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*Opening Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of  
Malta at the 2nd Frederick Oforu Memorial Lecture, 21 June 2018*

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Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to once again deliver some brief opening remarks, at this year's Frederick Oforu Memorial lecture.

It is the second year since these lectures were instituted, in the memory of Frederick Oforu, and I am proud to extend my patronage to this important commemoration.

As we all know, Frederick was a young man who came to Malta from Ghana, and took his own life while living here. He left a message for his friends, which explained the despair and isolation that he felt, and the terrible weight of what he described as "being treated like a criminal" by the authorities.

We must never forget Frederick, nor the lesson that his early and tragic death teaches us.

Therefore, let me take this opportunity to commend the Department of Inclusion and Access to Learning, within the University of Malta's Faculty of Education, for facilitating this evening's commemoration.

Let me also extend a warm welcome to the distinguished speaker, Professor Eileen Whelan Ariza.

I am informed that Professor Whelan Ariza will focus her lecture on the sense of confusion, and disorientation, that often occurs when people from different cultures come together due to migration.

This is particularly topical, in light of the upsurge taking place, not only in Europe but across the world. An upsurge triggered by populist ideologies and anti-migration sentiments, and atrocious scaremongering.

The dangerous rhetoric being used, would have us believe that different cultures cannot co-exist. Some populists go so far as to say that they should not co-exist.

However, I believe that the principle of co-existence is essential, not only to strengthen our democratic commitment to universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, but also to reach the full flourishing and the true potential of our society.

More than ever before, migration is intertwined with issues of geopolitics, trade, and cultural exchange.

Migration provides exciting opportunities for our countries, businesses, and communities, from which they stand to benefit in both the short- and long-term.

Migration has been a source of enrichment for people's lives, both in countries of origin and destination. It has offered opportunities for millions of people, all over the world, to build their lives in new societies, and contribute positively and successfully to the respective countries.

In fact, according to a recently published report of the Global Commission on International Migration, almost one in every 10 persons living in developed countries is a migrant.

However, as we know, not all migration occurs in positive circumstances.

Migration and the displacement of people are increasing, due to factors such as violent conflict, persecution, oppression, and environmental degradation.

Individuals and families are escaping situations of intolerable hardship, to seek a better future.

In order for such a future to be successful, I believe that we must emphasise the need for open and respectful dialogue, between the receiving society and the communities who arrive in countries of transit or destination.

For this reason, last year's launch of the Migrant Integration Policy, by the government of Malta, is a good step in the right direction.

However, I believe that we must do much more, right now, to ensure that the implementation date of 2020 is effectively reached.

Greater political will from all relevant stakeholders, including our authorities, is needed. We need to work hand-in-hand with civil society activists and migrant communities, is a must, to effect the much-needed change.

Furthermore, the 2014-2024 National Strategic Policy on Poverty and Social Exclusion must continue to focus on the specific challenges being faced by people with mental health difficulties; people experiencing violence or abuse; and asylum-seekers and migrants.

Each of these groups are identified by the National Strategic Policy as "high risk", and hundreds of asylum-seekers and migrants fall into all three of these categories.

Our authorities have pledged, through this strategic policy, to promote the wellbeing of migrants and asylum-seekers, in a timely way.

As a society, we must effect our commitment to ensure that the wellbeing of all the people who call our Maltese Islands their home is a priority, especially for those who are the most vulnerable.

I believe that it is about time for us to abandon the term 'integration' when discussing this topic, and move to 'inclusion.'

Our society will grow stronger when we embrace and celebrate our diversity, not simply by integrating but by respectfully including all of those individuals and groups, who are currently being left behind.

National policy-makers and institutions must respond to the legitimate needs of migrants and migrant communities, while also recognising that migrants are making important contributions to the socio-economic and cultural life of this country.

It is essential for our authorities to support proactive strategies that promote respect and understanding, both within Maltese society and within migrant communities.

This is what our much-needed dialogue should concentrate upon.

This is our only hope for the successful inclusion of all, in a democratic society.

In order to achieve our goal, we must first of all understand migration from the perspective of migrants themselves. We must listen to, and learn from, migrants.

A better understanding of migrants' choices about migration, and their experiences during their journeys, are of fundamental importance.

This will show us the way to develop more effective policies, which respond to the specific psychosocial and cultural needs of migrants, while also understanding the way we should welcome them into the uniqueness of our Maltese culture.

I augur that the memory of Frederick will be a source of hope for us, to accomplish this ambitious objective.

Frederick's legacy should be reflected in our determination, to ensure that nobody feels so isolated and rejected that ending their own life seems to be the only solution.

May his memory be a strong reminder, for us to keep pursuing a society that is more sensitive, more empathic, more inclusive, more peaceful, and more capable of safeguarding the intrinsic dignity of each and every individual.

Thank you for your attention.