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*Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta  
on the occasion of the National Day of the United Kingdom, 15 June 2018*

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Your Excellency  
Distinguished Guests,  
Dear Friends.

The history that unites the United Kingdom and Malta goes back, throughout the centuries. It is a legacy which has changed, in many ways, but it continues to exist thanks to the strong connections between our peoples.

In fact, there is a unique relationship between our countries, and events such as today's celebration provide an ideal opportunity for us to affirm these important friendships.

High Commissioner, on this particular occasion and in this spirit of friendship, I would like you to convey, in my name and on behalf of the Government and the People of Malta, our best wishes for the official birthday of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, and to the Government and the People of the United Kingdom.

Let me begin by celebrating the excellent diplomatic ties between our countries. I am convinced that our strong relations will remain secure, as both our nations move forward, to face the challenges of today's changing world.

I believe that our common goals, for the prosperity and wellbeing of our peoples, will continue to create a wealth of opportunities, for the mutual benefit of both our countries.

Our regular high-level exchanges, between our respective authorities, are further proof of the firm links between us.

The visit of His Royal Highness Prince Charles, last year, for the 75th anniversary of the Conferment of the George Cross for the bravery of the Maltese people during the Second World War, is a vivid example of these connections.

Earlier this year, my Prime Minister, Dr Joseph Muscat, visited London on the occasion of CHOGM 2018.

CHOGM 2018 provided an opportunity for Malta to showcase the Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence, and the Commonwealth Small States Trade Facility, both of which will be hosted in Malta.

I was also in London, during CHOGM 2018, to open a Commonwealth roundtable conference entitled "Children, Community, and Commonwealth."

This event was facilitated in collaboration between my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network, the British Council, Microsoft, and other collaborators.

This initiative brought together the voices of children from various Commonwealth countries, to share their ideas about the future of the Commonwealth of Nations.

It is also important to note the healthy economic links between the business communities of our countries, including the 2,460 local companies with shareholding interest from the United Kingdom.

Moreover the tourism sector continues to be a stable link between our two countries. The number of visitors between Malta and the United Kingdom remains high, creating important opportunities for person-to-person connections.

Our people-to-people contact is also very strong, due to the large diaspora of British people who are resident in Malta. This is estimated to be over 20,000, while the Maltese diaspora in the United Kingdom totals approximately 81,000 Maltese citizens and descendants. This represents the third-largest Maltese diaspora in the world.

I am confident that the protection of the rights of Maltese and British citizens, living both in the United Kingdom and in Malta, will continue be safeguarded, as the United Kingdom proceeds with its departure from the European Union.

Even though the United Kingdom plans to exit from the European Union, we will still have the opportunity to promote unity and solidarity together, within the Commonwealth of Nations, and other international fora.

Valletta's ongoing term, as European Capital of Culture for 2018, has opened further exciting opportunities, for cultural cooperation between our respective societies.

I firmly believe that the celebration of our diverse cultures is an essential doorway, to develop new friendships and strengthen existing connections, for the benefit of the people of Malta and the United Kingdom.

Excellency,

Let me conclude by saying that our nations should be most proud of the responsibility we feel, to protect the ideals of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Let us raise our glasses, and drink to the health of Her Majesty the Queen, and to the continuing friendship between the peoples of Malta and the United Kingdom.