

**Opening Address, delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the conference organized on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Conference, by the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, at San Anton Palace**

**7 December 2018**

**Distinguished guests,**

**Dear friends.**

**It is my pleasure to welcome you to Sant Anton Palace for today's Conference, which commemorates the 70th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights.**

**Let me take this opportunity to commend my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, for organising today's conference in partnership with the Human Rights Programme at the University of Malta.**

**Let me also thank the Foundation's Director-General, Dr Ruth Farrugia, who is also the coordinator of the Human Rights Programme, for facilitating our shared vision to promote and prioritise human rights in the Maltese Islands.**

**A focus on universal human rights and fundamental freedoms has always been a cornerstone of my life and my work, as an activist, a politician, and as President of the Republic.**

**I am also pleased to say that, today, we will inaugurate an annual Human Rights Award for academic publications, to highlight the contributions being made by our researchers and scholars in this essential area.**

**I believe that this anniversary provides us, as a nation, with the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the fundamental cause of human dignity. In fact, the Preamble of the Universal Declaration makes it clear that all of us have the responsibility, to protect the dignity of each and every individual.**

**Seven decades after the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, we cannot take our human rights for granted.**

**Universal human rights and fundamental freedoms have come under new pressures, and are facing new challenges in an increasingly uncertain world.**

**One important challenge to the universality of human rights is due to the pursuit of purely profit-centred strategies for social development.**

**All over the world, there has been an increase in inequalities, poverty and precarity, job insecurity, and reduced investment in social protection and empowerment.**

**I believe that we are also witnessing a global crisis in the practical implementation of basic social rights, which is highlighting the vulnerability of so many individuals and families, and therefore, is degrading their dignity.**

**It is a cause of concern to see that economic growth is taking place without full respect for democratic values and human rights. It is also a cause of concern to see an emphasis on individual liberties, without a complementary and necessary investment in social solidarity.**

**I am convinced that our economies and social policies must be guided by the universal perspective of a truly human rights-based approach, in order to develop models of social change which are inclusive, respectful, and oriented towards peace.**

**Another challenge, of which you are surely aware, is the growing threat of political populism, extreme nationalism, and ideological fundamentalism.**

**Such mentalities are directly opposed to the principles of democracy and human rights, and we must be courageous enough to say so, whenever they appear in our communities or our society.**

**National interests can never be used as a justification to suppress the rights and the freedoms of individuals, or their communities.**

**Economic expansion can never be used as an excuse to suspend or ignore certain rights, which safeguard the holistic dignity of people and their families.**

**Achieving peace and prosperity in our country, in our region, and in our world can only occur when we fully respect the mandate of the Universal Declaration, taken as a whole.**

**Human rights are not a “pick-and-choose” approach. They must be respected fully, in their totality.**

**Seventy years after the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was written, as a response to one of the most devastating wars the world has ever seen, we must work together as one society, to put its words into effective practice.**

**The Declaration speaks to us, each and every day, about the relationships that we must nurture within our communities, in our countries, and as one human family.**

**We have a long way to go to develop truly inclusive democracies in our world, which ensure that each and every individual is respected, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, faith tradition, or background.**

**Every time the rights of another person are violated, we, ourselves, are violated.**

**I believe that this is the spirit of solidarity, which animates the Universal Declaration, and which will continue to empower us to support one another, in these challenging times.**

**The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is our manifesto.**

**It is our wake-up call.**

**It is our roadmap for today, for tomorrow, and for every day.**

**Let us continue to strive, to implement a human rights-based perspective in our Maltese society and our world, for the benefit of both present and future generations.**

**Thank you for your attention.**