

Opening Address by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at an Interfaith Consultation Discussion entitled “United in Dialogue” at “The Majlis: Cultures in Dialogue” at The Palace, Valletta, 23 October 2018

Dear friends,

Let me begin by thanking each and every one of you, for joining us at this event. We are bringing together so many of the diverse communities of faith, in our Maltese Islands.

We have chosen to meet here, in the Palace, during the “United in Dialogue” exhibition, which would not have been possible without the collaboration among my Office, the Sheikh Faisal Museum, and our collaborators.

The endorsement that this exhibition has received, as part of Valletta’s ongoing term as European Capital of Culture, is an example of Malta’s unique identity, as a bridge between diverse cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.

I believe that this exhibition is providing the perfect venue for our deliberations, and the “majlis” we are sitting inside is a beautiful space of hospitality and friendship.

Malta has always been a central place of gathering, the “majlis” of the Mediterranean.

The Maltese Islands have always provided a space where different cultures and peoples have gathered together, in a spirit of dialogue and connection, for centuries.

For this reason, the fact we are coming together to discuss a united Interfaith Declaration, which will be signed during the United Nations' Interfaith Harmony Week at the beginning of next year, is a strong indication of our commitment to nurture further dialogue and opportunities for connection in Malta, and beyond.

Over the past years, World Interfaith Harmony Week has been an important commemoration, on the calendar of my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. We have organised various interfaith and ecumenical events, which can now be taken to the next level.

When we treat one another with love, we are creating a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation, which is essential, to create more peaceful and inclusive societies.

Interfaith harmony is essential in order to keep promoting sustainable social, economic, and environmental development for all, especially the poor and excluded.

This is because religious groups have, throughout the centuries, been doing their utmost to help to lift the poor out of precarity; to feed the hungry; to build hospitals and care for the sick; to maintain

educational institutions; and to welcome strangers, in desperate need of support.

People of faith have so much to offer, in terms of recognising and protecting the dignity of every person; honouring the diverse families, which make up our communities; and prioritising our moral responsibility to care for our environment, while also spreading a message of peace and respect.

Of course, the potential to share these virtues with one another does not end with people of faith. Each and every individual in society, whether a believer or not, has the duty to defend the dignity of others.

Let me also take this opportunity to draw your attention to some important research, which shows that, in the next thirty years, an increasing number of people will form part of the world's diverse religions.

Therefore, it is essential for us to set a good example, by creating mutually beneficial and respectful relationships among all faith traditions.

I believe that Malta has a special role to play, as a bridge between cultures and continents, and a strong voice for peace and dialogue.

This interfaith event is an opportunity for you, as community leaders, to make a tangible and long-lasting contribution

I am sure you will all agree with me, that religion has a unique role, to be a driver for love, peace, and respect in Maltese society.

The people of Malta are living proof of the rich diversity of influences and traditions, which make up the peoples of the Mediterranean.

Let us always strive to be an example of strength and solidarity, by engaging in meaningful dialogue and forming deep friendships between and amongst our communities.

We are a family, and like every family, we must want the best for one another, in order for all of us to achieve the desired success.

I believe that each and every one of us has something vital to contribute, as a crucial contributor to build sustainable peace and inclusive prosperity.

Let us be united, in pursuit of peace, prosperity, and wellbeing, thereby safeguarding equality, equity, and dignity for each and every member of society in the Maltese Islands, and for the whole of humanity.

Thank you for your attention.