

*Opportunity & Hope at a Time of Global Crisis: Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity & Universal Values*” and the theme of the ISCP session on September 11th will be “*A New Paradigm for International Relations in a Post-COVID World*”. Special emphasis will be placed on aspects of this topic that particularly relate to Europe and Africa and to their relationship with each other.

Contribution by HE Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca – Former President of Malta (2014-2019)

**If COVID-19 has shown us anything, it surely has shown us that our world is very fragile.**

**It is now common knowledge that the pandemic has significantly affected the socio-economic development of our human family.**

**It has wiped out, and it is still wiping out, much of the socio-economic progress we have achieved over the years.**

**It has shown us that we lack resilience.**

**It has shown us that we lack solidarity.**

**The pandemic has also brought to light that some countries lack meaningful leadership.**

**The pandemic has affected all of humanity, however it's negative effects have compounded, even more, on pre-COVID vulnerable communities of children and women in particular.**

**This situation is evidenced in research studies conducted by OECD and UNICEF.**

**It is therefore, salient to point out that the effects of COVID-19 are dangerously bringing a regression in children's rights and gender equality.**

**The new reality that is emerging is that the dimension and definition of poverty, has continued to expand.**

**COVID-19 has undoubtedly changed the goal posts that were set by the widely agreed and approved UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.**

**It is this serious consequence that must spur us all to find innovative and creative ways to rapidly intervene in a multilateral approach, to limit the damage, and overcome, the huge challenges that this pandemic has created to one and all.**

**Multilaterally we must persuade that state capacity, social trust, social solidarity, unity, and leadership are all essential components to limit the damage, and to create, the necessary resilience for our nations, to face these unprecedented challenges.**

**When leaders promote division through populist and nationalistic rhetoric, rather than encourage unity and solidarity, all possibilities of the necessary successful outcomes are shattered.**

**Encouraging a rise in nationalism brings together the necessary ingredients for social tensions and international conflict.**

**It definitely, is not the time, where states should be looking inwards and playing the blame game.**

**Global solidarity is key to fighting COVID-19 and its consequences. A constructive partnership between Europe and Africa is imperative.**

***Europe and Africa are twin continents*, as former President of the European Commission, Mr Jean Claude Juncker described them, in his state of the union speech in 2018.**

**Building meaningful multilateral partnerships, has never been so necessary for our world.**

**This is not rocket science.**

**It is after all the essential meaning of Goal 17 of Agenda 2030.**

**SDG 17 is clear on the need to strengthen the means of implementation and to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, as a first step to overcome the tragedy that has befallen on humankind.**

**It is unfortunate that with less than ten years to go, to reach this goal, we are still too far off.**

**The pandemic has revealed the injustices, the inequalities, and the lack of equity that exist in our world and further compounded them.**

**We need to collectively take the urgent and necessary actions to safeguard humanity from falling into an abyss of extremities.**

**It is today's choices that will determine how far reaching the negative effects of the pandemic, will be in the future.**

**In my opinion, there is no real choice, as the need for collective action to rebuild economies to deliver inclusive economic growth and prosperity, and holistic wellbeing for all, is fundamental.**

**Vulnerable communities have been hit the hardest and without universal social protection and a strong health care system, the gap of inequalities will widen further.**

**Identifying ways to address COVID 19 and learning from the success stories of other countries is crucial.**

**A crisis like this should be tackled through increased multilateral exchanges of experiences, knowledge sharing and joint action.**

**A Human Rights Framework should provide a crucial structure that can strengthen the effectiveness of global efforts to address the pandemic without leaving anyone behind.**

**I would like to reiterate the need, for the international community, to be seriously concerned on how the pandemic has transformed children's lives.**

**Children's routine has been disrupted.**

**An entire generation of children has seen their education being discontinued.**

**The lockdown of schools affected more than 1.5 billion of children and youth.**

**The digital divide has never been so evident.**

**Children are our most precious asset.**

**We cannot miss out, on the essential fundamentals for the development of the full potential, of our present and our future generations.**

**Education must be given priority at all times, but even more so during this critical time.**

**International Development experts are predicting that tens of millions of students in the world's poorest nations may never go back to class.**

**This would be a tragedy for the whole of humanity.**

**We also need to address the pandemic's longer-term effect on children's health.**

**30 million children receive free or subsidized school lunches.**

**The lack of healthy nutrition combined with more sedentary activities imposed by social distancing instructions are likely to have a long-lasting effect on the overall health of the global population in the future.**

**Children living in poverty are affected even harder and the pandemic has the potential to widen the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged.**



**OECD indicates that on average one in seven children grows in Poverty.**

**We need to address Child Poverty urgently and seriously, so as not to further jeopardise the rights of children.**

**Support from Governments, Local Authorities and non-governmental organisations must work with and for, the peoples badly affected to ensure that fundamental human rights are rightfully enjoyed by all, as also emphasised by the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), whereby he emphasized that *“All countries must strike a fine balance between protecting health, minimizing economic and social disruption, and respecting human rights”***

**As a woman from the Mediterranean, it is in this context that I believe that both Europe and Africa can benefit from each other's potential and experiences.**

**The European Union can benefit substantially by effectively collaborating with the African Union.**

**A prosperous Africa would provide new opportunities for investment and a supply of skilled new workforce.**

**Europeans must acknowledge that Africa is a land of opportunity and that it is not for exploitation.**

**Africa can provide Europe with the necessary growth and prosperity that it needs. This can be done by developing the necessary effective partnerships with the African Union.**

**This is the only way forward I see for the region I come from.**

**This undoubtedly can be a win-win situation for Africans and Europeans.**

**In this context, I must mention what The President of the new European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, so ably emphasised, recently.**

**It is encouraging to note that, Madame von der Leyen stated, that the European Union (EU) wants to establish greater political, economic and investment opportunities between Europe and Africa, and move towards a partnership of equals beyond the donor-recipient relationship.**

**This is the necessary paradigm shift that is needed.**

**The relationship between European States and African States, has historically been unfortunately shaped by the pursuit of European interests around influence, wealth, economic growth, power and politics.**

**We all need to acknowledge that this type of relationship is bound to fail.**

**Inclusive dialogue, genuine political will and strong determination, are the components that can move us forward.**

**The relationship between our two continents have to be built on a partnership of equals.**

**Gone are the days where Europe projects and dictates what it believes best for the African continent.**

**No one knows what Africa needs better than the Africans themselves.**

**We cannot drag our feet any longer.**

**We cannot be complacent.**

**We have agreed to a shared vision of a world without discrimination.**

**We cannot ignore what the international community have agreed upon in 2015 through Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.**

**I urge everyone to endeavour relentlessly to make this happen.**

**The pandemic has brought new unprecedented challenges to Europe, however this is also a time of opportunity.**

**The EU must take up the opportunity to look not only within itself, but even more so beyond its borders, to ensure growth and prosperity.**

**A partnership based on respect between our two continents can create a global model of equity, inclusion and dignity, which will transpire into a culture of sustainable peace for our peoples.**

**In this context, it is also encouraging to note what the EU's Foreign Policy Chief Mr Josep Borrell said: *"If we don't solve the problem in Africa, we will not be able to solve the problem in Europe. Africa is of particular concern to us"*.**

**We must be optimistic and perceive this uncertain time, as an opportunity for reflection and decision, to mend what we have broken in the past.**

**There's no denying that European history of colonisation has left its mark on the African continent.**

**In the process, it unfortunately also served to build a false conviction that Europeans are privileged and superior.**

**At a time, however, where interconnectedness is the only solution and way forward, we know that previous misconceptions are invalid, misleading and deceptive.**

**I believe that the pandemic has created an ideal opportunity to transform the old expired model.**

**Our one human family deserves the opportunity to develop in peace and in prosperity.**

## **CONCLUDING**

**This can only be achieved if the international community enhances its efforts to acknowledge our natural interdependence, and work together to reach the goals as set through Agenda 2030.**

**If we manage to reach the goals set through the SDGs we will undoubtedly ensure that universal values are truly and effectively universal. \\\ END**