

**Invitation to Speak at the Launch of the
Refugee Week Malta
20 – 26 June 2022**

**20 June 2022
19:00 hrs to 21:00 hrs**

For the Launch event of the festival, there will be a Peace Walk starting from St George's Square in Valletta, proceeding through Republic Street and up South Street, and end in Jean De Valette Square.

After this, speakers from various parts of the community representing the diversity within the communities in Malta, will share their message of the possibility for collective healing, especially with all that is going on locally and globally. The event will close with a celebration by the energetic Trakadum ensemble as a celebration of our community.

This year's theme of **Healing (5 mins 750 words)**

Dear Deborah and Julienne, members of the *Dance beyond Borders*

Dear Brothers and Sisters

We have just participated in a March for Peace on this very particular day, World Refugee Day. It is not a co-incidence that we have marched for peace on this day that reminds us of the estimated 90 million men, women, children, and young people who had to flee from their very homes and countries due to wars, conflict, persecution, and human rights abuses, to find safety elsewhere.

The plight of refugees is evidence of the essential need for each, and every one of us, to work for peace, to build peace, to cultivate a culture of peace in our societies.

Today we have marched for peace, to urge governments and leaders to actively engage in the right and appropriate actions and policies to sustain a peaceful co-existence among nations.

We are here to remind world governments and world authorities that they have committed to Agenda 2030, whereby SDG 16 specifically calls upon them ***to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.***

We are also here to request of the world governments and world authorities to step up to their responsibilities to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and afford all of the rights to all the peoples without prejudice.

We are here to remind them that they are the guardians of this important legacy left by our forefathers and foremothers to present and future generations.

On the other hand, we are also here today to remind ourselves that peace starts within each, and every one of us.

Let's not forget that each, and every one of us has a responsibility to build and sustain a culture of positive peace in our communities.

This means that we need to celebrate our diversity. We need to manifest the beauty of being different. We need to empower each other with respecting one other. As Martin Luther King said: ***Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.***

Even the smallest of our actions and attitudes can make a difference. Respect even in time of difference and adversity is the basis of a peaceful and harmonious co-existence.

This is everybody's responsibility.

This march for peace is also an opportunity for us, as civil society activists and human rights defenders, to reaffirm our resolve, to continue to advocate for the right political will and for the essential resources needed, so that refugees will not only survive, but also thrive and live in dignity and safety.

We strongly join today, with the statement of Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in his message to all world leaders, that:

“Every person has the right to seek safety – whoever they are, wherever they come from, and whenever they are forced to flee”.

This meaningful message should remind all of our leaders and authorities, that they cannot discriminate among refugees because of their ethnicity, colour, beliefs or county of origin.

We need to ensure that all those fleeing persecution, conflict or human rights abuses, has the right to seek protection and asylum in another country and should be given refuge and given their rightful dignity and respect at all times.

World Refugee Day reminds us also that borders should remain open to all people forced to flee. Restricting access and closing borders to those seeking asylum make their journey to safety even more dangerous and violates their very human rights.

It is a shame that some world leaders are unwilling to make and build peace. If world leaders manage to control their sense of territorialism, pride, and greed, then the movement of millions of people seeking safety will not be necessary.

In this context, we must today also remember the estimated one million children who were born in exile during these last three years alone. Children whose basic rights have been gravely violated.

What will their future be like and what opportunities will they have to achieve their full potential? What about their right to education? What about their right to a happy and healthy life?

Today we also need to remember the thousands of asylum-seeking children who go missing during their dangerous journey.

While thousands of missing asylum-seeking children are recorded, but in reality the numbers are phenomenal and are much worse than those actually recorded. Thousands of asylum-seeking Children often travel unaccompanied. Many children are sent by their parents, with the hope that their beloved children can find safety and a better life.

We know from experience that many asylum-seeking Children go unregistered at the borders, so they cannot be traced at all when they go missing.

We also know that many are trafficked and abused or sold for organs.

This has been the real-life experience of many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on European soil.

We must continue to remind world governments and authorities that they are committed to ***protect children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence, including torture***, as underlined in Agenda 2030 specifically in SDG 16 Target 2.

To further protect children and prevent them from going missing, we need to ensure to align our policies, legislation, and practices to the needs of children and young people, across the world.

It is essential that decision makers in the EU institutions and Member States ensure that the rights of children are effectively safeguarded.

If we want to start the community healing process, we need to strive harder to put policies in place to lessen the suffering that refugees go through on their journey.

We need to remind politicians that they need to do more to prevent and resolve conflicts and wars, and of the need to speak out and fight injustice, instead of fuelling division and fomenting hate.

As Albert Einstein said: ***PEACE CANNOT BE KEPT BY FORCE. IT CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY UNDERSTANDING.***

Finally, I appeal to all of us, whatever is our responsibility:

**LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO EMPOWER OUR COMMUNITIES TO UNDERSTAND
ONE ANOTHER.**

LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO SOW RESPECT FOR EACH ANOTHER.

LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD PEACE FOR ONE AND ALL.