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*Speech By H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President Of Malta, At The Reception In Honour Of Diplomats Who Presented Their Credentials*

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13<sup>th</sup> March 2018

**Excellencies**

**Distinguished guests**

**Dear friends**

**It is my pleasure to welcome three distinguished diplomats, *His Excellency, the High Commissioner of New Zealand; His Excellency, the Ambassador of the State of Japan; and His Excellency, the Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen.***

**Excellencies,**

**I would like to congratulate you all on your appointments, and wish you every success in your endeavours.**

**Your Excellencies, please convey my very best wishes to your respective Heads of State, while also expressing sentiments of friendship towards the peoples of your countries.**

**Your Excellency, High Commissioner of New Zealand,**

**Although geographically distant, Malta and New Zealand have enjoyed close diplomatic relations since 1973. Moreover, some Maltese have found themselves making a home in your country, and Malta attaches great importance to the preservation of Maltese heritage among the Maltese diaspora in New Zealand.**

**I must also take this opportunity to commend the activities of the Maltese Association of Wellington, which is carrying out social and cultural activities to support the heritage and identity of the Maltese diaspora in New Zealand.**

**Elements of the shared heritage, between Malta and New Zealand, is another source of our long-lasting friendship. We are mutual and active members of the Commonwealth of Nations, and I look forward to our close collaboration at the upcoming CHOGM in London.**

**Malta is also proud of the historical role it played during the First World War, as “Nurse of the Mediterranean”. The annual commemoration in memory of ANZAC Day, and the memorial in Argotti Gardens, at Floriana, are a statement of Malta’s**

**commitment, to honour the thousands of Australian and New Zealander servicemen and women who lost their lives during the wars.**

**I augur that this reminder of the suffering and hardships brought about by war will inspire us, to strive harder, to achieve sustainable peace, and inclusive dialogue amongst all peoples of goodwill.**

**High Commissioner, as we discussed this morning, I believe that we must develop our relations into tangible initiatives to address the trade deficit between our countries, by exploring economic areas of collaboration such as the film production industry, and the use of Malta as a logistics hub in the Euro-Mediterranean region.**

**In fact, Malta is the third largest logistics hub in the Mediterranean, providing ideal access to diverse markets.**

**Malta and New Zealand are relatively small maritime island states, which place a significant amount of importance on our respective regional foreign policy initiatives, and international affairs.**

**For this reason, the celebration of our social diversity and international collaborations is another aspect of shared interest.**

**Let us, therefore, further explore opportunities for collaboration in the various socio-economic sectors of our countries. In this context, there is also much scope for us to seek closer cooperation in other areas of trade, of cultural collaboration, and social development.**

**Let me conclude by saying that we must continue to be united by our common aspirations, of creating equality, prosperity, and wellbeing, for the benefit of all the communities within our respective societies.**

**Your Excellency, Ambassador of the State of Japan,**

**Diplomatic relations between Malta and Japan were established in 1965, and relations at all levels have flourished in that time.**

**Malta and Japan are closely united in our mutual commitment to essential values, such as the importance of an active democracy; the rule of law; and fundamental human rights.**

**Although strong economic ties already exist between our countries, there is always room for improvement in further connections, and I believe that now is the perfect time for us to diversify product and service categories, according to the needs of both our countries.**

**In fact, I must note the increase in Japanese tourists to Malta, and also Maltese tourists to Japan. Japanese tourists are increasingly choosing Malta for their wedding and honeymoon destinations, which is yet another growing market that emerged over the past decade.**

**There is much room for us to continue to develop this important industry, as it is not only an economic operation but also an opportunity for person-to-person contact.**

**In a world that is undergoing unprecedented changes, we must do everything that we can to transform our socio-economic collaborations into long-term friendships. This is a way of ensuring excellent and sustainable relations, which will be strengthened on all levels.**

**Malta looks forward to continue intensifying the cooperation between Malta and Japan, particularly in the cultural sector. It is also by celebrating the diversity of our cultures that we can become closer and develop more inclusive societies.**

**Let me take this opportunity to highlight the importance that the Maltese Government is presently giving to the cultural sector, through Valletta's term as the European capital of culture for 2018.**

**Culture has the potential to be a source of friendship and connection, amongst our respective peoples.**

**Your Excellency, Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen,**

**Let me begin by expressing my deep concern, on behalf of the authorities and the people of Malta, regarding the ongoing conflict in Yemen, and the devastating consequences that this conflict is having on the country and the people of Yemen.**

**I wish to underline Malta's full support for an inclusive political solution to the Yemeni crisis, whilst reiterating our full confidence in all efforts being undertaken by the United Nations, and its newly appointed Special Envoy.**

**I am sure that Special Envoy Martin Griffiths shall strive to facilitate a comprehensive and lasting settlement between Yemeni parties, in line with the National Dialogue Conference Outcomes and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.**

**Malta is extremely concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen, where millions of people are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance. The international community must rise to its responsibilities, to allow unrestricted access of much needed humanitarian aid throughout the country.**

However, humanitarian assistance can only alleviate the most immediate needs of the people of Yemen. Malta therefore urges all concerned parties to renew the cessation of hostilities and re-engage in peace talks, under the facilitation of the UN Special Envoy, which will facilitate the necessary infrastructural and societal rebuilding of Yemen.

Malta believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Yemen, and for this reason I urge all parties concerned to keep the peace and wellbeing of the people of Yemen, and the region as a whole, at their heart.

In this context, let me augur the strengthening of bilateral relations between the authorities and the people of Malta and Yemen, in the years to come, for the benefit of both our countries.

Excellencies,

On concluding, let me encourage all of us to continue fostering cooperation among our nations, to create further positive change in our regions and across our world.

Malta's ongoing celebrations as European Capital of Culture for 2018 is a important event, which clearly reflects our willingness to share our Maltese culture, and to create opportunities to collaborate with our neighbours and friends, from across the world, through cultural diplomacy.

Excellencies, dear guests, friends,

Please raise your glasses to drink to the good health of the new Ambassadors, and to excellent relations between Malta and the countries they represent, and to the friendship of our peoples.