
*Opening Remarks delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca,
President of Malta, at the launch of the PFWs Research Study entitled
“Access to Healthy, Clean, and Fair Food: An Exploratory Study of the
Maltese Scenario”, 19 July 2018*

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Sant Anton Palace for the launch of today’s study, which focuses on the importance of ensuring that the people of the Maltese Islands have adequate access to healthy, clean, and fair food.

This study is the culmination of the successful collaboration that has taken place between the National Observatory for Living With Dignity and the National Centre for Family Research, both of which are research entities within my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

Let me therefore begin by congratulating the coordinators of these entities, Professor Carmel Borg and Professor Angela Abela. I must also take this opportunity to commend Dr Censu Caruana and Professor Suzanne Piscopo, whose passion and expertise have contributed towards the positive completion of this study.

I am confident that the launch of this research will help to highlight the need for greater awareness, within our national context, in the area of healthy, clean, and fair food.

Above all, I believe that we must do more to highlight the concept of “food justice”, which is the right of our communities to grow, to sell, and to eat healthy food.

Healthy food is best described as food which is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally, with care for the wellbeing of the land, the workers, and animals.

People practicing food justice will lead to a strong local food system, self-reliant and resilient communities, and a healthier environment.

In order to make such an approach possible, there is the need for us to identify the kinds of food that are available to families in the Maltese Islands, and whether healthy and clean food is, in fact, truly accessible for everybody. This was the fundamental premise behind the study, being launched today.

If healthy and clean food is prohibitively expensive, or if vulnerable or precarious groups are restricted from accessing it for whatever other reasons, then this reflects an unacceptable injustice and form of inequality within our society.

I believe that we must make it clear, to our authorities and to society at large, that access to food is a factor of basic importance, by which we can assess the overall wellbeing of individuals and entire communities in the Maltese Islands.

I am informed that the data from this study makes it clear that food constitutes the highest expenditure being made by 4-person families in Malta and Gozo.

However, it is alarming to recognise that, in order for the food that they consume to be considered healthy and clean, such families have to spend in excess of 500 euros per month.

This is a prohibitively high figure for many families, which means that individuals suffering from vulnerability or precarity of any kind are finding it almost impossible to access adequate food.

For this reason, it is essential for us to take a stand, and to put this discussion on the national agenda.

As we know, what we eat has a massive impact on the quality and length of our lives. The fact that a large number of people in our society are, in effect, being excluded from the best kind of food and therefore, being excluded from full access to good health, is unacceptable.

For this reason we must also address alarming indicators from Eurostat, which rate Malta as among the countries with the highest incident of obesity in Europe.

Furthermore, almost half the deaths in Malta are a result of cardiovascular diseases, which are directly related to obesity and other related factors.

The link between these worrying indicators, and the need for us to promote healthy lifestyles and access to healthy food, is clear.

On concluding, let me say that it is essential for our authorities to do more to ensure that each and every family has the economic ability to make choices which are healthy, and to purchase fresh and clean food.

This is what food justice is all about.

Food justice is the belief that healthy food is a basic human right. Everyone, regardless of socio-economic status or background, deserves access to healthy, fresh, and fair food, thereby reflecting our country's commitment to safeguard the intrinsic human dignity of each and every individual, family, and community in the Maltese Islands.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to the outcomes of today's discussions.