

Dear Madame President

Colleagues and fellow Parliamentarians

Having been a member of Parliament since 1996 and then Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives since 2013, one aspect I learnt through my experience is that politics and people should be close to each other. Coming from a small island, Malta, in our Parliamentary system we have members of Parliament that keep their profession. Throughout the years this aspect in our system has been controversial as it can lead to conflicts of interest. However, one argument which has constantly resisted change in our Parliamentary system is that, when politicians keep their profession, they are more aware of what the problems are on the ground; what are the needs and the challenges that people face.

Social justice must start from good laws. There cannot be social development and justice without good and effective laws. Good and effective laws are crucial, but they are equally worthless if not enforced properly. Therefore, Parliaments have an essential role in putting social development and

justice high on their agenda. The protection of social justice must never be considered in the abstract. It must be guided by universal principles that leave no room for doubt. Only in this way can one set a pattern for the implementation of measures by means of which social justice can truly be achieved, placing as the forefront all persons who yearn for justice most, especially the vulnerable.

One of the most important recent political developments that happened in Europe, and Malta as well, was the creation of the welfare state during the second half of the 20th century. Malta, today, has a robust social security system which contributes to an improved social justice. These efforts and the numerous acts passing through Parliament throughout the years sometimes are taken for granted. But it takes a huge effort by national authorities to dedicate a large part of the national budget dedicated to social development. My message to the executive, not only of my country but throughout the world, is that this is money well spent. We must make sure that our expenditure is dedicated to those who are truly in need.

We tend to measure a country's success solely on how the gross domestic product improves year on year. GDP growth is an important factor, but it should not be the only measurement to mark the development of a society. Respect for human rights, social rights, gender balance... these are also important elements that need to be factored in the equation of what is growth and development. A stronger economy is not an end in itself but should serve as a means for wealth to be distributed in a just way among our citizens. It is useless to have a strong growth in GDP when such growth results in disparity of wealth distribution.

Fighting social discrimination is another important aspect to social development. Taking the issue of gender, women in Malta were granted the right to vote and the right to stand for elections in 1947. Few women have been elected to our Parliament since Malta became Independent in 1964. Following Constitutional Amendments introducing a gender corrective mechanism during last legislature to address the under-representation of women in Parliament, application of the law was carried out for the first time following general elections in 2022. Due to

this corrective mechanism, 12 female MPs were added and for the first time bringing a total of 22 female MPs in Parliament.

In 2022, our Parliament unanimously approved a bill that includes femicide in our criminal code. The bill lays out circumstances when a homicide, or the attempted offence, was carried out because of a woman or girl's gender.

Dear colleagues, these are just few examples of how Parliaments can be effective in contributing to better well-being in our societies. I want to emphasise that Parliaments are not only effective tools but essential institutions to improve social justice. Parliaments are the most important institutions that we have at our disposal, to decide on better legislation and to safeguard what has been achieved throughout the years. Therefore it is up to us Parliamentarians to use our institutions to the best of our abilities in order to improve the wellbeing of our citizens.

Thank you.