**SPEECH Delivered by HE Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta on the occasion of the Independence Day of ISRAEL, 2017**

**[Salutations]**

**Distinguished guests,**

**Dear friends,**

**Thank you, Your Excellency, for your kind greetings.**

**Please convey, in my name and on behalf of the Government and People of Malta, our sincere best wishes to His Excellency President Rivlin and to the People of the State of Israel, on the celebration of Israel’s National Day.**

**Since relations between Malta and Israel were first established, in 1965, bilateral cooperation between our nations has steadily grown. Our cooperation now covers a wide range of sectors, which include healthcare, aquaculture, environmental protection, education, oil exploration, water conservation, and tourism.**

**Malta is pleased to note the development of fruitful relations between our respective authorities over the past years, and we look forward to the continued strengthening of political, economic, and cultural ties between our two countries.**

**Indeed, there is much potential for further contact between our communities, and enriching exchanges between our peoples.**

**For example, I am pleased to note the participation of Malta’s resident Chabad community, at various interfaith events, organised by the President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.**

**Another initiative of great importance, facilitated by the Foundation and instituted under my presidency, has been an annual commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.**

**The first memorial was held in collaboration with Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial to victims of the Holocaust.**

**Malta’s commemoration included the active involvement of students from Malta and Italy, who had the opportunity to meet one another, and discuss the continuing relevance of the Holocaust in our lives.**

**This year’s memorial included the cooperation of further stakeholders, from the Embassy of the Netherlands, the Embassy of Germany, and the Italian Embassy. Working alongside the President’s Foundation, these stakeholders were able to bring several Holocaust survivors to Malta, who shared their testimony with hundreds of school children, and members of the public.**

**It is in direct response to the horrors of the Holocaust that our nations committed themselves, so profoundly, to follow a path founded on universal human rights, which honours the dignity of all human beings.**

**Therefore, our continuing remembrance of the Holocaust all the more vital, in light of the oppression and injustices that are being experienced by vulnerable peoples all over the world.**

**Let us therefore take a moment to reiterate our respect for the late Shimon Peres, former President of the State of Israel. Her Excellency, the President of Malta, was present at the funeral of this influential statesman and champion for peace, and it is this legacy of cooperation and peaceful connection which we must pursue, as a light of hope, to all peoples and all nations.**

**Indeed, we must continue working together to safeguard the integrity of all peoples’ wellbeing, across our Mediterranean region.**

**For this reason, Malta, as a bridge between cultures within the Mediterranean Sea, is ideally placed to facilitate a stronger relationship between the diverse peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean region.**

**Let me also take this opportunity to reaffirm Malta’s commitment to continue working closely with the international community, in the global effort to prevent and counter terrorist activity. Malta is committed to resist all attacks against fundamental human dignity and freedom, and take action in favour of unity among all peoples, to sow the seeds of peace and friendship.**

**Such processes of friendship can be strengthened by emphasising the positive role of diplomacy through tourism and culture. Both of these sectors offer opportunities for person-to-person and community contact, which result in important relationships being formed and strengthened.**

**Such opportunities also translate into greater closeness among the respective business communities of our nations, with the potential for mutual prosperity. We must also emphasise the importance of cooperation in the areas of education, which are rich with possibilities for greater interaction.**

**Indeed, connections between educational institutions in Malta and Israel would result in new areas of connection between academics, researchers, and students, increasing the flow of visitors between our countries.**

**The rich legacy of our histories, the experiences of our peoples, and the heritage of our countries are a fertile ground for future collaboration and exchanges.**

**Excellency,**

**On concluding, let me say that both our nations should be most proud of the values we share in common; our commitment to the importance of peace, of democratic participation, and of social solidarity, all of which ensure a dignified life for all of our citizens.**

**Let us continue, as Mediterranean neighbours, to mobilise our efforts to secure stability in our region. It is only when we work together, to achieve the wellbeing of all, which we can be confident of sustainable peace and prosperity for both present and future generations.**

**Let us raise our glasses and drink to the health of the President of Israel, to the peoples of Malta and Israel, and to the friendship that exists between us.**