
Opening Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, during the Personal Empowerment Day in Malta, organised by BPW Europe, 6th April 2018

[Salutations]

Dear friends.

I would like to begin my brief remarks by commending BPW Malta, for facilitating this important opportunity to encourage the personal and professional empowerment of Maltese women.

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome Dr Catherine Bosshart, BPW International Vice President on United Nations Matters.

Dr Bosshart, I hope you shall have some time to enjoy our beautiful islands and tremendous heritage, during your stay in Malta.

We all believe that the empowerment of our women and girls is essential, in order for us to create a healthy and prosperous society, which can effectively achieve our fundamental democratic ideals of equality, equity, and justice.

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 promotes respect for human dignity, the pursuit of equity, effective access to democratic participation, and equitable opportunities for prosperity.

Sustainable Development Goal Number 5 specifically targets the need for gender equality, and for the empowerment of women and girls, as part of our countries' 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 inspire both our young women and our young men, to become true champions of gender equality and inclusion.

It was for this reason that EMPOWER, Malta's first Platform of Organisations for Women, has been facilitated by my Foundation the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

This platform is aimed to encourage more women to participate in positions of influence and leadership, while also creating closer synergies among nationally-active groups of women in commerce, business, and social activism.

Such opportunities for connection, between groups of women, and such opportunities for empowerment, are necessary, especially when we know that, according to the updated indicators from the World Economic Forum, it will take an estimated 217 years to end disparities in the pay and employment opportunities of men and women.

This indicator shows a disturbing increase on a previous indicator, by the World Economic Forum, which said it would take 170 years. This is evidence of the fact that disparities are becoming worse, rather than better.

In the face of such worry indicators, we cannot be complacent.

Let me now focus, for some time, on the situation in our country. 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 developments. Most importantly, this index is showing a positive increase in the level of Maltese 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.

The European Institute for Gender Equality index also 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.

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.

As regards the top levels of decision-making, according to the 2018 European Commission's Report on Equality Between Women and Men, Maltese 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.

In fact, according to the European Commission's Report, women across the European Union are still a long way off, from achieving full economic independence.

In comparison to men, Maltese 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 cannot afford to be complacent.

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 your workshops at this conference.

On concluding, I believe that we must continue to do more, to make sure that women's voices are being heard by our authorities and within our business communities.

We must use every platform at our disposal, to promote women's participation across all levels of Maltese society, and to ensure that women are developing important skills of leadership and networking, such as you are promoting at today's event.

Let us be united, to safeguard equality, equity, and dignity for each and every member of society, in pursuit of sustainable peace, prosperity and wellbeing in our Maltese Islands.

Thank you for your attention.