

**Keynote Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the 3rd World Conference on Tourism and Culture organized by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation and UNESCO, Istanbul, 3 December 2018**

**[Salutations]**

**Distinguished guests,**

**Dear friends,**

**It is truly my pleasure to be in Istanbul, and to have the opportunity to address you, during this 3rd World Conference on Tourism and Culture.**

**I would also like to commend, the collaboration between the UNWTO and UNESCO, for facilitating this important conference.**

**The theme of this conference, “For the Benefit of All”, is truly befitting, because tourism, in synergy with culture, has the potential to generate growth not only at a national and regional level, but also it can create direct and immediate socio-economic gains for local communities.**

**When speaking of the interconnection between the tourism industry and culture ..... we are also speaking of community-level tourism ..... We are also essentially promoting the much-needed dialogue among diverse cultures, in today’s world.**

**Let me urge you, from the outset, as stakeholders in the tourism industry, to transform this industry into a new form of diplomacy. Let me encourage you to think of tourism, as also a catalyst for diplomacy.**

**Tourism diplomacy is a way of opening up to tourists visiting our countries, to understand, acknowledge, and respect each other's diverse cultures.**

**Tourism diplomacy is so much needed in today's uncertain and suspicious approach towards one another.**

**In this context, I truly believe that a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry, will need to embrace, the cultural sector.**

**This is to ensure that the tourist will have the opportunity to explore and appreciate the local culture.**

**Through this approach, local communities will also benefit from the prosperity created by the industry.**

**As I see it, it is only in this way that the tourism industry can serve to create inclusive prosperity, social cohesion and peace, for all humanity.**

**This can be ensured by developing, and by giving the visibility that is needed, for example, to the cultural and traditional heritage of all communities within our societies.**

**As we all know, tourism is a job-generating industry due to its labour-intensive character. Therefore, if the tourism industry reaches out to local communities it can also help to develop dignified job opportunities for diversely-skilled, and qualified people, on a community level.**

**To further my argument, allow me to share, the experience and good practices of my country, regarding the importance, to bringing tourism and culture in synergy.**

**As a Mediterranean country, the tourism industry for Malta, has been one of the most long-standing pillars of the Maltese economy. Therefore, we are very acquainted with the benefits derived from the tourism industry.**

**Through our long-standing experiences, we became very aware of the importance of developing a sustainable tourism product, by incorporating, within this product, our diverse and rich culture. We have learned how to offer a distinctive and authentic experience to the millions of visitors that now choose Malta as their holiday destination, all the year round.**

**A very visible and constructive example of what I am talking about is this year's celebration of Valletta's term, as the European Capital of Culture.**

**Valletta's successful nomination as the European Capital of Culture, gave us the opportunity to put a spotlight on our historical heritage, and also on the many traditions that are still enjoyed in the many diverse quaint villages, of the Maltese Islands.**

**Moreover, in preparation to this year-long event, the cultural sector in Malta has been empowered and encouraged to participate, together with other foreign artists who were invited to Malta to take part in the numerous Valletta 2018 events.**

**This has led to a multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary experience, which was enjoyed by locals and tourists alike.**

**In fact, the positive socio-economic impact of Valletta as the European Capital of Culture, was tangibly seen in the substantial increase of more than 18% in first-time tourists, and another 9% increase in repeat tourists, for the first three quarters of this year.**

**This year-long cultural and touristic venture has resulted into attracting tourists from across the globe. Malta has seen a 26% increase of tourists hailing from non-EU countries, and as far as Australia. In fact there was a substantial increase of 27% from the Australian market alone. Even the traditional EU markets, increased by 14%.**

**This was part of the positive socio-economic effect as a result of factoring in, the cultural and traditional sectors in the Maltese touristic brand.**

**Another important outcome, from these endeavours, was the creation of a sense of connection, with visitors coming to Malta. One can easily say that a powerful spirit of friendship and hospitality, was uniquely created this year.**

**Undoubtedly, tourism provides us with a significant common ground for sharing. We all know, that tourism has the ability to bring multiple stakeholders to work together in synergy, and not in competition.**

**This is because every stakeholder brings their own unique contribution to the industry. Every country and community has its own particular culture and identity, which can offer an inspiring experience to our visitors.**

**A perfect example of this cultural synergy through tourism, is what we are endeavouring to achieve, here, in the Mediterranean Region.**

**Our individual Mediterranean countries have their own distinctive histories and cultures, yet we come together as one region to celebrate a uniquely Mediterranean identity.**

**Celebrating this practical synergy among Mediterranean countries is at the heart of the ethos of the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation, which was set up a few years ago, and of which I am the proud patron.**

**The Mediterranean Tourism Foundation is promoting initiatives within and among the countries of the Mediterranean, for the benefit of all of our communities and societies.**

**The Mediterranean Tourism Foundation seeks to promote peace through inter-cultural connections by taking initiatives for the development of sustainable tourism in our region.**

**The MTF comes together through its annual global forum to discuss challenges which are currently being faced by the industry, but also, and even more importantly, to find and develop the practical solutions, to address the concerns, of the business stakeholders, and also of our diverse peoples.**

**The MTF believes that for the industry to be sustainable and mutually beneficial for both tourists and residents alike, we must focus on responsible tourism.**

**As MTF, we endeavour to meet the objectives of responsible tourism, in a two-pronged approach and process, by improving locations , so that benefits will be enjoyed by both local residents and communities, as well as the tourists visiting the area.**

**We also believe that responsible tourism commits our private-sector stakeholders, and our authorities, to make tourism more respectful and sustainable, to provide a dignified life for all.**

**I am pleased to say that, this approach is already being adopted in my country, whereby my Government, is working in synergy with the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association ..... which is the national organisation that represents all the private stakeholders in the sector, and a founding partner of the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation.**

**The Maltese Government and the MHRA are embarking on regeneration projects of specific areas which have, over the years, unfortunately, created a perception of over-tourism, due to the lack of a sustainable approach.**

**The Government and the MHRA in my country are investing in strategies for sustainable tourism, to take proactive and practical actions, to overcome any risks of adverse socio-economic and environmental impacts. This approach is also helping to generate greater economic benefits to the respective community, while enhancing of good-feel factor.**

**These strategies for respectful and responsible tourism, are a must, for the success of the industry.**

**We need to ensure that we overcome the perception of over-tourism ..... which is growing in certain countries ..... and the strain that can be caused on the local infrastructures and communities.**

**Therefore, our tourism strategies must be holistic.**

**We need to involve, not only the industry stakeholders but also local communities and civil-society organisations. We need to encourage everybody to share their aspirations, and to be active participants in the decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods.**

**In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all the stakeholders within the Mediterranean tourism industry, to join the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation.**

**On the other hand, I would like to invite all global stakeholders, to join us in Malta, for our annual Mediterranean Tourism Forum which is to be organised in February 2019.**

**This forum will continue to upgrade our discussion on the importance of a tourism industry that needs to be continuously proactive, so as to keep up with all the latest developments.....as we believe that sustainable tourism has to be relevant at all times.**

**In fact this year, we will also be enhancing our discussion regarding the importance of embracing technology within the industry, and specifically, focusing on blockchain and tourism.....and of how this innovative technology can be used to create further efficiency in the industry.**

**The plans for this global forum can be further explained by the Secretary General of the Foundation, Mr Andrew Agius Muscat, who is also present here today. I am sure that he would be more than willing to answer any of your queries regarding the Foundation and this forthcoming Global Forum.**

**Earlier, I also spoke of the positive effects garnered by Malta during Valletta's term as European Capital of Culture. For this reason, I would like to also share with you the forthcoming potential initiative being taken up by the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation for the organisation of the Mediterrean Capital of Culture and Tourism.**

**This initiative will create the opportunity, for the countries of the Mediterranean, to focus on their cultural and traditional heritage, to attract more visitors to their respective country.**

**Therefore, I would like to encourage the countries of the Mediterranean to be on the lookout for details, in the coming months, with regards to this regional project.**

**I would like to tackle to other huge concerns, that affect the tourism industry ..... Climate change and our environment.**

**Frankly speaking, if we truly want the tourism industry to have a future for our respective socio-economic growth, we need to focus on an effective positive contribution to conserve the natural diversity and the cultural heritage of our world.**

**Being sensitive, in our strategies towards the cultures and the specific needs of each society will help us build trust and confidence between visitors and residents, for the benefit of the industry and the people of our world.**



**Such opportunities, to build trust, confidence, and friendship, will become increasingly important, as more people travel, and globalisation continues to bring us closer.**

**In this context, I would like to encourage a shared and long-term investment, by all stakeholders, supported by the international community, to safeguard the sustainable future of our planet.**

**As we speak, a gathering of many of our governments, is taking place, in Poland, to continue with the discussion about climate change, and its impact on our ecosystems.**

**I do hope that the international community will pull up its socks and endeavour harder, to meet the targets that it has established for itself, and which, unfortunately, are still way behind. We need to leave no stone unturned, to safeguard our ecosystems and our planet.**

**I am sure that we are all aware, that the tourism industry will be worst off, with the negative impacts of climate change, which we are already witnessing.**

**Therefore, I believe that we, as the diverse stakeholders of this important industry, need to commit ourselves, through effective strategies, to address climate change, as an intrinsic part of building a sustainable tourism industry.**

**We must not work together as stakeholders, but also we must motivate all of our national and international authorities in the tourism sector, to uphold their commitments towards a sustainable planet for all.**

**A practical initiative which I would like to share from my own country, is the work being done, by the authorities and civil society activists, to free Maltese beaches and coastline from plastics. We are endeavouring to become the world's leading destination for environmental ocean tourism, and to fulfil Malta's aspirations to become a plastic-free ocean area.**

**Such an initiative will contribute not only to address some of the concerns created by climate change, but also to a healthier and sustainable tourism industry.**

**This is another area where the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation will be potentially taking practical initiatives so as to make the Mediterranean Sea plastic-free.**

**The Mediterranean Tourism Foundation believes that with such practical initiatives we can save our marine ecosystems, and contribute directly to the attainment of the UN Agenda 2030.**

**In this context, we also have a responsibility to ensure an environmentally-sensitive tourism industry, as part of our international commitment to implement the entire United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.**

**The United Nations' Agenda 2030 is the perfect roadmap, for us to achieve the objectives for sustainable tourism investment.**

**After all, this is in line with the mandate of the Muscat Declaration, which was the principle outcome of last year's World Conference on Tourism and Culture.**

**This important matter is also very specific in SDG Number 8 Target 9, which focuses on the importance of sustainable economies and tourism, and which states that:**

**By 2030, we are committed to, “devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that create jobs and promote local culture and products.”**

**If all of us make this effective and practical contribution, we will be also targeting SDG Number 1, which is the eradication of poverty to end inequalities and injustices.**

**Achieving SDG 1 is essential, to fulfil our aspirations for the prosperous and peaceful future of our world.**

**Equally important are the objectives in SDGs Number 14 and Number 15.**

**As the tourism sector expands, we must keep the environmental wellbeing of our ecosystems high on the agenda of the tourism industry.**

**An environmentally responsible perspective will be of direct benefit, as was clearly indicated in a report published last year, by the International Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences.**

**The report, entitled ‘The Potential of the Blue Economy in Tourism’, says that the blue economy can be positively reinforced by the contributions of sustainable tourism.**

**Such contributions include strategies to conserve our marine environments, while also effectively managing our coastal regions, which are a living part of the natural and cultural heritage of our countries.**

**I would like to reiterate, the importance of sustainable tourism, in our international strategies, to address current environmental instabilities, and to promote the sustainable preservation of our global ecosystems.**

**I am pleased to note that environmental degradation is becoming a concern among industry stakeholders, as the expectations of consumers, to participate in a tourism industry that is respectful of the environment, is increasing.**

**Such concern for the future of our planet will continue to be reflected in the kind of choices that travellers and tourists make, when they visit our countries.**

**This is also emphasised by the latest Green Economy Report, which was published by the United Nations Environment Programme and the UNWTO.**

**One of the things that strikes me in this report, is the emphasis on the urgent need for further investment, by the international community, to make the tourism industry greener, more environmentally responsible and more responsive to the expectations of contemporary consumers.**

**Beyond the environmental impact of tourism itself, we know that our entire world is changing, as a result of the disruptive impact of climate change.**

**These disruptions will only grow in severity, with negative repercussions for all of our regions and societies.**

**This is why, the initiative, taken by the Jamaican authorities, to establish the Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre is commendable.**

**The newly-established Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre, will be addressing the negative impacts of climate change, in a proactive manner, by encouraging the tourism sector to be innovative and to adopt good practices, that will increase environmental protection.**

**I would like to encourage to seek further information on this Centre from the Jamaican Minister for Tourism, who is also present here.**

**Protecting our environment is essential to protect our cultural heritage, for the benefit of both present and future generations.**

**For this reason, I am so proud to say that the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation has developed a ground-breaking app, in partnership with the Maltese government, to measure energy efficiency in the hospitality industry.**

**This will address the high cost of energy expenditure in the tourism and hospitality industry, and also, to contribute towards the reduction of CO2 emissions.**

**Such practical efforts are clear evidence of the effective initiatives that can be taken, and the need for more direct investment, by the tourism sector, national governments, and the international community.**

**This is another synergy that must take place, to ensure that global issues such as climate change, are addressed.**

**A final point, which I would like to emphasise, is the inter-connected relationship between peace-building and tourism.**

**It is very important for us to realise that there cannot be prosperity without peace.**

**Peace is not simply the absence of violence.**

**Peace is the positive transformation of our societies to be more equal, equitable, and just, and tourism is one of the most promising sectors, in our countries, to help in achieving peace.**

**This fact is highlighted by indicators from last year's 'Tourism as a Driver of Peace' Report, published by the World Travel and Tourism Council, which reveals a strong link between tourism sectors that promote socio-cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability, and achieving peace.**

**On concluding, let me reiterate that an investment in sustainable tourism does not only boost the economy of our countries ..... Investment in sustainable tourism also shows us a way of**

**uniting the goals of economic development, with the necessary respect for the diverse cultures and communities of our world.**

**I believe that we must be bold.**

**We have no alternative, but to protect the precious natural and cultural heritage of our planet.**

**Sustainable tourism maximises the prosperity of local communities and creates an ideal context for global cultural, and tourism diplomacy.**

**Sustainable tourism reminds us of our commitment, as one human family to respect universal human rights, and fundamental freedoms, which underpin our humanity.**

**In a few days' time, we will be commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Our foremothers and forefathers, 70 years ago, had this important vision, for all of us ..... a vision which is an integral part of the essential work that the UNWTO and UNESCO, carry out.**

**Therefore, I augur that we shall continue to be led by a rights-based perspective, to promote a universal culture of peace and prosperity through sustainable tourism, for the benefit of both present and future generations.**

**Thank you for your attention.**