

Opening Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the Valletta 2018 Annual Conference with the theme “Sharing the Legacy”, 24 October 2018

**Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,**

I feel truly honoured to be invited to give some opening remarks at this prestigious fifth international conference, organised by the Valletta 2018 Foundation.

It is also a great pleasure to welcome so many distinguished speakers and panelists to the Maltese Islands.

“Sharing the Legacy” ... is an appropriate title for today’s event.

I am confident that during your deliberations, you will discover many ways in which the social and artistic communities of Malta, and beyond, can move to the next level, by assessing and evaluating the medium and long term effects of the many events that have taken place during this time.

Before indulging further into my contribution, I would like to take the opportunity to commend all of the hard work that has been put in by the dedicated team of professionals and volunteers, led by Mr Jason Micallef, Chair of the Valletta 2018 Foundation.

Let me also thank the Honourable Minister for Culture, Justice, and Local Government, Dr Owen Bonnici, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Consumer Protection and Valletta 2018, Dr Deo DeBattista, for their determination, and the strong show of political will to ensure that this historical event will be a success; with long term sustainable benefits.

Valletta may be the smallest capital city in terms of size, within the European Union, but thanks to all your efforts, we have created a unique cultural contribution for our Union, and for our Mediterranean Region.

I am pleased to note that sustainability has been a key consideration across all of the activities and endeavours, to make Valletta 2018, a long-term achievement.

I am also truly proud of the fact that my government has taken up the sustainability of Valletta, as part of our international responsibility, towards the effective implementation of the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

It is by using this roadmap for sustainability, which is provided by the SDGs, that I will focus most of my contribution this morning.

Sustainability is at the core Agenda 2030 which aims, for a better planet, in the best interest of our human family.

It is truly heartening that the international community within the United Nations, for the very first time, recognised the importance of culture. So much so, that it found it necessary to include it as a central component of Agenda 2030.

I believe that culture is what shapes us. It gives meaning to our identity.

Therefore, I believe that ensuring that culture is a cornerstone of our national, regional, and international development policies, is the only way to safeguard our identities, and to create truly inclusive societies.

Moreover, I believe that we must work together, within our diverse societies, towards a more holistic and global sustainability approach, as we cannot achieve the desired results singlehandedly.

If, as a regional and international community, we effectively adopt such an approach, this will ensure a future where equality, inclusion, environmental sustainability, and peace, are effectively safeguarded, for the benefit of all our human family.

Undoubtedly, to achieve this vision, we will also require the creative contributions of our cultural sector.

In fact, SDG Number 11 states clearly that we must make our cities “inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”.

SDG Number 11, Target 4 specifies that we must all do our utmost, to, and I quote, “protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage.”

I am proud of the many endeavours that have been put in by my government, and Maltese authorities, to invest sustainably in Valletta, to ensure that its cultural heritage is conserved and safeguarded.

This does not mean that we can rest on our laurels, as there is always much more to do.

Therefore, I augur that all of the authorities and civil society in the Maltese Islands continue to work in synergy, to safeguard Valletta, and eventually, all of the other cities and localities on these islands.

I also augur that this conference will provide a respectful space for honest discussion, about how to do more, to sustainably protect our cultural and our natural heritage.

On the other hand, as we are all aware, culture is also a catalyst to generate sustainable employment opportunities.

Tourism, which is a major pillar of Malta’s economy but also, a major pillar for most of the economies in our region, flourishes in an environment where culture is celebrated.

Another point which I would like to raise, at the beginning of this important conference, is women's contribution to culture.

UNESCO's latest report about this issue makes it clear, that a substantial percentage of individuals, employed in activities within the cultural sector, are women. This means that an investment in culture is also an essential investment in SDG Number 5, which targets gender equality and equity.

Prioritising cultural policies that promote local products, and honour the contributions of our local craftsmen and women, will make a valuable contribution to reducing social inequalities, in line with SDG Number 10.

I augur that these principles and objectives, embedded within the Agenda 2030, will continue to be highlighted in the strategies of our authorities, institutions, and private sector stakeholders, to ensure that cultural sustainability remains high on the Maltese agenda.

Working in synergy is key, to continue raising the bar and setting new standards, in so many areas of social and cultural development.

Cultural investment is not "something extra" it is a essential investment, in the sustainability legacy of our Maltese Islands.

Investment in the cultural sector is an investment in our values.

These values are a powerful embodiment of our aspirations, to create social and political utility, through the effective education of our communities; the implementation of social justice; and a commitment to uphold universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

These are the values that constitute a crucial part of our Maltese, Mediterranean, and European heritage.

Valletta 2018 has given so much visibility to these values.

Malta's geostrategic position at the crossroads of the Mediterranean has made our country a natural bridge, between continents and cultures.

I hope that the legacy of Valletta's term as European Capital of Culture will be a powerful reminder of this vocation, which we have, as Maltese, always prioritized as an island for peace and unity.

On concluding, let me quote the words of Pericles, one of the great statesmen of our Mediterranean history, and an early defender of democracy.

He said that "what we leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others."

I am confident that the work of the individuals, the artists, the innovators, the researchers, and the visionaries, who have made this

year an opportunity for innovation and exploration, will resonate in the lives of our Maltese communities, for decades to come.

I believe that our success will be measured by, to what extent we have made the lives of others more inspiring, more beautiful, and more filled with dignity and opportunities for positive and sustainable development.

This is the kind of legacy I wish for us to leave, to our present and future generations, as the people of the Maltese Islands.

I augur that Valletta 2018 will only be the beginning for a more sustainable way of life to be embraced by all the cities and villages of our islands.

Thank you for your attention.