

**Opening Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at the Mental Health Association Gozo Annual Conference, with the theme “Kemm Inħossni Tajjeb ... minn 1 sa 10?”, 12 October 2018**

**Dear friends,**

**Two days ago, people from all over the world commemorated International Mental Health Day.**

**I am pleased to say that this conference is also making a valuable contribution, to the much-needed focus in our country, on issues of mental health awareness and advocacy against social stigma.**

**Therefore, let me begin by commending the work of the Mental Health Association of Gozo, in particular the Association President Ms Pauline Camilleri, and the Association’s collaborators, namely, the Gozo General Hospital and the Ministry for Gozo.**

**As we all know, issues of mental health are affecting people from all across society in our Maltese Islands.**

**Whether old or young, employed or unemployed, women or men, minority groups or mainstream society, mental health is a topic that touches each and every one of us.**

**In the same way, challenges to mental health can affect anybody, at any stage of their lives.**

**According to indicators from the World Health Organisation, 1 out of 15 people suffer from major depression across the Europe region. Furthermore, if we include all forms of anxiety and depression, then that number climbs to 4 out of 15 people.**

**This data is reinforced by the latest statistics from Eurostat, which indicate that chronic depression is a pervasive and serious concern among all the communities of the European Union.**

According to a Europe-wide survey, almost 4 percent of men and almost 7 percent of women, in the Maltese Islands, are living with severe or chronic depression.

The next wave of this survey will be conducted in 2019, to give us a better idea of whether the work that is currently being done, to address these issues, is having a positive effect.

I am convinced that one important contribution we can make is to ensure that people feel supported, and do not feel isolated or alone with their struggles.

I believe that the wellbeing of our entire society is negatively affected, even when one individual does not feel sufficiently empowered.

Too often, people only reach out for help in the event of an emergency. Too often, people are living in complete silence with their concerns, allowing treatable problems of mental health to get out of hand.

Studies have shown that a relapses, in more severe forms of mental illness, are less common among individuals whose family and friends can provide stable support.

Therefore, we owe it to one another to provide this level of support.

For this reason, my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, with support from the Office of the Commissioner for Mental Health, produced an awareness-raising video for World Mental Health Day.

I am pleased to note that this video, which focuses on the issue of suicide prevention, will be shown later during the conference.

The video highlights national indicators, which tell us that 88 percent of the suicides in Malta are completed by men.

Certainly, the issue of suicide affects both women and men.

However, I believe that we must do more, as one united society, to ensure that our boys and young men are empowered to express and to talk about their emotions, and reach out for care when it is necessary.

First of all, I believe that all of us must take good care of ourselves, and our own mental health.

This is why the topics selected for this conference, to encourage a sense of wellbeing and self-empowerment, are so important.

We must continue asking ourselves, “Kemm Inħossni Tajjeb?”, and take action if, and when, we find ourselves giving a more negative response.

Most importantly, we must continue to prioritise open dialogue, among all stakeholders within the mental health sector, especially the essential contributions of the individuals who are experiencing challenges to their mental health.

Nobody can teach us more about issues of mental health, and how to provide practical support, than those who are, or who have, lived through such experiences.

On concluding, let me once again commend the Mental Health Association of Gozo for the work you are doing. Thanks to your endeavours, you are encouraging a more positive attitude, towards issues of mental health.

In this way, you are ensuring that the dignity and the holistic wellbeing, of each and every individual and family in our islands, remains a top priority.

Thank you.