

**OPENING SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT  
OF MALTA AT THE 33RD SESSION OF THE ACP-EU JOINT  
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, HELD IN MALTA**

**19 JUNE 2017**

**Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly**

**Co-Secretaries and High officials**

**Dr Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta**

**Members of the European Parliament**

**Dear friends**

**I would like to begin by welcoming you to the Maltese Islands, and while I augur you much constructive and successful work, I also hope that you will find sometime, to enjoy the beauty of our unique historical and cultural heritage.**

**It is truly a pleasure and a privilege to address the 33rd Session of the African Caribbean Pacific – European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly.**

**Malta's historical and cultural legacy, as a nation at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, provides further impetus to create opportunities for dialogue and connection, between different cultures and peoples.**

**As an island at the crossroads of continents and civilisations, we know that, in this world, no country or group of people can face the future alone.**

**Indeed, Malta's ongoing Presidency of the Council of the European Union is reinforcing our commitment to work for peace, prosperity, and the wellbeing of all societies.**

**Our endeavours, towards the building of peace, prosperity and holistic wellbeing, depend on our ability, and our firm resolution, to promote, to encourage, and to work to build a spirit of solidarity.**

**For this reason, let me begin my remarks by commending the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly for its endeavours.**

**The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly is a unique institution, which celebrates partnerships between diverse stakeholders from the global South and North.**

**It is this focus, on developing new opportunities for dialogue and friendship, which inspires me, as I am sure it also inspires you, with confidence for the future.**

**With this in mind, let me quote one of the greatest orators ever to live in our Mediterranean region, Cicero, who said:**

**“Everything is alive. Everything is interconnected.”**

**I encourage you to analyse these inspirational words, as I believe that when we fully appreciate the power of Cicero’s philosophy, we will understand the need for an ongoing process of dialogue, to commit ourselves, to work to sustain our interconnectedness.**

**We must recognise that our national and international authorities, our societies and our communities, are interconnected.**

**They should be structured around the need to provide basic dignity and respect, and to work for the holistic wellbeing, of all humanity.**

**The truth is that, in today's world, global economic interdependence is a fact. However, I believe that we must also understand and accept that our interconnections go far deeper than the economy.**

**Whether we like it or not, these connections are active, across the political, social, and ecological spheres of our countries and regions.**

**Whoever we are, wherever we are positioned, and whatever we do, we are connected and effect each other, as one humanity.**

**Therefore, as this parliamentary session focuses on issues of migration, demographic growth, investment in Africa, and other pressing concerns, I urge you to always, and in all ways, keep this underlying reality, foremost in your minds; that peace, prosperity, and the wellbeing of our human race and the world are interconnected.**

**Sources of healthy development in one part of our economic, social, and ecological systems, can have great benefits, which affect our societies and our world.**

**Likewise, injustice, discrimination, and oppression, are thwarting global development in some parts of the world, and are also de-stabilising our efforts to achieve the advancement of humanity, as a whole.**

**Promoting strategies to strengthen positive interdependence, between our different communities and nations, will lead to increased opportunities for all of humanity.**

**These include opportunities for knowledge sharing and investment; research and innovation; international protection and security; and person-to-person relationship building and friendship, through education, trade, and tourism, just to mention a few.**

**In this way, by nurturing a proper transformation, to build and foster relationships and friendships, among the peoples of our nations, we shall come closer to achieving practical changes, that would be of particular benefit to the most vulnerable members of our communities, and our societies at large.**

**I must note, it is this objective that underlies the Cotonou Agreement, which prioritises the eradication of poverty; achieving sustainable development; the inclusion of ACP countries into global economic**

**networks; and promoting the rule of law and the enforcement of justice.**

**It is essential that our national authorities, business communities, and civil society activists continue working in synergy, to keep channels of political, economical and social goodwill, open.**

**In doing so, you shall be helping to build sustainable peace, by addressing the holistic wellbeing of our countries and our regions. We must endeavour, relentlessly, to keep these objectives high, on the agenda of the international community.**

**Moreover, these very same objectives are fully endorsed, and supported, by all the leaders of our nations, through the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its Sustainable Development Goals.**

**Agenda 2030 provides an effective framework, and a practical action plan, for the sustainable future of our nations and our world.**

**Agenda 2030 acknowledges that the first, and most important, change which we must make, is to create a more equitable and fair system for the distribution of wealth.**

**For this reason, the first Sustainable Development Goal targets the eradication of poverty.**

**This is the most basic inequality, which we must address, in order to achieve a deep-rooted social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological transformation of our global situation.**

**Sustainable Development Goal Number 1 makes it clear, that an end to poverty, in all its manifestations, is essential to achieve global progress in all sectors of life.**

**Poverty crushes people's hopes and aspirations.**

**Poverty demeans human dignity, and perpetuates cycles of precarity, which many a time spins out of control, and inflicts damaging consequences across multiple generations.**

**Hence, we must take to heart the inspiring words of Nelson Mandela, who said:**

**“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”**

**There can be no peace and prosperity for humanity, and our world, if systematic injustices continue to be perpetuated, through our political institutions and socio-economic structures.**

**So long as a disproportionate share of the world's resources are not being enjoyed by all, there shall be no equitable distribution, which translates into sustainable development for all humanity.**

**I would like to take this opportunity, at the beginning of this 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the African, Caribbean, Pacific and European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly, to urge you, as policy makers and as the experts in your sectors, to take action, in a spirit of solidarity.**

**We must remember that all of our nations are signatories to the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and therefore, we are all responsible to implement its goals and targets, for immediate and far-reaching effects, in the best interest of humankind.**

**We cannot continue to drag our feet, or to be complacent about the world's situation.**

**We must work across the borders of our nations, to agree upon, and to achieve, a shared vision of solidarity, equity, and unity.**

**I believe that, the economic strengthening of our countries must be paralleled by increased attention to strategies, which ensure sustainable improvements in everybody's daily life.**

**We must conquer our fears and doubts.**

**We must be courageous.**

**We must put our faith in a global social solidarity approach.**

**We must continue to empower the partnerships which already exist among ACP and EU nations.**

**We must continue to reaffirm our commitment to universal rights and fundamental freedoms, which we need to implement by taking effective action.**

**Furthermore, we must prioritise the need for promoting sustainable structured processes of democratic dialogue among the diverse cultural groups, social sectors, and communities of faith within our nations.**

**Most of all, we must resist threats of division and self-interest, wherever they occur, by standing firm in our commitment to solidarity and peace.**

**This responsibility, to nurture mutually beneficial encounters between communities and countries, must be at the heart of all our strategies and policies, to ensure a successful future.**

**Now is the time, for us to stand together, shoulder to shoulder.**

**Let me reiterate the importance of strengthening synergies, among our national authorities, international institutions, and civil societies.**

**Communities and governments must come together, to improve communication among the various stakeholders that are active throughout our nations. This must be the approach, to tackle urgent issues of injustices, inequalities, poverty, precarity, and conflict.**

**We all know what needs to be done and how it is to be done.**

**We must make a change, on the ground, by encouraging the proactive participation of all our citizens.**

**Our citizens have the best understanding of the changes that need to take place within society, to promote equity and social justice.**

**Those within our societies, who have direct experiences of poverty, exclusion, and discrimination, are the best placed to influence and inform essential strategies and policies.**

**I truly believe that much more must be done, to support vulnerable communities and less developed countries.**

**However, we must also create and sustain safe and respectful spaces, where all people who have been pushed to the margins of society are welcomed, as valued collaborators.**

**I urge you as politicians and as policymakers, to use your influence, to ensure that the diverse voices of our peoples are heard, by sharing, and acting upon, their concerns and aspirations.**

**It is in this way, that we can develop effective strategies and policies, for full inclusion and equitable participation.**

**It is only in this way, that we will come closer, towards creating the kind of world, and the kind of legacy, that we want to pass down to our children and all future generations.**

**I augur that the collaborations between African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, and the European Union, will guide us towards this potential legacy of peace and prosperity.**

**In this context, I would also like to commend the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation [UNIDO] and the German Government, for their initiative, which as I am informed will be launched today in Malta, entitled: 'Global Africa'.**

**'Global Africa' will provide a powerful space for dialogue and collaboration, by focusing on important issues of social, political and economic development across Africa.**

**Considering that a number of proactive initiatives have and are taking place, there is already a sense of momentum, to place Africa high on the agendas of our nations and the agenda of the international community.**

**In order to keep this momentum going, and to create a meaningful improvement for the communities and societies in Africa, we must be willing to face some challenging realities, which are blocking the full prosperity of the peoples of Africa.**

**For example, there are alarming reports that more wealth is pouring out, every year, of the 48 countries which the World Bank classifies as**

**'sub-Saharan Africa', than is actually, being channeled in, for development.**

**I would like to share with you a very meaningful quote from the "Honest Accounts 2017 Report", which was compiled by a coalition of UK and African NGOs:**

**"Research for this report calculates the movement of financial resources into and out of Africa, and some key costs imposed on Africa by the rest of the world [...] The countries of Africa are collectively net creditors to**

**the rest of the world, to the tune of 41.3 billion dollars in 2015. Thus, much more wealth is leaving the world's most impoverished continent than is entering it." End quote.**

**Commenting on this report, Aisha Dodwell, a campaigner for the NGO Global Justice Now, said:**

**"This research shows that what African countries really need is for the rest of the world to stop systematically looting them. While the form of colonial plunder may have changed over time, its basic nature remains unchanged." End quote.**

**We definitely cannot allow a new rhetoric of investment and industrialisation to continue perpetuating these underlying realities and tensions.**

**Therefore, the most necessary investment, I want us to see, my friends, is, first and foremost, an investment in the dignity of the peoples of Africa.**

**The development that I aspire for the international community to achieve, is the development of the social, economic, and political wellbeing of every individual, of every family, and of all communities in Africa.**

**Although I cannot be present for the launch of 'Global Africa', I am pleased that this morning I had the opportunity to share some of my ideas for effective and sustainable investment in Africa, with the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management.**

**I believe there is the need to invest our efforts in developing innovative strategies, which touch the social, economic, political, and environmental realities, experienced by each and every human being in the nations of Africa.**

**Finally, I urge all of us to continue to strive, together, to ensure sustainable and meaningful change, which promotes the dignity and the wellbeing of all peoples, across our societies and nations, for the benefit of both present and future generations.**

