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*Opening Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of  
Malta at the “Mediterranean of Civilisation and Peace” Conference, Sicily, 25  
May 2018*

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[Salutations]

Distinguished guests,  
Dear friends,

Let me begin by commending il Comitato Scientifico, for organising this important conference, entitled “Mediterraneo di Civiltà e Pace.”

If there was ever a time when we needed to profoundly discuss the Mediterranean, in the context of peace, undoubtedly, it is today.

Although the Mediterranean has always been the cradle of civilisations, since time immemorial, conflicts have always predominated our history and obscured the richness of our diversity.

As the President of an island-nation, and as a woman from the Mediterranean Sea, I feel it is a privilege, to belong to this unique part of the world.

As people of the Mediterranean, we all have so much to be proud of.

In fact, the breathtaking diversity and cultural richness of the Mediterranean, along with its historical and social legacy, provides us, as people from the region, with a unique understanding of how to develop holistic strategies for sustainable peace and inclusive prosperity.

I so truly believe, and I know that many of you share my vision, that the Mediterranean can be an effective model for peace and prosperity, for other parts of the world.

The people of the Mediterranean can be an example of strength and solidarity, by engaging in an ongoing and meaningful dialogue, to connect among the many communities, from all over the region.

The countries of the Mediterranean have different demographic characteristics and contrasting levels of development, yet our history is so intimately connected.

I consider the people of our region as one family, and like every family, we must want the best for one another.

First and foremost, we must ensure that the conflicts, which are taking place across our region, are addressed, in the best interests of our children and young people.

Our children and young people need to have stability; ..... they need to have protection; ..... they need to have security, for them to be able to live peacefully, and also, to be able to build a culture of positive peace.

Positive peace is not simply the absence of violence or armed conflict.

Positive peace is a deep-rooted and long-term transformation, which must happen within and among our communities and nations, to make peace a sustainable reality for all.

To achieve this spirit of positive peace within our Mediterranean region, and across our world, I believe that we must effectively take up 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 promotes, primarily, justice for all. These values are based upon:

The respect for human dignity;  
The pursuit of equity;  
The effective access to democratic participation; and  
The fair distribution of wealth.

An effectively committed implementation, by all of our nations, to achieve Agenda 2030, in an effective and timely way, will ensure the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, by all the people of the Mediterranean, and all of humanity.

Each and every one of us must understand that everyone has a role to play, to achieve these goals and to work for sustainable peace.

Our authorities and all of our citizens must be united in one commitment, to stand up for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, for the benefit of all humanity.

Such a commitment is even more important for our family of nations, in our region.

For example, the phenomenon of migration is a pressing concern in many of our countries.

According to indicators from the International Organisation for Migration, the number of individuals and families seeking refuge across the Mediterranean, in 2017, numbered over 115, 000.

The number of fatalities of people crossing the Mediterranean Sea is estimated to be over 2,000, and this is a very conservative estimate.

We cannot allow this situation to continue.

We must work hard, to generate the much-needed solidarity between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.

It is also essential for us to seriously invest our efforts in the empowerment of the people of Africa, as Africa does not need charity.

Africa is a continent of opportunity.

I believe that Europe and the Mediterranean have the responsibility to invest sustainably in Africa. When we invest in Africa, we are investing in human rights; ..... in peace; ..... in growth; and ..... in prosperity.

In order to do so effectively, we must be constantly on our guard against the dangers of populism and fear-mongering, which are, unfortunately, increasing in many of our countries.

We cannot continue to stare at the crises and struggles of our neighbours.

Now is a most appropriate moment in our history, to encourage and to promote a culture of peace, by addressing inequalities.

A culture of peace is the only sustainable response against violent extremism and intolerance, which are affecting our region and our world.

In order to achieve our objectives, I believe it is essential that we intensify processes of intercultural encounters and interfaith dialogue; ..... to overcome suspicion; ..... to nurture respect; ..... and to ensure that we are giving dignity to one another.

We must keep reaching out, across the borders and beyond the barriers that constrain us.

We must recognise that the values which unite us, as the diverse people of the Mediterranean region, are stronger than the challenges that divide us.

The unique heritage and history of our region is a source of powerful connection, and we must do our utmost to pass on this legacy, to our future generations.

I believe it is crucial for all of us, including our authorities and civil society organisations, to endeavour to empower our children and young people, by providing safe and welcoming spaces, where their aspirations can be heard, and followed.

They are the present of our countries and our region.

They are our leaders of tomorrow.

It is therefore the responsibility of each and every one of us, and all of our authorities, to create opportunities for them to connect with one another.

For peace to be enjoyed, we must ensure that no one is left behind, marginalised, excluded, or oppressed.

We must ensure that we create the appropriate environment, where each and every one of us, as part of one human family, is encouraged to make their own contribution to achieve sustainable peace and inclusive prosperity.

We must empower our children and young people to know their choices, and to make them wisely.

We must empower them to make the choice for dignity;  
We must empower them to make the choice for respect;  
We must empower them to make the choice for justice;  
We must empower them to make the choice for peace;  
To make the Mediterranean region a better place for our children and young people.

Thank you for your attention.