



Press Release

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Speech by the President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca at the launch of a publication entitled ‘Phoenix Rising: Starting Over after domestic violence’, written by Ms Elaine Compagno and published by the St Jeanne Antide Foundation

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to inaugurate the launch of ‘Phoenix Rising’, a book published by Saint Jeanne Antide Foundation with the support the President’s Award for Creativity.

This book is the culmination of a two-year project, bringing to light survivors’ experiences of domestic violence in Malta, written by survivors themselves.

I hope that, through this publication, their stories will finally reach an even wider audience, providing much-needed inspiration and solidarity with those who are still caught in cycles of abuse and isolation.

Each chapter is rooted in a qualitative methodology, bridging together research, therapy, and popular wisdom. The book produces an insider’s look at the painful realities faced by many women and families across our islands.

Furthermore, the book’s thirty-seven recommendations will give an excellent opportunity for our authorities and policy-makers to see the necessary action we must take on our journey forward, as a nation, to continue tackling the scourge of domestic violence.

I am pleased to note that the recommendations combine the lived experiences of survivors with the practical requirements for action, expressed by professionals and practitioners in the field.

Together, through initiatives such as this project, we must continue sending a strong message that we are united, as one society, against gender-based violence in all its forms.

It is shocking to consider the implications of recent developments, taking place in certain European countries, which are undermining the progress we have made as a human family in the struggle against gender-based violence.

Let me speak, for a moment, about one such development. A week ago, I am sad to say, the Russian Parliament voted overwhelmingly for a bill that decriminalises many acts of domestic violence.

Moreover, it drastically reduces sentences for abusers. The new law, which passed with a 380 to 3 votes, eliminates criminal liability for “battery within families” that does not cause “substantial bodily harm”. This substantial bodily harm is defined as injuries which require hospitalisation, meaning the most extreme examples of abuse.

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In a country where an estimated one in three women are victims of domestic abuse, human rights advocates say that this law will worsen an already-grave problem.

As women's rights lawyer Mari Davtyan explains about this law, and here I quote, “sends a message that the state doesn’t consider familial battery fundamentally wrong anymore.” End quote.

We cannot allow the rejection of human dignity to go unchallenged, wherever it takes place. Ending domestic violence is ultimately a human rights issue, and human rights are universal. They cannot be treated as a pick-and-choose, or ‘a la carte’, concept.

They are a framework, a way of life, a reality that must be embraced completely and profoundly, and by all.

We, as Maltese, should be proud that the Istanbul Convention has been signed by Malta, and is being ratified in our country. However we cannot drag our feet, waiting for action to be taken. Civil society must keep encouraging our authorities to act now.

We cannot be silent while social and cultural attitudes, including certain decisions from our courts, dilute our commitment to a zero-tolerance policy towards gender-based violence.

In 2015, CrimeMalta published a study which revealed that reports of domestic violence had increased tenfold between 2007 and 2014.

The previous year, a report by the EU’s Fundamental Human Rights Agency found that one in seven Maltese women had experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15, and that the statistic in Malta was more than twice the EU average.

Therefore we must do all that we can to reaffirm, at every opportunity, the roots which keep us connected to the framework of universal human rights and essential freedoms.

We must continue to empower the marginalised and the vulnerable, to strengthen their voices and their resilience in the face of political, social, or economic exclusion.

The book we are celebrating today quotes a famous poem by Maya Angelou, which describes the strength of the human spirit in the face of injustice. I would like to quote it:

“Did you want to see me broken?

Bowed head and lowered eyes?

Shoulders falling down like teardrops,

Weakened by my soulful cries?

You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes,

You may kill me with your hatefulness,

But still, like air, I'll rise.”

Like the phoenix of the ancient legend, we are called to rise. We are called to shine our light in the darkness of ignorance and prejudice.

We are called to be examples, in this time of uncertainty, to our families and to our communities, emphasising our commitment to make the Maltese Islands a unique place of safety and respect for all.

A place where the wellbeing and the dignity of every man, woman, and child, of each human being, is at the heart of all our laws and our policies.

Let me conclude by extending my thanks to Saint Jeanne Antide Foundation for their tireless work, and their innovative and proactive strategies on behalf of the vulnerable.

We must all be firm in our responsibility to safeguard the dignity of all people in society, ensuring it is fully reflected by our authorities, our institutions, and across society in our Maltese Islands.

Thank you.