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# Press Release

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*Lecture given by the President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca to students of the Fletcher School Global Master of Arts Program, Tufts University, Boston: Diplomacy for Peace*

Professor Deborah Winslow-Nutter  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear faculty and students.

I am glad to have this opportunity to meet you and to share some thoughts about the important role that diplomacy must play within our family of nations, in the face of increasing uncertainty around the world.

The defining principle of diplomacy has, for a long time, solely centred around national interests. We are told that the most effective diplomacy occurs when governments use the elements of power at their disposal, including political connections, geographical context, economic capacity, and even military resources, to create change for their own benefit.

The classically trained diplomat knows that such benefits are achieved through a delicate balance between strategies of persuasion; of compromise; and the threat of force.

However, beyond the pursuit of purely national gain, I believe we share a more central objective. This objective is what we mean when we talk about the overarching importance of peace.

I believe that the goal of all our work, in the best interests of our interconnected family of nations, must always and in all ways be effective and sustainable peace.

For this reason we must acknowledge that many national and community leaders, from across the globe, have dedicated their entire lives to building peace.

Billions of euros and dollars have been spent, to fund peace-building initiatives.

**Attachments: photos**

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World organisations, such as the United Nations, exist to safeguard the vitality of global peace, to prevent the escalation of violent conflict, and to provide a continuous channel of dialogue between nations.

My dear colleague Antonio Guterres, the new Secretary-General of the United Nations, has once again reaffirmed the crucial place of peace within the core mandate of the United Nations.

In his own words, and I quote, “Let us resolve to put peace first. Let us make 2017 a year in which we all – citizens, governments, leaders – strive to overcome our differences. From solidarity and compassion in our daily lives, to dialogue and respect across political divides... Peace must be our goal and our guide.”

We need to make this promise of peace a reality.

Achieving authentic peace means building bridges instead of reinforcing the artificial walls which separate us. It means striving for positive change. It means carefully re-evaluating the barriers of privilege and exclusion that enclose our economies, our institutions, and our societies.

To produce meaningful change for the benefit of others, we must take action when we encounter instances of oppression and injustice. They are sometimes so deeply embedded within the status quo, in our nations and our international community, that we fail to recognise them.

We cannot deny that an urgent reform of the status quo is needed, if we accept that it contains and perpetuates processes of discrimination and prejudice. Take, for example, the phenomenon of migration that is such a pressing issue here in the Mediterranean, in Europe, and around the world.

The Mediterranean is the most deadly transit route for refugees and migrants seeking safety and a better life. However, the rhetoric used by some of our leaders, and increasingly used by populist demagogues, seeks to shift the blame onto these vulnerable groups.

There is the disturbing implication that it is the victim who is to blame for the injustice and violence which they suffer. We cannot accept this divisive mentality, which makes invisible the common bonds of humanity that bind us together.

Moreover, there is a worrying tendency to personalise what is, in fact, political. We cannot ignore larger issues of structural injustice by focusing on personal prejudices, claiming that it is only extremists who are the problem.

The right-wing radicalisation we are witnessing around the world is not an aberration. Rather, it is the product of the systems which we must urgently reform. These structures must have, at their centre, the dignity of the human person, above and before all other considerations.

I am afraid that populist doctrines and ideologies are creating increased resistance to the need for this domestic transformation.

However, we need to put our own houses in order.

We need a full and frank review of the vision for our own countries. It is then that we can ensure the development of healthier relationships among our nations.

We must address inequalities of all sorts, whether on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and so on, that hinder respect and harmony in our own communities and societies.

How can we successfully safeguard the dignity of other nations if our own countries do not reflect a commitment to effective social justice?

Furthermore, I believe that any efforts at diplomacy, which are enacted at the service of the national good, cannot conflict with our responsibility to secure the common, universal, and global good.

We have accepted the importance of a global approach for our countries' economic prosperity. It is now the time to develop a global social solidarity approach and an ethical commitment to wellbeing.

We must acknowledge that our innermost human nature is defined by the profound desire each one of us shares to create connections, and to build meaningful relationships.

The diplomat has a crucial role in creating new, and healing old, relationships.

The importance of healthy relationships in turn means that we must seek out opportunities for new connections, rising above our differences of culture, language, political orientation, and our traditions of faith.

I believe that the diplomat maintains and sustains peace by nurturing open channels of communication, and encouraging collaboration across economic, cultural, and social sectors.

Our commitment to connections built on social solidarity must be expressed throughout our societies and nations. As I see it, the success of diplomacy must come from a shared and unified culture of peace, promoted through active opportunities for cultural diplomacy.

In service to a common culture of peace, I believe that the fundamental rights, freedoms, and dignity of the human person should be a top priority on our national and global agendas.

It is the task of diplomacy to ensure that communication between our nations remains open, to receive the creative and collaborative potential which occurs when we work together.

Let me encourage you, throughout your academic and professional lives, to consider this responsibility very carefully indeed.

In the process of your studies and careers, I would like you to ask yourselves;

How can diplomacy be a channel through which harmonious solutions for the future are achieved; through which hope in our collective potential is restored; through which dialogue is sustained and the seeds of peace are nurtured?

I must admit that a diplomat faces many challenges because of the contrasts that can arise between the principles of peace and the goals of a nation's self-interest. Friendships formed between our nations primarily serve a state's own interests, however, I believe that these cannot be coercively imposed or closed from the greater good.

Any asymmetry of power, whether it is between individuals, communities, or countries, brings the potential for suffering and instability. It invites oppression and exploitation, rather than equity and mutual respect.

And let us never forget that displays of military force do not create sustainable peace. Violence can never lead to understanding and respect.

Each and every one of us, whoever we might be, must decide together that the power and strength of a nation can no longer be determined by how successfully it intimidates others. The fundamental lessons of solidarity and respect, which we teach our children, cannot be ignored at the highest levels of governance.

Otherwise the international community creates a sense of hypocrisy, which undermines the commitment it says it feels towards fundamental human rights and peace.

I believe there must be renewed focus, on behalf of all our nations, to promote the inclusion of minority groups and oppressed communities. They must be invited, as valued contributors and respected stakeholders, to participate in the social and economic lives of our countries.

Without such a sense of respect, then discrimination and inequality will continue to create deep-rooted tensions that can take many generations to address.

Humankind is at a crossroads in history.

We are at a delicate moment in the development of our human family. Across the globe, it is becoming clear that the challenges we face are not being adequately addressed by state-centred solutions. It is clear, all around us, that new and innovative solutions are required to effectively deal with contemporary concerns.

Top-down models of communication, which continue to exclude or underrepresent women and other groups from the table, are not delivering the stability and peace which is so much needed today.

We must harness the potential of new technologies, which make it more possible than ever for us to achieve truly participative and collaborative change.

I encourage you all to become part of this new reality, by finding ways of addressing international issues in increasingly de-centralised ways, empowering our communities and strengthening their voices.

We must inspire one another to break down damaging stereotypes while we build new and harmonious narratives. This is how authentic dialogue can happen, by connecting communities and nations in a spirit of solidarity.

We cannot go on thinking of others as units of production to be exploited, as resources to be consumed, or as objects to be used.

Moreover, we can no longer wait for leaders to act alone in the slow journey towards peace. As diplomats, you are well aware of the unfolding realities of today's world. You know that true power belongs in the hands of the people.

It is the wellbeing of the people that the state must facilitate, in every way possible, and never at the expense of the global good.

It is up to us to invest in new models of social change, which combine the innovations of technology with the priceless ideals of our democracies.

This is the moment to step outside national, cultural, and religious boundaries, and work together to build a united culture of peace.

Top-down nation building can only express a narrow collection of interests, and so it is your duty, as it is mine, as people of goodwill, to encourage all individuals to express and represent their aspirations for a better life.

Civil society has an essential role to play in offering us guidance while we consider our journey forward. The hard-won achievements of our respective nations cannot be compromised by the over-emphasis that authorities sometimes give to short-term objectives.

We must give pride of place to the core and certain values which define our democracies, namely, respect for Human Rights; care for the environmental heritage of our planet; and the sustainable stability of our regions.

Non-governmental organisations are ideally situated, both within our countries and across borders, to be guardians of these goals. Their collaboration with national and international authorities is essential.

Such collaboration ensures that legislation and policy remain rooted in the lived experiences of real people, prioritising their best interests and safeguarding the wellbeing of all, especially the most vulnerable.

It is up to each one of us to create conditions that are favourable for effective change. It is up to us to embrace our responsibilities as members of one global community, striving together for social justice and human dignity.

Dignity exists in the connection between individuals, between communities, and between nations. It is this reciprocity of respect which creates the possibility of peaceful collaboration.

Diplomacy cannot be an instrument which protects the power of the few at the expense of universal human dignity. It cannot limit itself to the confines of realpolitik; of tit-for-tat strategising; or competitive displays of might and influence.

Diplomacy must be an opportunity for patience in the face of challenges. It must create an environment of friendship and mutual enrichment, rather than facilitating the ambitions of the few.

Diplomacy must be a celebration of truth, a source of protection, and a bond of trust. Diplomacy must be guided by our sincere hopes for harmonious and sustainable peace, both within and between our nations.

I hope that we shall each be fortunate enough to look back on our lives and know that we did our utmost, in all the ways we could, to fill the world with wellbeing. May you always be active champions of peace, throughout your careers, and for the whole of your lives.

Thank you, and please enjoy the rest of your stay in Malta.