

**George Mason University, “Peace beyond the Patriarchy”
Lecture, September 2017**

[Salutations]

Dear friends,

Let me begin by thanking Professor Susan Hirsch, for her kind invitation, on behalf of George Mason University’s School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, to deliver this 28th Lynch Lecture to such a distinguished audience of faculty members, students, and alumni.

Let me also take this opportunity to commend the relationship between S-CAR and my Foundation, that is, the President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, in Malta, and which, has led to a number of fruitful collaborations.

These collaborations include, a successful series of public lectures, which have done a lot to sensitise members of the Maltese public, to important issues of conflict analysis and peace-building.

During this lecture, I shall share some thoughts and reflections, about the importance, I believe we must give, to peace-building, particularly from a gender perspective.

I shall speak about my belief, confirmed by my many encounters with individuals and communities from around the globe, that issues of gender, and the challenge to safeguard peace are intimately and profoundly connected.

For this reason, a holistic approach to gender and peace, must focus on the relationship between gender and violence.

For example, one of the initiatives I most recently supported, and presented at the European Parliament a few months ago, is a proposal that was formed during a four year European Union project, entitled “Femicide across Europe”.

This initiative is an outcome, from the research conducted by a network of experts and researchers, who have tackled urgent issues of violence, which are experienced by women across the European Union.

The network, specifically focused its attention on femicide, which is to say, the result of the most lethal and criminal forms

of violence faced by women, and the leading cause of female homicides worldwide.

It is shocking to consider, that there is, as yet, no European-wide, let alone international, monitoring system, which looks at the particular forms of violence confronting women.

The need for such a focus on femicide has even been highlighted at the United Nations, in 2015, with calls for a “Femicide Watch” to be established. However, developments have unfortunately been slow.

It is important to note that the World Health Organisation is itself, highlighting the need for increased attention to data collection in this area.

Although data is thin on the ground, some 35 percent of female homicides, are perpetrated by an intimate partner. Moreover, the World Health Organisation draws specific attention to the scourge of so-called “honour killings”, which are, and I quote;

“Honour killings are among the most tragic consequences and explicit illustrations of embedded, culturally accepted discrimination against women and girls. They are often committed with impunity owing to widespread acceptance of

the practice and legal and judicial statutes that protect the murderer.” End quote.

For this reason, earlier this year, I urged the members of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, of the European Union, to respond to the grey areas in our research and our laws, by supporting the establishment of an observatory on femicide.

Through such an observatory on femicide, vital data collection and analysis can take place, thereby making a serious contribution, to influence legislation and policy, and thus, helping to address the violence faced by women in their communities and societies.

I believe that, while such measures are essential, they must form part of a larger transformation within our societies.

We must prioritise the visibility of all women, in all situations, and we must effectively respond to the challenges that they are facing.

In order to do so, we must take a look at the systemic and structural oppressions, that continue to undermine the full

freedoms, and the rightful equality, of women and gender minorities.

I believe that the international community must do more, to confront the underlying discrimination, that is harming the dignity, of so many individuals, around the world.

First and foremost, we must take a critical look at the sources of oppression, which circulate through our nations, and our international systems.

I believe that the only pathway for us to achieve sustainable and meaningful wellbeing, for women, for girls, and for gender minorities, but also for men and boys, is by courageously, and openly, confronting the patriarchy.

The reality is that patriarchal oppressions are present throughout our societies.

They are prevalent in the ways our cultural narratives are formed, in the ways they function, and in the ways they are disseminated throughout our communities.

Patriarchy is a truly global challenge, and will require an equally global response and solution.

Patriarchy is a cultural system that we are born into, in which we all participate, and which we perpetuate, often unconsciously, to the detriment of so many human beings.

Patriarchy, like all forms of oppression, has a way of normalising its abuses. It has a way of making the unacceptable injustices faced by so many women, girls, and gender minorities seem like they are part, of a socially acceptable status quo.

Patriarchy, makes us believe, that there are no alternatives to its way of thinking, of acting, and of living. It would have us believe that a deep-rooted change is not possible.

However, I believe that now, at this precarious moment in the history of our world, with so much international conflict and global confusion, we cannot afford to be complacent.

We must move together in solidarity, regardless of our gender, to address all unjust systems of power.

We must keep using all the platforms at our disposal, to affirm that there is, indeed, another, and a better, way of living.

Many of you are students, exploring the world through the opportunities of your education.

Let me therefore encourage you, to heighten your awareness, throughout your studies, and in your careers, to how power circulates, often in very unjust ways, throughout society.

Let me encourage you to consider, what other paths we can take, as individuals, and as one human family, on our slow journey, towards a more peace-focused, gender inclusive, and sustainable world.

In order to open our minds to the limitless potential of people of all genders working together, we must challenge the one-dimensional vision of masculinity, which is upheld by the patriarchy.

We cannot continue, explicitly or implicitly, to promote damaging and distorting attitudes.

We must replace perspectives that privilege power, coercion, and control with stronger attributes, such as compassion, respectful relationship-building, and the ability to nurture humanity.

To achieve such a vision of our world, we must disrupt all forms of dualistic and narrowly gendered thinking, especially when it comes to the roles that women and men pursue in society.

Moreover, we must recognise that questioning our binary assumptions about gender and the world is essential, in order to create societies that are safe and welcoming for people of all genders, of all sexual orientations, and of all identities.

In this context, I am proud to say that my country, Malta, has been ranked first, out of 49 observed European countries, by the ‘International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association’, in their annual index for LGBTIQ rights.

Moreover, Malta is one of the only countries in the world to have made LGBT rights equal at a constitutional level, and, in 2016, Malta became the first country in the European Union to ban “gay conversion” pseudo-therapies.

All of these efforts are evidence of the importance that the Maltese give, to the personal truth, and to the intrinsic humanity, of each and every member of our communities.

All of these efforts show us, that it is possible to create a fundamental change in our societies...a change which disrupts

the narrow and rigid thinking, exhibited by patriarchal oppressions.

However, even with such examples of success, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels.

As you well know, here in the United States, political will can change. Sometimes, progress can be reversed, with apparent ease, and with disastrous effects.

Therefore, what we truly need, most urgently of all, is a transformation within our cultures.

I believe that the young people of the world must take a more central role, to achieve this much-needed transformation. You must be the activists of today, in order to become the effective leaders of tomorrow.

Your activism is needed, here and now, before it is too late.

The world needs a transformation that promotes solidarity, through an approach which encourages collective and cross-cutting activism.

We must transform our global consciousness, away from destructive and coercive attitudes, towards a perspective that upholds the peaceful and inclusive participation of all people, whoever they may be, and wherever they may come from.

Inclusive participation is possible when we are not complacent, when we take real action, and when we challenge the far-reaching effects of patriarchal oppression, in our societies.

We cannot ignore the fact that women, for example, are still suffering from various forms of economic inequality due to the gender pay gap.

The gender pay gap exists across our nations, and continues to restrict women's access to equitable and equal opportunities for employment.

According to the World Economic Forum's latest report on the gender pay gap, and I quote;

“More than a decade of data has revealed that progress is still too slow for realising the full potential of one half of humanity within our lifetimes.” End quote.

Nor can we ignore the fact that careers, which are historically associated with women, such as education and the caring professions, have a disproportionately lower salary.

We must also take note of important indicators from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, which says that it will take 170 years for us to achieve economic gender equality.

Furthermore, the report suggests a strong relationship between gender parity and gross national income. Quoting once again from this report, there is *“a growing body of research and evidence strongly suggesting that gender parity can become a key driver of prosperity and national income growth.”*

Therefore, achieving gender equality, and equity in the world of work for people of all genders, is just as essential for the health of our economies, as it is essential for the social and political freedom of all members of our human family.

For this reason, we must also address the fact that men often occupy the vast majority of visible roles of influence, within political and economic sectors.

According to data from a report entitled “Women on Boards” , released by Morgan Stanley Capital International, among the 4,218 companies covered by their analysis, women held 15% of all directorships, with Norway (40.1%), Sweden (33.7%) and France (33.5%), reflecting the highest percentages of women as board members.

Moreover, the report indicates that companies with strong female leadership generated a Return on Equity of 10.1%, per year, versus 7.4% for those without, while also exhibiting fewer instances of governance-related challenges.

In the world of politics, according to last year’s indicators from United Nations Women, only 22.8% of all national parliamentarians were women, and globally, there are 38 countries in which women account for less than 10% of parliamentarians.

Moreover, women who hold such positions are expected, and in some ways they are forced, to subscribe to patriarchal norms in order to be successful.

The inclusion of women in positions of authority and governance is essential, if we are serious about valuing the voices of people of all genders.

In order to end patriarchal oppressions, we also need to find innovative ways to deal with the conflicts which patriarchy produces and promotes, within and across our societies.

We need to face the facts, and address worrying indicators which tell us that, while the UN Security Council's resolution number 1325 recognised that war impacts women differently, and women's participation is vital to peace talks, between 1992 and 2011, only 9% of peace negotiators were women.

Moreover, only 2% were chief mediators, and only 4% were witnesses or signatories. All of this must be acknowledged against the backdrop of a pioneering study by Laurel Stone, conducted in 2015, and entitled "A Quantitative Analysis of Women's participation in Peace Processes."

This study states that when and where women are included in peace processes, there is a 20% increase in the probability of peace agreements lasting at least two years, and a 35% increase in the probability of peace agreements lasting 15 years.

For this reason, I believe that we must introduce a self-reflective and constructive critical approach, which makes the effects of patriarchy visible, and triggers a more substantial, meaningful,

and sustainable change, thereby promoting the inclusion of women and gender minorities at all levels of influence.

In this way, we shall also initiate a sustainable process of healing, within our communities, to address the ongoing effects of patriarchal oppression.

Real change can only take place with a grass roots approach, using a bottom-up methodology, which listens to people's genuine concerns, and takes practical steps to change our attitudes and actions.

Sustainable peace begins with each and every one of us.

Identifying the root causes of patriarchal oppression, and making them visible, is therefore essential.

We must appreciate that different cultures and diverse groups bring in different attitudes and approaches, in the way they manifest the problems of patriarchy.

For this reason, we must create safe and respectful spaces for dialogue with a broad diversity of participants.

We must bring women and gender minorities on board, not only as stakeholders but also as leaders in processes of dialogue, which aim to transform conflict and sow the seeds of peace.

In so doing, we shall be implementing the full force of the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, SDG Number 5, which promotes full equality for all genders.

To achieve such equality, and equitable peace, I believe we must take every opportunity to end, once and for all, the normalisation and perpetuation of patriarchal violence.

We cannot go on excusing our cultural narratives, which justify anti-social and damaging male behaviour by saying that “boys will be boys.”

Not only does such an attitude endanger the health and safety of women and girls, but it also diminishes the dignity of men and boys, by implying that positive change is not possible.

Nor can we go on celebrating a “macho” culture, where violent and controlling attitudes are celebrated, without criticism.

We must challenge the idea that aggression is part of what it means to be a “real man”, and that femininity should, by extension, be degraded.

To achieve these goals, I believe that our national, regional, and global institutions need to do more, to encourage men to be vocal and to speak out, against patriarchal ideas and actions.

Men cannot be silent partners, in the work we must do, to achieve the meaningful empowerment of women.

Let me quote the inspiring words of feminist academic and activist, Professor Bell Hooks, when she says;

“Males cannot love themselves in patriarchal culture if their very self-definition relies on submission to patriarchal rules. When men embrace feminist thinking and practice, which emphasises the value of mutual growth and self-actualisation in all relationships, their emotional wellbeing will be enhanced. A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving.” End quote.

Therefore, we are all stakeholders, with so much to gain, by addressing the tremendous challenges which patriarchy,

normalised violence, and deep-rooted oppression are having, at every level of our societies.

Working together to address patriarchal oppressions will lead us to remove the barriers and the borders that constrain people, of all gender identities.

Working together to address patriarchal oppressions will also lead us, to truly safeguard the dignity, of each and every individual.

Let us remember that many of the world's conflicts, are the result of a patriarchal system, which legitimises the use of violence; which promotes narratives of violence; and which perpetuates the objectification of human beings, of other creatures, and of the land itself.

Each and every one of us has the responsibility to make a positive change. We must be fearless, and stand up to any and all perspectives which enact dangerous systems of exploitation and oppression.

Let me conclude by encouraging you, as educators and as students, to find ways of taking practical actions, to address the

underlying cultural and social injustices, which are perpetuating violence and abuses within our societies and across our globe.

As students and educators, you are well placed to promote innovative educational perspectives and bold cultural narratives, which will help to end, once and for all, the discrimination, inequalities, and violence being faced by women, by girls, and by gender minorities.

Most importantly of all, we must take care of one another.

We must remember that this precious gift of life deserves to be treated with dignity, with respect, and with tenderness.

Let us therefore work together, to prioritise a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of gender-based violence and oppression, in order to promote equality and equity.

In this way, I am confident that we shall be doing our best to create, and to sustain, a global culture of positive peace, respect, and dignity, for the benefit of all humanity.

Thank you for your attention.