

“**Let** us continue to do all that we can to achieve a society that safeguards the values of peace, solidarity, and wellbeing”

Speech given by Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, during the commemoration of the Anniversary of the Santa Maria Convoy, 11 August 2017

Every year, we gather here, to commemorate the Anniversary of the Santa Marija Convoy. This year is particularly special, because we are celebrating the **Convoy's** 75th Anniversary.

This is a moment of great significance in the history of our Maltese Islands, which connects us, in the most humane of ways, with other nations.

It was at the height of the Second World War, when the people of Malta had reached a point of near starvation.

Our islands were on the verge of surrender.

The people of Malta endured heavy bombings, and were suffering sustained attacks.

It was on the 15th of August, 1942, when Malta and Gozo were saved. The convoy codenamed *Operation Pedestal* arrived in the Grand Harbour, to relieve the hardships being endured by the Maltese.

It was thanks to the presence of these ships and their essential cargo, that the people of Malta and Gozo were able to keep up their strength, until the end of the war.

I believe that the resilience shown by the people of these islands, who endured such great struggles, should be a lesson to all of us.

Their strength is a testament to the perseverance that was shown by our parents and grandparents, who experienced but overcame the hardships of war.

However, we should not think of their bravery as something that only exists in our past. I believe that the lives of our ancestors are still a most compelling example, from which we can all learn.

The experiences of conflict and violence, endured by our ancestors, are an invitation for us to consider the choices we are making, today.

I believe that their experiences should continue to be a catalyst for us, both individually and as a nation, to make the choice to work for peace.

The experiences of our forefathers and foremothers should remind us to endeavour even harder, to nurture a culture of peace and wellbeing, in our communities and across our society.

Peace is not only the absence of war.

Positive peace can be achieved when we decide to create safe spaces, of protection and respect, where the full participation of each and every person is assured, and where the universal human rights of all are effectively safeguarded.

If we continue to work for sustainable peace and holistic wellbeing, we will create an environment where the potential of our democracy can truly develop.

I am convinced that now is the time for us, to take our democracy to the next level, by ensuring that our society is fully inclusive and truly participatory.

Therefore, we must do more to listen to the voices of each member of our society, by responding to their needs and concerns, especially the most vulnerable among us.

Let us do all that we can to protect the heritage of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, for which our ancestors fought so bravely and sacrificed so much.

For this reason, I am convinced that our country still has an important role to play, to promote peace and solidarity among the peoples of our Mediterranean Region, and beyond.

Let us take this opportunity to recognise and acknowledge that our heritage gives us an important insight into the challenges of conflict, and how to work to achieve a deep-rooted transformation of society.

We must share this legacy of healing with others, by continuing to be a strong voice for peace in our region; by being a symbol of hope to other nations, currently suffering from conflict and war; and by reaching out to encourage dialogue among peoples from all cultures and walks of life.

This annual commemoration should not only serve us to remember the lessons of our past; but it should serve as an opportunity to put these lessons into practice, in our daily lives.

We must treat each day as a new opportunity to connect with others; to build bridges rather than walls; and to reaffirm **Malta's** role as a peace-builder in the Mediterranean.

Let us continue to do all that we can to achieve a society that safeguards the values of peace, solidarity, and wellbeing, throughout our Maltese Islands and beyond, for the benefit of both present and future generations.