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*Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at an activity organised on the occasion of World Refugee Day, organised by the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and UNHCR, 20 June 2018*

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Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to be with so many people of different backgrounds, faith traditions, and beliefs, who share a common outlook of respect and solidarity.

This is the second year we are hosting this reception,.

Let me begin my brief welcoming remarks by commending the collaboration between UNHCR and my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

Throughout the years, we have worked very closely with UNHCR, and we hope that this relationship continues to grow and develop in the future.

The participation of civil society, to promote and safeguard positive change, is one of the fundamental pillars of a healthy and vibrant democracy.

Let me therefore take this opportunity to thank UNHCR, and other members of civil society present here today, for the work that so many of you do, with refugees in this country and beyond.

We cannot forget the astounding indicator from UNHCR, which states that 1 in every 113 people, globally, have been forced to flee their home due to conflict or persecution.

This shows that we have a clear duty to do what we can, as a nation of goodwill, to make sure that the people who are suffering as a result of violence and intolerance are welcomed, with dignity.

The President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society has identified migration as a priority area in our work, to reach out to asylum-seekers, who find themselves in our country.

This is because my Foundation is committed to prioritise the needs of those who are most vulnerable, and to ensure that their universal human rights and fundamental freedoms are being truly respected, and also to provide the necessary empowerment and education.

World Refugee Day gives an opportunity to all of us, to learn more about our role as citizens, and how we can celebrate our diversity in the Maltese Islands.

As citizens of the world, we should not only want freedom and human rights for the people within our own respective societies, but we must uphold the belief that all people are born equal, and deserve equal rights and dignity.

This is the true essence of what it means to be a citizen of a living democracy.

It is how we treat the weakest or most vulnerable members of our communities that shows who we are.

A society is at its strongest when it draws upon its diversity, and when it endeavours to ensure that universal human rights and fundamental freedoms are truly enjoyed by all.

This is the strength I believe that we must promote.

On concluding, I believe that we have a clear, ethical duty, to remind the world that our Mediterranean Region is not simply a place of tragedy.

The Mediterranean Region has always been, throughout the millennia, a place of welcome, of refuge, and of dialogue.

Let us work together, to ensure that this legacy of hope informs our future, as we work to overcome the challenges of our contemporary world.

Thank you for your attention, and I augur that you will enjoy your evening.