

On the Occasion of  
the Exchange of New Years' Greetings  
with the Diplomatic Corps  
Accredited to Malta

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Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,

I am pleased to host you at Verdala Palace this evening to welcome the New Year in a spirit of conviviality and friendship.

I am honoured to preside over this event and address you all for the first time since my Inauguration as President of the Republic of Malta.

This is not only an occasion for us to meet informally and exchange pleasantries, but also one of great symbolic importance that helps us bring our countries and our shared values together.

I have the pleasure of having come to know most of you personally, especially those of you who reside permanently in Malta. I am equally satisfied and thankful that many have travelled from their capitals or country of posting to be with us here today.

Excellencies,

We are now in the ninth month of my Presidency term – months that have presented me with several rewarding instances as well as other occasions that troubled me greatly.

I am sure that most of you have been following events unfolding in Malta, and consequently my pronouncements on them.

I have already delivered a strong message to the People of Malta on the occasion of Republic Day on 13 December, wherein I also reached out to you – our foreign partners and friends.

What I said on that day is still very much valid today.

The Malta you know all too well by now, is a far cry from the negative image that is being projected abroad.

I speak on behalf of the People of Malta when I say that we would like to see this chapter closed the soonest possible. We want to see that justice prevails. This process will undoubtedly be on top of the newly-appointed Prime Minister's agenda. Nothing is more urgent.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Robert Abela on his assuming the responsibilities of Premiership. I have no doubt that he will face this daunting task, of bringing back normality to our country, with determination, with resolve and with the full implementation of all his capabilities, in full respect of our institutions and the rule of law.

I am certain that with decisiveness and goodwill we will move away successfully from this dark patch in Malta's history.

The events that took place should not be allowed to permanently overshadow our history of longstanding achievements and contributions to global stability and promotion of democratic values.

You can all assist Malta to get over this phase by projecting, and building upon, the positive realities that make Malta the dynamic country, geared towards innovation, that it is today.

I cannot emphasise or reiterate enough that the Maltese people have not given up on the values that lie at the core of our society such as hard work, honesty, tolerance, acceptance and a democratic way of life.

Generosity is another value which characterises us Maltese.

One clear example of this was the way in which the people supported the numerous calls for solidarity and hands-on help over the Festive Season.

I, for one, was both gratified and moved by the response given to the yearly national charity events which against many odds, were a resounding success.

This, and all the other positive traits of Malta and its People, are the ones that I ask you to speak of and promote in the course of your duties especially with your capitals and colleagues abroad.

Excellencies,

The New Year did not start on a positive note on the regional and international fronts.

I am very worried about the crisis that has been fomenting for years right on Malta's doorstep, in Libya.

I fear I may have been prophetic in my very early messages as President, when I stated that turning a blind eye to the unfolding developments in this country will come at a dear cost and that we will regret our inaction.

The situation has been deteriorating over the years. Malta has been consistently among those that called for additional international attention – a call which I have to say was not always heeded. We always believed that the interests of the Libyans were being sidelined.

I must also add, that as one of the closest neighbours to Libya, and a partner that was always ready to assist the country hands-on, Malta should unfailingly be involved in meetings discussing the future of this country.

Yet, this is not only a problem for the Libyan people, or their immediate neighbours to solve. Libya should be an item on all international agendas.

Positions are now all the more entrenched, and external influences and direct involvement are further exacerbating the situation. The cease-fire agreed upon is holding and this could lay the grounds for diplomatic negotiations to begin.

The bottom line is that as long as armaments and weapons continue to reach the country we will not be able to even speak of a credible resolution to the conflict.

This applies to Libya, and all other ongoing conflicts.

All members of the international community should observe and respect the UN arms embargo.

We simply cannot afford Libya to become a protracted conflict and fertile ground for a proxy war.

The international community cannot stand by until the next upsurge of violence, by which time it will perhaps be too late to mend the fences.

Excellencies,

The first few days of the New Year were also marked with a flagrant increase in tension between the United States, Iraq and Iran.

All parties have to exercise restraint and carefully consider any reaction to avoid further escalation, and increase in political tensions and turbulence in a region, that is already very volatile.

A regional political solution is the only way forward and all international actors, notably the EU, have a role to play in supporting such an initiative.

I have, over the past years and in my previous capacity, already spoken in favour of the Iran Nuclear deal – the JCPOA.

This in my view constituted a landmark in nuclear non-proliferation and should not be discarded. It is crucial to now maintain the unity of the remaining participants in support of this agreement, before its undoing goes beyond the point of no return.

The abandonment of this deal, and the recent developments in the region are a cause of serious concern which could very well be the spark that sets the whole region in flames.

Migration remains yet another pressing regional and international concern. Malta has, for over twenty years now, been affected by dramatic incidents of arrivals, most originating from sub-Saharan countries.

For all these years, Malta and other front-line countries were left alone. We have long reached the point where a coordinated, international and multilateral solution needs to be successfully and urgently implemented.

On the positive side, we can confidently speak of the African continent as one less of a threat and more as one of opportunity that is beckoning.

Africa's economic growth prospects are among the world's brightest. Half of the world's fastest-growing countries are in Africa and growth prospects will be among the highest in the world, according to the IMF.

There are various sectors where foreign companies could have a comparative advantage, such as banking, telecommunications and infrastructure.

I have long believed that Africa holds huge potential, and am glad to finally see a change in narrative on this neighbouring continent to Malta and Europe.

Changing economic dynamics are also predicted by the World Economic Forum in Asia as this year the continent's GDP will overtake the combined GDP of the rest of the world.

By 2030, the region is expected to contribute roughly 60% of global growth.

The bulk of that growth will come from the developing markets of China, India and throughout South-East Asia and it will give rise to a host of new decisions for businesses, governments and NGOs.

It is in everyone's interest to see that the right decisions are taken to steer Asia's development in a way that is equitable and directed towards resolving social and economic challenges.

Excellencies,

The context in which we are meeting today allows me to also briefly underscore my strong concerns on what I consider to be a major disaster of our times - Yemen.

I find the absence of international action and apparent lack of concern on this acute humanitarian crisis as most disconcerting and worsening.

This conflict is now in its fifth year – and has produced the worst humanitarian situation we have witnessed in decades. The situation is nothing short of shameful when one sees that over 20 million – 80% of the population are in need of humanitarian or protection support, and over two million persons have been internally displaced.

We lost count as to how many have been killed or died because of prevailing circumstances.

It comes as no surprise that these and other similar statistics have led some actors to question whether the multilateral model has failed and cast a dark shadow on its relevance.

I believe the exact opposite.

Multilateralism – if not hampered by ambitions and motivations of prominent individual actors - is the only solution to known and emerging crises.

The dangers of unilateralism can not, and should not, be underestimated. Likewise, multilateralism cannot come under attack, precisely when it is needed most.

I can immediately think of a scenario, where international action will be doomed to failure, unless this is taken through a functioning multilateral framework - I refer here to the attainment of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The hard and fast facts concerning the eradication of poverty are not encouraging.

If we are to achieve the central commitment of ‘leaving no one behind’ by 2030, we will need to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere around the globe, meaning that no one will be left living on less than USD 1.25 a day.

In 2015 we also undertook to reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty by 2030.

Where do we stand vis-a-vis these targets? We are only ten short years away from their target year?

More than 700 million people, or 10% of the world population, still live in extreme poverty while the gender gap is still a very persistent one.

The figures on hunger also continue to be alarming particularly when it comes to children. Poor nutrition causes nearly half of the deaths in children under five, this translates into 3.1 million children each year.

Energy poverty in many regions is still a fundamental barrier to reducing hunger and ensuring that the world can produce enough food to meet future demand.

Close to 840 million people have no access to electricity worldwide – most of whom live in rural areas of the developing world.

If we are to properly address the issue of hunger, we need to beef up our global vision on how food is grown, what food to grow and how to get it distributed and consumed.

Our farming lands, potable water, oceans, forests and biodiversity are being rapidly degraded.

Climate change is putting even more pressure on the resources we depend on, increasing risks associated with disasters, such as droughts. Rural faced with destruction, water shortages, and crop failure are forced to migrate in search of better opportunities.

The disastrous, months-old, devastating fires covering huge areas of Australia and destroying everything in their path, are stark examples of what high temperature, winds and storms can lead to.

My sincere heartfelt sympathy goes to our Australian friends and I take this opportunity to express Malta's full empathy and compassion with the People of Australia at these trying times.

The figures I just mentioned on Sustainable Development Goals are but a few elements from what UN Secretary General Guterres has termed as the 'boldest agenda for humanity'.

Our action, a concerted one, needs to be just as bold.

There is no other platform to address these targets from if not the multilateral one, with the United Nations in the lead.

In doing so, it is good to note that the United Nations has laid out plans to reform and reposition its Development system by making it more integrated.

This initiative is a necessary component of the broader reform agenda of the UN, which should better enable the institution to respond and hopefully also pre-empt today's intertwined global challenges.

Aside from structures and established organisations what ultimately needs to drive our global action, is the prevalence of the common good and collective advantage.

This applies not only to situations of conflicts, crises or emergencies but also when it comes to setting standards and objectives on pressing global issues, such as Climate Action.

No given country should hold hostage or jeopardise the progress painstakingly achieved over the years.

As in any community, the good of the few should not come at the detriment of the many.

Driven by its commitment to global stability and dialogue, Malta intends to make a further contribution to its active multilateral profile, as it launches its campaign to bid for a Non-Permanent Seat at the UN Security Council for the years 2023-2024.

This two-year mandate will see Malta join nine other Non-Permanent Members at the UN's highest table, once it hopefully secures its election in 2022. This would be the second time for Malta to serve in this role and we would greatly welcome your countries' support to our aspired goal.

Excellencies,

Now more than ever, international action should be driven by the principle of 'solidarity', which although challenged at times, still somehow abounds and prevails. Solidarity-with suppressed peoples or ethnic groups who face the daily denial of human rights and basic fundamental freedoms.

The rallying of support at national and grass roots level, from across the globe, when needed comes as a welcome reminder of what international cooperation should look like.

Yet, we should not wait for catastrophe or disasters to strike, for us to implement solidarity on the international level.

Rather than the exception, this must be the rule.

I too have made of ‘solidarity’ one of the objectives of my Presidency. I do not mean this only in the strict sense of charitable initiatives.

It is a horizontal principle that I insist upon in dealing all the targets I have set for these five years ranging from the equal and fair distribution of wealth, to the healthy and smooth integration of migrants, and giving the elderly the care and dignity they deserve.

Excellencies,

With all these goals in mind, and with the backing and loyalty of the People of Malta, I will be doing my utmost to help ensure that our society thrives and prospers in a stable environment, in the serenity and security guaranteed by functioning institutions and in full compliance with the rule of law.

I will also be seeing that Malta is restored to its rightful place in the international arena and enjoys the respect it deserves for the results obtained over the decades in the interest of dialogue, world peace and the defence of universal values and democratic principles.

The People of Malta, rely on your full support in getting there.

May I wish you all a very Happy New Year full of success, prosperity and above all good health.

Thank you.