.**

**We must make it clear that humans sexuality and the human body, have no place in an exploitative marketplace. We cannot tolerate the objectification and degradation of the human person, anywhere and at any time.**



**Furthermore, I would like to reiterate, that the complex issue of slavery is only compounded, when we remember the particular vulnerabilities faced by children, and in particular child migrants and refugees.**

**This was the focus of a recent conference, organised by my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, in collaboration with Missing Children Europe.**

**The conference highlighted the specific issues confronted by children, who go missing, as a result of migration.**

**Unaccompanied children are more exposed to harm and exploitation. Furthermore, they are at a high risk of sexual violence and contemporary forms of slavery.**

**According to the UN Office of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, children have been particularly affected by a rise in human trafficking, across Europe.**

**Moreover, Europol estimates that 27% of last year's migrant arrivals to Europe, fleeing situations of war, of environmental devastation, and extreme precarity, were children.**

**At a minimum, in one year, 10,000 unaccompanied children are now unaccounted for.**

**This means that we have lost all trace of an estimated 10,000 children, while we also know that this is only the tip of the iceberg, as was stated by the Director of Europol, Rob Wainwright, himself.**

**I am pleased to say that some progress is being made. As a result of this conference on missing migrant and refugee children, and its recommendations, the European Commission launched a series of priority actions, last April.**

**These priority actions call for our European Union to reinforce the protection of migrant children, at all stages of the migration process, when arriving in the EU.**

**In its official communication, the European Commission recognised the importance of the conference and its target actions, to better protect children in migration, and to prevent them from falling into the hands of traffickers and other criminal organisations.**

**Even though more must be done by the European Commission, this is proof of the power that we have, as civil society activists, as researchers, as experts, and professionals, but most of all, as citizens of the world, who are concerned with safeguarding and celebrating the dignity of all humanity.**

**I am confident that, with the combined strength of the academics, practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders present here today, we can also make a difference.**

**We must work together to find new ways of ensuring that organised criminal networks can no longer operate across borders, by exploiting holes in our immigration systems, to take advantage of innocent victims.**

**We must also remember that it is not only migrants who are at risk. There are people, even in our most developed nations, who are threatened by contemporary forms of slavery.**

**Therefore, we must encourage the formation of an EU-level observatory, to combat modern slavery, and national commissioners, who are empowered to take action on behalf of the vulnerable.**

**Let us also consider how best we can work in collaboration with the United Nations, through its “UN Alliance 8.7 Platform”, to unite our efforts.**

**Moreover, we must encourage innovative methodologies, which develop quality indicators and reliable data. In so doing, we will be better able to make meaningful policy decisions, and allocate resources where they are truly needed.**



**We must ensure that all crimes, which involve the enslavement of human beings, are treated with the utmost urgency, and that perpetrators are punished with the full weight of the law.**

**Most importantly of all, we must address the root causes of so many forms of modern day slavery, which originate in conflict, in precarity, and in poverty.**

**We must make it our business, to ensure that criminal groups and individuals are not taking advantage of families who live in poverty and**

**situations of conflict, by persuading them to allow their children and relatives to face the risk of enslavement.**

**Modern day slavery is one of the greatest Human Rights contraventions of the twenty-first century, and it must be urgently addressed.**

**I also urge all businesses, within the private sector, to do their part, by helping to root out and address potential instances of modern day slavery, within their supply chains and across industries.**

**I urge our authorities to do more, to intensify the training received by law enforcement representatives, educators, and other professionals who come into contact with the public.**

**In this way, they shall be better able to identify trafficking and make an effective response.**

**I urge all professionals to build stronger links with civil society and with international organisations, by sharing good practices, to develop holistic and interdisciplinary strategies.**

**In this way, we shall be making real progress, to achieve the promise of Sustainable Development Goal 8, and Target 7, to end modern day slavery, as part of our global Agenda for 2030.**

**Finally, let us do all that we can to protect, to rescue, and to support the victims of these horrible crimes, and to bring the perpetrators to justice.**

**We cannot tolerate the scourge of modern slavery within our societies.**

**The international community has made amazing developments, in the areas of technological advancement and innovation. Let us use these resources, to identify and prosecute traffickers, and to assist the vulnerable in a timely manner.**

**Let me conclude with another quotation from Nelson Mandela, who said;**

***“Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times - times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in***

*science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation - that they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils.” End quote.*

**Modern day slavery is not a challenge we can shy away from, when so many millions of lives are being damaged and destroyed.**

**The more of us who get involved, to address poverty and injustices, then the more effectively we shall be stopping traffickers.**

**Let us all work together, to promote awareness, to inform and educate, and in the process, effectively support victims, their families, and humanity at large, to achieve practical results, for the benefit of both present and future generations.**