
Opening Address by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at the JCI Malta Symposium, entitled 'Pushing Boundaries'

26th October 2017

It is my pleasure to address the opening of this “Pushing Boundaries” Symposium, which aims to tackle the challenging but essential topic of discrimination within our communities and across our societies.

Let me also take this opportunity to commend JCI Malta for their efforts to push this topic forward, and to create a respectful space for discussion and debate. I am informed that you have gathered participants for today’s event from five JCI countries, including Syria, Jordan, Estonia, the United Kingdom, and Malta.

By sharing the experiences and aspirations of young people from all over the world, your symposium be enriched by diverse perspectives and points of view.

By working together, you will also be effectively helping to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

I am also pleased to note that you have chosen to focus your deliberations on specific forms of discrimination, being faced by individuals and groups within our society. In particular, I am informed that you will also be highlighting migrant populations.

Let me draw your attention to a recent report, prepared by the Migrant Women Association of Malta, entitled “Stepping Up: An Investigation of Female Asylum Seekers and Employment in Malta”.

This report surveyed women coming from Libya, Syria, Somalia, and Eritrea, and an overwhelming 78.6 percent of participants said that they believed discrimination is the main obstacle to their chances of finding long-term and dignified employment.

The report states, and I quote, “*discrimination is not only high in the total sample, but also high for each and every nation group surveyed.*” End quote.

It is alarming to consider the implications of such exclusion, on the basis of racial discrimination, which is being faced by these women.

Such discrimination hinders equitable participation in our economies and societies.

Not only do migrant and refugee women, and their families, suffer because of these unacceptably high levels of prejudice, but our communities and societies are negatively impacted, due to a lack of more inclusive and open economies.

I believe that this example highlights the importance of an intersectional approach, in all our strategies to effectively tackle the scourge of discrimination.

Just as these women are facing intersecting prejudices, on the grounds of their ethnicity, their gender, and their legal status, so too do many other groups and communities face complex challenges to their full and equitable participation within our societies.

Discrimination and prejudice are the great impediments that stand in our way, to creating the kind of inclusive and peaceful world which we deserve; a world which we will be proud to hand down to our future generations.

I would like to encourage you, as young people, to be today's activists of inclusion, in order to become the effective leaders of inclusive societies, tomorrow.

You must also be an example of how diversity can be a source of strength and empowerment in our lives.

Furthermore, you are in a privileged position as members of JCI, to share this message with your colleagues, your peers, and your communities around the world.

I urge you to use your influence to create more inclusive and participatory environments, such as the safe space created by this symposium, where the voices of each and every one of us can be heard and respected.

Above all, I would like to encourage you to ensure that you are always guided, in this uncertain world, by universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I urge you, as young people, to push for the strong participation of civil society, so as to encourage our policymakers and authorities to safeguard this precious legacy of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to keep extending its global reach for the benefit of all.

Finally, let me share with you some inspiring words, spoken by the American civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, who said;

“If we desire a society of peace, then we cannot achieve such a society through violence. If we desire a society without discrimination, then we must not discriminate against anyone in the process of building this society. If we desire a society that is democratic, then democracy must become a means as well as an end.” End quote.

Let me conclude by once again commending the efforts of JCI Malta, to promote strategies of inclusion and active participation through this series of events, facilitated by the Erasmus+ programme.

When I see the young people of Malta reaching out to connect beyond the shores of our islands, I am reminded of the great potential which our nation has, to be a centre of peace and dialogue in our Euro-Mediterranean region, and beyond.

I augur you success, not only with your discussions, but also by building new friendships and connections.

I look forward to exploring the outcomes of your deliberations.