
*Opening Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at the
Mediterranean Tourism Forum*

2nd March 2018

“Peace and Wellbeing in the Mediterranean through Sustainable Tourism”

[Salutations]

**Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,**

If I had to describe the Mediterranean Region in a word, I would say; UNIQUE.

**Unique in its history,
Unique in its heritage,
Unique in its culture,
Unique in its beauty,
Unique in its diversity.**

Above all, unique for its peoples.

The Mediterranean's breathtaking diversity and cultural richness, along with its historical and social legacy, gives us a unique opportunity for sustainable investment, for inclusive initiatives and for subsequently holistic practices, for peace and prosperity.

I so truly believe, and I know that many of you share my vision, that the Mediterranean can be a real model for other parts of the world.

I am proud to say that Malta, through the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation, the UNWTO, the Union for the Mediterranean, and other stakeholders, are working hard, to make this vision a reality.

The Mediterranean brings together different continents and cultures, thereby creating a dynamic space in which dialogue, cooperation, and prosperity can truly flourish.

The countries of the Mediterranean have different demographic characteristics and contrasting levels of development, yet our histories are intimately connected.

We are a family, and like every family, we must want the best for one another for all of us.

For this reason, I believe that we must focus our collective efforts, to maximise its potential for peace and prosperity, through opportunities for respectful and sustainable tourism.

I am convinced that we all know that tourism provides a common ground, from which our different strengths, drawn from various areas and sectors of the industry, can work together in synergy.

Tourism, as an industry, probably more than other industries, is an essential contributor for strong socio-economic growth, job creation, and the safeguarding of our historical and environmental heritage.

Tourism is a sector that has a significant impact on the livelihoods of billions of people, around the world.

According to the 2017 Economic Impact Report released by the World Travel and Tourism Council, conducted in collaboration with Oxford Economics, tourism generated one in every 11 jobs, of the world's employment opportunities, last year.

This translates to a total of 292 million jobs. The tourism sector also grew by 3.3 percent in 2017, and has outpaced the global economy for the sixth year in a row.

The report also notes that travel, tourism, and hospitality generated 10.2 percent of the global GDP, when the direct, indirect, and induced impacts of the sector are all taken into account.

Tourism is inherently flexible.

Tourism is also inherently linked to diplomacy, and hence, can be an ideal driver for the promotion of peace through diverse strategies and initiatives, which take place across the cultural, educational, entertainment, and sports sectors, to mention a few.

In fact, according to indicators by the World Travel and Tourism Council, in its 'Tourism as a Driver of Peace' Report, research clearly reveals that there is:

"A positive correlation between tourism sectors that show sustainability in social, cultural, economic, political and environmental areas with 'positive peace'."

Positive peace is not simply the absence of violence or armed conflict.

Positive peace is a deep-rooted and long-term transformation, which must happen within and among our communities, to make peace a sustainable reality for all.

I am convinced that, through the efforts of the hospitality and tourism industries, and all stakeholders working in synergy, a peace-building mechanism can be created within our communities and societies.

Thus, I am a believer that the private sector can play a powerful role, to contribute to global peace.

I am sure we all agree that the tourism sector has the unique ability to effect substantial social and economic changes for the benefit of many.

I believe that tourism can do so in three critical ways; by sustaining dialogue, by celebrating diversity, and by creating prosperity.

In this way, the efforts of the tourism sector can help to create and to sustain more peaceful, more prosperous, and hence, more resilient societies.

As tourism grows and the sector flourishes, a whole host of opportunities and skills open up to our peoples. Some of these opportunities include language-learning, business skills, and hospitality training, which become key components, to develop a more competent, diversified, flexible, and competitive workforce.

In this way, the lives of countless individuals and families, and their communities and businesses, stand to benefit from increased investment in the peace-building potential of tourism, which will definitely lead to sustainable prosperity.

This fact is also underlined by the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and it's Sustainable Development Goals. In particular SDG Number 8, which focuses on the importance of sustainable economies.

SDG 8, Target 9 goes into more detail, whereby it states that, by 2030, we must devise and implement policies that promote sustainable tourism, while also creating jobs and promoting local culture and products.

SDG 8 is putting pressure on all of us to be more innovative in our endeavours.

The tourism sector also has the responsibility to respond effectively, to the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals Number 14 and Number 15, which target the sustainable future of our oceans and land mass, respectively.

As the tourism sector expands, into new and more innovative territories, it must also keep the environmental wellbeing of our ecosystems at its heart.

An environmentally responsible perspective will be of direct benefit to the tourism industry. In fact, entire communities and societies stand to benefit if we safeguard our global environmental heritage.

Our environmental responsibility, within the tourism sector, is further emphasised by the report, published last year by the United Nations World Bank Group, which is entitled ‘The Potential of the Blue Economy in Tourism’.

This important report states that; *“Sustainable tourism can be part of the blue economy, promote conservation and sustainable use of marine environments and species, generate income for local communities (thus alleviating poverty), and maintain and respect local cultures, traditions, and heritage.”*

A sustainable tourism industry is, therefore, a critical component, to our global strategies, to preserve healthy and sustainable life on this planet.

I believe that long-term investment in the sustainable future of our planet, and its sensitive ecosystems, must be at the centre of all our touristic endeavours, to ensure a sustainable tourism industry.

On concluding, let me reiterate my firm conviction, which I am sure is shared by all of us, that tourism has the potential to be a key contributor for peace and prosperity in our nations.

It is for all these reasons that the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation was set up with a vision; *“to revitalise the efforts to transform the Mediterranean into an area of peace, cooperation and prosperity by investing and promoting sustainable tourism growth across the region.”*

Hence, I would like to encourage us all, to work together, and to achieve these goals.

Let us be innovative let us think outside the box, of how we can collaborate on bilateral and regional levels, for the benefit of our businesses and all of our peoples.

Let me encourage all stakeholders, within the tourism industry, to lead by example, by encouraging dialogue; by creating opportunities for friendship; by celebrating diversity; by investing in our ecosystems, in our societies, and in our economies; and by promoting positive peace across our world.

Please permit me to urge you all, to endeavour, arduously, to make the tourism industry a true driver for solidarity, peace, and prosperity, for your benefit, for your families, and for all of humanity, now and in the future.

Please do be ambassadors of sustainable tourism, for positive peace and inclusive prosperity.