

**Closing Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta,  
at the 2019 Virdimura Award Ceremony, at Verdala Palace, 16 March 2019**

**[Salutations]**

**Distinguished guests,**

**Dear friends,**

**It is my pleasure to address you at this distinguished ceremony, which celebrates the role of women as crucial collaborators, to achieve sustainable peace, inclusive prosperity, and holistic wellbeing within our Mediterranean Region.**

**In particular, let me take this opportunity to commend Dr Ethyl Felice, whose contributions to the wellbeing and welfare of Maltese society are well known.**

**As a mental health professional, and as an advocate for the mental health of mothers in particular, she is an inspiration for all of us.**

**Ethyl, I am so very proud of the work that you are doing, for the benefit of our communities here in Malta and throughout the Mediterranean, and beyond.**

**Let me begin my brief reflections by reminding all of us that women have, throughout our history, stood out as inspiring contributors to achieve prosperity and progress in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.**

**However, women have rarely received the recognition, which is our due.**

**In this context, I wish to pay tribute to the late Fatema Mernissi, the celebrated Moroccan scholar and feminist who died three years ago.**

**Mernissi said that “the real mistake of women was to let the memoir, the collective, the history, the space of producing history, fall into the hands of men alone.”**

**The International Viridimura Award is an example of how we are taking back the necessary space that belongs to women, as our right, to be the authors of our own narratives.**

**As we know, Dr Viridimura herself is a symbol of empowerment, when she became the first woman in history to graduate as a medical doctor.**

**She is an example for all the girls and women of the Mediterranean Region, to keep pursuing their ambitions and to achieve their aspirations, even in the face of discrimination and prejudice.**

**I believe that, at this uncertain period in the history of our world, there is an urgent need for humanity to promote the values of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, which should be at the core of our democracies.**

**We must be champions of a culture that promotes inclusion, equality, and respect, in order to ensure that all of our citizens, regardless of their gender, are able to effectively access opportunities for success.**

**Such a culture can only be achieved when the international community achieves the vision of the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 5.**

**This global Goal commits all of our countries to make gender equality, equity, and inclusion a reality in our lifetime.**

**On concluding, I believe that we must continue to make our societies more gender-inclusive and gender-conscious, by exploring further initiatives in the Mediterranean and beyond.**

**Let me urge all of you, to make every effort possible, to ensure that our countries keep developing their potential, as enablers of equality, peace, and prosperity, for the benefit of all.**

**The women of the Mediterranean are ideal ambassadors of these values, because it is women who are so often at the heart of our families, the communities, and societies.**

**When women are given their rightful visibility, and the tools they need to be empowered, then our entire Mediterranean Region will prosper, for the benefit of both present and future generations.**

**Thank you.**