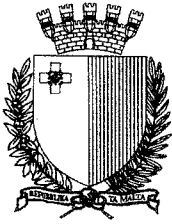


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REPUBLIC OF MALTA

PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE
REPUBLIC OF MALTA
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS

Statement by
the

Honourable Dr. Joseph Muscat
Prime Minister

Head of Delegation

Sixty-Eighth Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

United Nations
New York

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Mr. President,

I wish to join other delegations at this distinguished gathering in congratulating you on your election as President of the sixty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly. I am sure that under your guidance and through your excellent diplomatic skills we will have a rich exchange of ideas and a fruitful outcome.

I also wish to extend my congratulations and gratitude to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremic, for his successful stewardship of the last session of the United Nations General Assembly.

My deepest appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, whose passion and commitment have proved instrumental for the work of the organization.

Mr. President

Secretary-General

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will start by taking you back a few years.

You will certainly remember how not too long ago, the world waited in anticipation and hope for the clock to push past midnight to the year 2000. As with most fresh starts, the new millennium brought with it a sense of promise.

And indeed something extraordinary was taking place.

For the first time in history, governments had committed themselves to walk the talk by adhering to a set of measurable targets aimed at lifting millions out of poverty by the year 2015. These so-called Millennium Development Goals were bold and ambitious. They became national and global priorities, setting government policies and generating a strong commitment across wide areas towards their attainment. Failure, it was felt, was not an option.

Undoubtedly, there have been remarkable successes.

The number of people living in extreme poverty and poverty rates have fallen. Access to clean sources of water has improved. The proportion of urban slum dwellers has declined substantially and there have been visible improvements in the areas of health and education.

Yet, as significant as these achievements are, we are now at a watershed moment.

The international community has already recognised the need to push these goals further, beyond 2015, and to see that they become *sustainable* development goals. An important stock-taking exercise has been taking place to ensure that no one is left behind, that no human being feels like a scrap of life anymore, living at the edge of existence.

Mr. President,

It would be easy for us to think of poverty as belonging elsewhere if we do not see it around us. We have the luxury to exercise wilful blindness to malnutrition and disease, pretending they belong to a different culture or nationality; to a fictitious world that is as easily wiped away as flipping the TV channel. And it would also be easy for us to think that we can be altruistic since we are lucky enough to live without want.

But we are not here today to be blind. What brings us together in this august hall, year after year, to hear speech after speech, is a longing to belong. We want to be part of something bigger; something that goes beyond our self-imposed borders of language, culture and tradition. We want to belong to this global sea of peoples sharing a single purpose of mind.

This longing or need to come together tugs at our hearts with hope and empathy for those on the margins of humanity. We want to do something worthwhile. We want to commit our intelligence to be effective agents of change. 'Make poverty history' we heard. And indeed we work towards that aim. But as we hold these noble aims high, we also question whether our plan is a priority; whether it will fit our national budget or our political life cycles. And then we pause to consider our options, to choose that which will hurt us the least.

The poor have no luxury to afford us time to take our decisions.

Humanity cannot wait for a better time when there is no financial crisis. We, the international community, need to forge ahead with dogged determination to reach all our goals. I am proud to note here Malta's long-standing history of solidarity with other nations all over the world. Our accession to the European Union took this solidarity a step further and my country assumed responsibilities and obligations in the context of overseas development assistance with developing countries. This remains a cornerstone of Malta's external relations and we remain firmly engaged to seek the eradication of poverty and the sustainable development of societies in need. We are proud to form part of the EU which is the world's largest donor of development aid worldwide and we are committed to reach the goals that we have set and to be a reliable partner for those in need.

Equally, I am proud to recall that this year marks twenty-five years since Malta proposed to this same Assembly that the conservation of climate should be part of the common concern of mankind, a concept that launched the process leading to the United Nations climate change convention. Malta is proud to have been at the forefront of that discussion and we are adamant to keep this issue alive for we are conscious of the fact that climate change hits hardest the world's most vulnerable.

In defining a common vision for the future we believe that the eradication of poverty and the promotion of sustainable development must be at the heart of the post-2015 development framework. In the words of the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, *"overcoming poverty is not a task of charity...it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings"*.

Malta is committed to continue to engage with its international partners in developing a post-2015 global development agenda that delivers on the promise of a better and fairer world for all.

Mr. President,

Malta also understands the need to act in other palpable ways.

When rickety boats laden with irregular migrants reach our shores, we see the suffering and the loss of dignity etched on these people's faces. We understand that they are caught in a web of poverty and exploitation. We feel for those fleeing persecution and poverty, in search of safety and prosperity. And we do everything we can to provide them with the help they need, offering refuge and respite.

Yet Malta cannot do this alone. The international community must do more in the face of this ongoing situation that is nothing but tragic evidence of our global failures. It would be easy to flip channels once again; to park it in someone else's back yard. But it is not someone else's problem. Irregular immigration, human trafficking and modern-day slavery are *everyone's* problem. And we all have to share in solving it, not only regionally but also globally.

Mr. President,

There needs to be a sustained evolution in our thinking. At the threshold of the year 2015, we urge fellow nations to, not only think beyond the current Millennium Development Goals and how to ensure their sustainability, but also about what other goals should be included. There can be no unfinished business. There can be no sustainable development goals without peace, without fighting corruption, without respect for human rights and without economic equity which is the social justice issue of our time. The news headlines may not shock us anymore but those living in fear of their lives and those of their families, do not live to make the news. They look to survive. Whether scrapping for food or sheltering from bullets, whether hiding daughters from falling victims to rape as a tool of war or keeping sons from being forcibly recruited as child soldiers, millions of people all over the world live dreading tomorrow. Each day they die a little bit more.

And we do bear responsibility for this, for not safeguarding their sense of belonging as equal human beings on this earth. Malta firmly believes that the United Nations can and must do more to safeguard human dignity and to stir the conscience of humanity. No undertaking can be as fundamental as addressing the needs of the peoples of the world and no organisation is better placed to see to this than the United Nations.

Mr. President,

Malta's geo-strategic situation makes it look closest at that which surrounds it. We are proud to be a people of the Sea – that Mediterranean Sea which has given us life and marked our history. We are proud of our contributions towards the 'health' of this Sea, the myriad of exchanges that we support and the good relations we hold with all our neighbours.

But we are also troubled by the conflicts and suffering that we see around us.

Waves of new tomorrows and hopeful struggles for democracy in North Africa have given way to new realities that were unthinkable when the Millennium Development Goals were drawn up. Sectarian strife, religious tensions and power struggles have halted or reversed progress on development in these countries. It is almost correct to say that the Mediterranean

Sea is 'at a boiling point' and that the next conflict - on scarce resources, over contested borders or even cultural offence – is just waiting to happen.

But there can be no stalemate, no acceptance of the *status quo* if we truly believe that the peoples of the Mediterranean deserve better. The violation of human rights and shaky institutions need to be addressed if we are to truly look holistically at a new positive agenda for humankind. The deepening links between the lives of peoples across countries demand coordinated global action and we must stand up to the challenge.

Malta firmly believes that more can be done by the community of nations gathered here to support the fragile democracies that are struggling to take root where dictators formerly ruled. More can and should be done to ensure that the economies of the region are able to flourish, intra-regional trade supported, and cultural exchanges fostered. And more needs to be done to stop the violence and bloodshed that risk becoming the norm for those of us not in harm's way.

Malta calls upon the international community to look with compassion towards the innocents of Syria. It is a humanitarian catastrophe with no end in sight, a horrendous and

Each child's death and each mother's wail should shame us all.

morally outraged across the world. Justifiably outraged - for there can never be justification for the appalling suffering that is taking place. The Mediterranean Sea basin is a wash with promise but polluted with pain and prejudice. The Middle East remains a hotbed and the most explosive region of the world. How many more need to die, not only in the region, but even elsewhere because of conflict or terrorism? How many more need to leave all their belongings to join hurried convoys, fearful of losing their lives? How much longer can the rights of others be ignored, trampled upon, while others enjoy their own perceived rights?

We need to stop the wildfire. We need to stop the further descent into brutality and carnage. And those responsible must be brought to international justice.

Mr. President,

Malta is convinced that we cannot be talking of post-2015 if we cannot solve our differences today. We do not have *carte blanche* to be immune and indifferent, for the cost of our inaction is greater than the cost of our effort and commitment. Conflict saps the focus from our goals. It drains our resources and stifles our potentials. The United Nations family, committed as it is to the purpose of peace and prosperity among nations, understands this.

Malta firmly believes that peace truly 'in our time' needs to be the overriding goal, the one target to which we should all aspire and for which we should all work. We need to ensure stable and peaceful societies if we want to take the Millennium Development Goals further.

The opportunities for all to thrive are there. The United Nations is and should be the force field to which all nations gravitate in order to solve differences and push boundaries together. Our global goals and commitments cannot be solely time-bound but must also be outcome-oriented. We need to think 'inclusive' and 'holistic'. Post-2015 we should not be looking towards rebooting but towards continuity in purpose and greater ambition. Ten times as lot not dying every day is a great achievement; ten times more not dying and truly living is an astounding victory for all.

But to get there we have to realise that everyone everywhere has an equal voice. People need to be involved in the decision-making since it affects their lives and their livelihood. They should be foremost on our minds as we consider the world's natural resources and tackle global concerns such as climate change. There is never one way of doing things and we can only achieve our targets if we listen to the people we are meant to represent and make them part of the decision-making process.

Mr. President,

A few weeks ago, a young girl, Malala from Pakistan, spoke in this very Assembly of her dream for girls to get an education and wield the power of the pen. Thirteen years ago, our leaders had an inchoate dream - to live up to the millennium moment and to better peoples' lives.

As we approach the year 2015, we need to remember the hope and determination we felt as we crossed into the new millennium, that determination that made this world a somewhat better place through the goals we reached together.

And we need to carry this forward, to continue to make dreams happen.

For every day, millions of people around the world dream of something more than a scrap of a life. For indeed there are no scraps of life.

Thank you

