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*Opening Address by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta  
at the “Closing the Gender Pay Gap” Conference, Opening Address,  
20 April 2018*

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Hon Thorsteinn Víglundsson, Member of Parliament, Iceland  
Ms Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir, Chair of the Executive Board of Women Political Leaders  
Dr Anna Borg, Director, Centre for Labour Studies, University of Malta

Dr Ruth Farrugia, Director-General, President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society

Distinguished guests  
Dear friends

Let me begin by thanking my Foundation ... the President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, for facilitating today’s important conference, in collaboration with so many essential stakeholders.

These include emPOWER, the Platform of Organisations for Women; the Centre for Labour Studies at the University of Malta; the National Statistics Office; the National Forum of Trade Unions; and Ernst and Young.

It is inspiring to see the synergies that have been created, with each stakeholder bringing their strengths and aspirations to the table, in order to take this conversation to the next level.

It is only by working together, through opportunities such as this conference, that we can continue to highlight the essential need for the equal and equitable socio-economic participation of women.

This conference also gives us the opportunity to promote practical action, to achieve this important goal.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome two of our speakers, who have joined us from Iceland; the Honourable Thorsteinn Viglundsson, Member of the Icelandic Parliament and former Minister for Equality, and Ms Hanna Birna Kristjansdottir, Chair of the Executive Board of Women Political Leaders.

Recently, I visited your beautiful country as part of a Women Political Leaders initiative, of which I am a proud member of the advisory board. I had the opportunity and the privilege to participate in a panel discussion with Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the world's first democratically directly elected female president, whose leadership in the area of women’s empowerment needs no introduction.

Her legacy is surely a source of pride to the people of Iceland, to all women of the world.

For these reasons, I must commend the many ways in which Iceland is leading the way, to introduce concrete measures for equal pay, by making checks and balances legal and mandatory, so that equal pay exists in practice, and not just on paper.

I look forward to hearing from our eminent speakers from Iceland, and I am sure we shall all be inspired with the practical strategies they shall share, and to work towards the economic empowerment of women in the Maltese Islands.

Although there have been a number of important steps forward, for women's economic empowerment in my country, in particular in the increased rate of gainfully occupied women, now it is the time to address the challenge of the gender pay gap.

I am convinced that we all believe that the socio-economic empowerment of women leads to the enrichment of our families, our communities, and our societies as a whole.

Moreover, our journey towards full equality and equity in the economic sectors of our country is evidence of an even deeper commitment, to safeguard the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of all humanity.

In this context, I believe that we must be led by the mandate of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Agenda 2030 is a roadmap that brings with it a system of values, which promote respect for human dignity, the pursuit of equity, effective access to democratic participation, and equitable opportunities for inclusive prosperity.

Sustainable Development Goal Number 5 specifically targets the need for gender equality, and for the empowerment of women and girls, as part of Malta's commitment to a future of equality, equity, and justice for all.

I believe that our society, and our whole world, would benefit from strong female role models, whose example will continue to inspire both our young women and our young men, to become true champions of gender equality and inclusion.

Notwithstanding the large employment gender gap of over 25 percentage points, between Maltese men and women, the 2017 European Institute for Gender Equality index shows some signs of positive development. Most importantly, as I have already stated, these include an increase in the level of women engaged in full-time employment.

However, according to recent data from Malta's National Statistics Office, nearly a quarter of Maltese women claim that they are unable to work due to personal and family responsibilities.

On the other hand, the European Institute for Gender Equality index notes that one of the most serious challenges for gender equality in Malta is the unequal division of time spent by women and men on unpaid work. This includes care, domestic tasks, chores, and social activities.

This reflects a worrying lack of development, when it comes to the mentality and the culture, here in Malta, which still excludes women from full and equitable inclusion in the economy.

We are making considerable strides forward, in terms of legislation and policy .... however, we are not keeping up the same pace to achieve the much-needed mental and cultural leap, to overcome prejudice and discrimination.

According to the latest European Institute for Gender Equality index, the share of Maltese women who are members of boards in the largest quoted companies, is only 3.8 percent, compared to an EU average of 21.7 percent.

When it comes to the share of board members of Malta's central bank, 20 percent are women, as opposed to 80 percent of men.

As regards the top levels of decision-making, according to the 2018 European Commission's Report on Equality Between Women and Men, women account for less than 20 percent of parliamentary members in Malta.

The European Commission's report also echoes the European Institute for Gender Equality index, stating that Malta is among the worst performers on the gender employment gap, in Europe.

It is shocking to acknowledge that the gender pay gap in Malta has almost tripled over four years: from 4.5% in 2014 to 11% in 2018. The overall earning gap stands at nearly 50% according to the latest Eurostat reports.

Let me quote Professor Anna Borg, the director of the Centre for Labour Studies, who shall speak later on during this conference. Professor Borg has said that "women work for free more than a month every year because of the gender pay gap and things will only get worse if nothing is done."

Furthermore, in comparison to men, women still tend to be employed less, are employed in lower-paid sectors, work on average 6 hours longer per week than men, but have fewer paid hours, and face fewer and slower promotions.

Women in the EU are over-represented in industries with low pay levels and under-represented in well paid industries, thereby significantly contributing to the gender pay gap, across the European Union.

We need to find innovative ways to address this troubling situation, especially in our own society, and I hope these indicators will provide valuable food for thought during this conference.

Let me therefore conclude by thanking the number of stakeholders who are present here today, and who are actively interested in taking whatever steps they can, to close the gender pay gap.

I firmly believe that many individuals and organisations within our business sector are well intentioned, but are still lacking in the appropriate strategies to address the issue of the gender pay gap, head on.

Therefore, I augur that today's conference will inspire all stakeholders in Malta to take strategic action.

I am encouraged by the number of people in attendance, and the focus which we are placing on this issue, at a national level.

Let me encourage everyone to be united, in pursuit of sustainable peace, inclusive prosperity, and holistic wellbeing, thereby safeguarding equality, equity, and dignity for each and every member of society in our Maltese Islands.