
*Opening Address, delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of
Malta, at the “Every Life Matters Conference”, 26 April 2018*

[Salutations]
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends.

It is my pleasure to share some brief remarks at the opening of this important conference.

The theme for today’s discussion, “Every Life Matters”, is particularly timely. I am glad to see the participation of so many national and international experts, who will be sharing their research and insight.

Let me also take this opportunity to commend the conference organisers, namely, the Life Network Foundation Malta and Dar tal-Providenza, in collaboration with the One of Us Federation and LeJeune Foundation.

Thank you for collaborating to provide a safe space to share your expertise and information.

I believe that it is essential for us to always promote, prioritise, and protect the intrinsic dignity of the human person.

This is especially necessary at a time when our country is undergoing historical changes, in the spheres of legislation and policy, which deal with sensitive areas of reproductive care.

I believe that it is necessary for all of our professionals, civil society activists, national authorities, and also members of affected communities, to participate in respectful dialogue, around these issues of such ethical importance.

I also believe that it is necessary to focus on finding innovative ways to increase awareness about the need for sustainable inclusion, and the full participation of every individual, especially those who are living with disabilities or experiencing various forms of vulnerability.

When we promote inclusion and participation, we are celebrating the diversity which enriches our communities and our society.

It is this commitment, to the celebration of diversity, which creates a context for truly democratic values, and universal human rights, to flourish and grow stronger.

The inclusion of persons with disabilities, at all levels of society, is part and parcel of our commitment to uphold these democratic values, and safeguard universal human rights.

Furthermore, it is also the duty of our authorities to create opportunities for the full participation of each and every member of society, within the life of this nation.

Legislation and national policies, to ensure inclusion are important, however, I also believe that we must work to sustainably encourage a mentality of support and solidarity, which can shield us from the dangers of prejudice, exclusion, and marginalisation.

Such dangers can be even more predominant, when they are confronted by individuals who are already experiencing increased vulnerability or risks of abuse.

Effective enjoyment of the human rights of all people, including persons with disabilities, requires that our authorities and policy-makers are made aware of the extreme prejudices, which are in some circumstances still faced by members of these communities.

For this reason, I am pleased to note that individuals and families, with first hand experiences of living with disabilities, shall have the opportunity to share their narratives during this conference.

You are the experts on your own lives, and it is our responsibility to listen, to your needs and aspirations.

Once again I would like to thank the conference organisers for creating an opportunity for effective democratic participation.

In this context I appeal to our authorities to listen, to take action, and to continue to endeavor to confront the prejudices that are at times still deeply embedded within our culture.

Persons with disabilities must always be our essential partners, in the process of transforming and improving our legislation and policies.

It is by listening to them that we can understand the needs that are to be addressed to transform our society, and create, in the process the context for the holistic wellbeing of all.

For example, as prenatal testing become more easily accessible, I am sure that we would all agree that such testing is an important component, to achieve comprehensive and effective prenatal care, for both a mother and her unborn child.

However, let us also be aware that the possibility exists for the abuse of prenatal testing.

In real time, our country is experiencing a unique opportunity to discuss the potential tensions that exist between arguments for reproductive choice, and the rights of people with disabilities.

I am hopeful that this conference will be part of the larger conversation, taking place in our society, to address misconceptions and to encourage a context of respectful discussion.

I believe that the intrinsic dignity of the human person does not depend on their gender, ethnicity, health, mental capacity, disability, or any other specific factor.

We derive our humanity from something far more fundamental, and for this reason, I augur that we, as a nation, shall always be led by a rights-based approach, which affirms and safeguards the dignity and respect of all the diverse people who call the Maltese Islands their home.

Thank you for your attention.