

**Lost in Migration 2021**

**Welcome by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca  
Former President of Malta**

**9 December, 10.10 am**

**Duration 5 mins**

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**On behalf of the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, I welcome all the participants to the 5<sup>th</sup> Lost in Migration Conference, organised jointly by Missing Children Europe and the Foundation.**

**From the outset I would like to thank Maud Buquicchio, the President of Missing Children's Europe, for her tireless efforts to safeguard Children in Europe and beyond.**

**I also would like to thank Aagje Leven, the Secretary General at Missing Children Europe, for leading such an amazing team, and in particular Louise Bonneau, the Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer.**

**Thank you all so much for continuing to give visibility and advocate for the most vulnerable children in Europe.**

**It is truly a pleasure to see so many participants joining us from across Europe, mainly this conference is a strong statement that all children are our concern, as all Children matter, no matter what.**

**It was during a meeting of the Patrons' Council of Missing Children Europe in 2016, when we heard the then Europol Chief, state that a minimum of 10,000 unaccompanied children were unaccounted for and therefore were missing. This meant that we had, lost all trace of an estimated 10,000 migrant children on European soil.**

**This is what prompted Missing Children Europe and the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society to act, by bringing people together, and highlight the issue, of this community of most vulnerable children, to the attention of decision takers and policymakers.**

**The first Lost in Migration Conference was held in Malta, in 2017, during Malta's Presidency of the European Council.**

**In fact, we took the opportunity to present the outcomes of the first Conference, to the Ministers of Home Affairs and the Ministers of Justice from across the European Union, while attending the informal meetings.**

**The Lost in Migration Conferences, during these last 5 years have brought together numerous policy makers, non-government and**

**civil society organisations, professionals and practitioners, to share, exchange and develop strategies and recommendations for decision makers, on the need to provide for effective safeguards to migrant and asylum seeking children, coming to Europe.**

**During these years the conferences have taken different formats, but the aim has remained constant. Through these conferences we wanted and want, to ensure that children's human rights, and the rights of young people who come to Europe, are effectively safeguarded.**

***Lost in Europe*, which is a cross border journalism project, estimates that over 18,000 refugee children have disappeared from asylum seekers' centres, in Europe between 2018 and 2020 alone.**

**These statistics alone are frightening.**

**But when we learn what happens to children who go missing, the stories are even more horrendous.**

**This is the reason that we need to strive harder to save every child.**

**This is after all, the responsibility of each and every one of us, in whatever capacity we might be or in whatever responsibility we might carry.**

**However, I must highlight that, it is even more so the responsibility of every government, within the European Union, to uphold its commitment for Children's Human Rights.**

**We therefore need, to be courageous and hold our governments to account, to effectively implement, the obligation of safeguarding each and every child in our respective country.**

**A new perspective taken this year is the participation of children and young people who have experienced, in one way or another, this phenomenon.**

**As you will learn later, over the last weeks, children and young people had the opportunity to share their stories and challenges in seven European cities.**

**Malta is one of the countries where the migrant hub was brought together.**

**I am happy that this afternoon, a session is dedicated to hearing the life stories of young people who have one way or another experienced, the loss of a fellow migrant child who went missing.**

**I therefore urge you, to listen carefully to the children and young people while they relate their experiences, and to take the opportunity to learn and understand from their first hand**

**experiences, how policies and good practices, can respond to the difficult circumstances and challenges, faced by children seeking asylum.**

**Some on-going and upcoming legislative proposals, like the Pact on Migration and the review of the EU's anti-trafficking rules, should reflect on issues we will hear about today.**

**This conference is bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, politicians, policymakers, practitioners and civil society organisations, and is providing us with a great opportunity, to have a broad policy discussion.**

**We should ensure that the outcomes and results of this conference will reach the decision makers, both at national and at European Union level.**

**Being forced to migrant, due to fleeing conflict and wars, persecution, and extreme poverty, is a tragedy in itself.**

**Moreover, unaccompanied asylum-seeking and migrant children, who go missing after they were caught up in the migration human**

**catastrophe, which has become an everyday reality, across our borders, are the victims we cannot continue to ignore.**

**Being a woman from the Mediterranean, we witness, first-hand the hardship and horrendous stories endured, by children during their migration journey, across the African continent.**

**The shocking stories, that they experience on their journey, are truly unbelievable and hard to forget.**

**This simply cannot go on.**

**Every single child that go missing, is one child too many!**

**I would like to end with a quote by a migrant girl, Anzia Yeziarska, who said:**

***“I’m one of the millions of migrant children, children of loneliness, wandering between worlds that are at once too old and too new to live in.”***

**This is an inspiring quote from a child who experienced the horrendous experiences of feeling alone in a world which is not kind to the most vulnerable. This quote should give us the resolve to continue to advocate and insist that our authorities, should be ensuring that each and every child is safeguarded.**

**I wish you all fruitful dialogue and exchanges during of your deliberations.**