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*Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta at the Official  
Opening of “The Majlis: Cultures in Dialogue”, 17 September 2018*

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Distinguished guests,  
Dear friends.

It is my pleasure to launch this historical exhibition, entitled “The Majlis: Cultures in Dialogue.”

Let me begin by commending His Highness, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, for his inspiring vision, to create an opportunity for the peoples of the East and West to enter into respectful and meaningful dialogue, through the world of culture.

I must also take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Sheikh Faisal Museum; the UNESCO Doha Office; the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science; Heritage Malta; and the National Commission for UNESCO in Malta, for their contributions to make this exhibition a reality.

My patronage of this initiative, and the support it has received as part of Valletta’s ongoing term as European Capital of Culture for 2018, reflects Malta’s identity, as a bridge between diverse cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean Region.

This cross-cultural exhibition is creating a space of hospitality, which is evident in the use of the “majlis”, the traditional Arabic “place of gathering”, at the heart of this installation.

In fact, I believe that we can say that Malta has always been the “majlis”, the “gathering place”, of the Mediterranean.

The Maltese Islands are a space where different cultures and peoples have gathered together, in a spirit of dialogue and connection, for centuries.

Through the selection of artworks and artefacts, which have been included in this exhibition, we are invited to deepen these connections, in particular, by focusing on the incredible diversity of Islamic culture and civilisation in the Gulf, and beyond.

Creating such opportunities for connection and friendship, among the diverse cultural communities and faith traditions in the Maltese Islands, has always been an essential part of my work, as the President of Malta.

Through the good offices of the Presidency and the President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, the first official meeting between the leaders of Malta’s Muslim and Jewish communities took place at an event facilitated by my Foundation.

This is one example of an important milestone, which we facilitated, to establish channels of communication between these groups.

Furthermore, my Foundation has conducted a series of consultations with the various Muslim groups in Malta, exploring and celebrating the diversity of Islam.

I believe that it is essential for us to continue promoting dialogue between different faith communities, here in Malta and in the world, at large.

According to indicators from the Pew Research Centre, which highlights population growth projections for 2010 to 2050, atheists, agnostics and other people who do not affiliate with any religion will make up a declining share of the world's total population.

On the other hand, the projected growth of Muslims and Christians will grow.

Due to the heavy concentration of Christians and Muslims in this high-fertility region, both groups would increase as a percentage of the global population.

Therefore, let me highlight the importance of creating a mutually beneficial and respectful relationship between the Islamic and the Christian worlds, and Malta's special role as a bridge between cultures and continents.

Malta is a geo-strategic hub in the heart of the Mediterranean, with a vocation to be a voice for peace and dialogue.

For this reason, supporting cultural diplomacy initiatives, such as this exhibition, are essential. Through the world of art, of creativity, and of technology, we are building opportunities for our peoples to come together and learn from one another.

Furthermore, this exhibition encourages us, here in Malta, to remember our own history and the heritage of our past, which connect us with the golden age of Islam.

Although Malta has been a predominantly Christian country for hundreds of years, our language and certain elements of our culture are a clear connection with these Islamic roots.

I augur that this exhibition will nurture a spirit of respectful dialogue and profound reflection, encouraging us to see that we have so much in common, no matter who we are or where we come from.

Thank you for your attention, and I hope you will all enjoy the exhibition, and be touched by its inspiring message of friendship and peace.