
Opening speech, delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the launch of the 4th International Congress of Biodiversity

17th November 2017

Prof. David Mifsud

Distinguished academics, scientists, and students

Dear friends

It is my pleasure to open this 4th International Congress of Biodiversity. Let me begin by commending the Entomological Society of Malta, and in particular, Prof David Mifsud for his dedication and passion for the subject.

I would also like to commend you, for hosting this event, and for facilitating such an important space for dialogue.

This is an excellent example of diplomacy through biodiversity, because this event brings so many people from across the globe together!

I am informed that your deliberations shall focus on new opportunities for scientific discussion, while also creating stronger connections among environmental NGOs, government agencies, and environmental authorities.

I believe that such synergies are essential, in order for us to take practical actions, within our diverse societies, for the ultimate benefit of our peoples and our planet.

For this reason, the focus of this congress on biodiversity, and the safeguarding of our global natural heritage, comes at an important time in the history of our world.

We are at a crossroads; now is the time in which we must make the choice, as one humanity, to take definitive action and to transform our societies, for the better.

Our world is facing unprecedented challenges on a global scale which include economic insecurity, food scarcity, processes of climate change, threatened ecosystems, and violent conflicts.

On the other hand, the world is experiencing a fast-growing population, levels of consumption that are getting higher each year, and greater pressure upon limited natural resources.

Alternatively, all of our countries have committed themselves to effectively implement the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

Let me remind us that each of our countries is a signatory to the UN Agenda 2030.

In this context, each of our countries is responsible for Agenda 2030.

The Sustainable Development Goals offer the international community the best opportunity to unite, around an agenda, which is truly revolutionary in its nature, and universal in its application.

The SDGs challenge our status quo, and compel us to act for a deep-rooted change in our mentalities.

The SDGs call for us to see the opportunities and benefits, which are possible, when we embrace sustainable development.

Moreover, the SDGs remind us of the high risks, should we continue along our present path, with a “business as usual” attitude.

Agenda 2030 broadens the scope of the development agenda, being pursued by our countries, with its proposed goals to reduce inequalities, to encourage equity, and to build inclusive and peaceful societies.

The importance of valuing and safeguarding biodiversity is an implicit part of each goal; however, there are two specific goals, which focus, completely, on biodiversity.

These are Goal Number 14, which focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas, and marine resources; while Goal Number 15 focuses on restoring and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

These goals offer an explicit focus on the integrity of the natural world, which underpins all of our plans for global development.

Biodiversity-related targets are also central to the other Sustainable Development Goals, including the first and most fundamental goal, which is the eradication of poverty.

Goal Number 1 highlights the need for access to land and to natural resources, which must be made available to all individuals, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

Furthermore, the goal on food security promotes resilient agriculture; the genetic diversity of seeds, plants, and animals; and equitable benefits from the use and the sharing of such genetic resources.

The Sustainable Development Goal on water seeks to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including our precious coastal areas.

These targets are linked together, across the diverse goals of Agenda 2030. Therefore, I believe we need to keep working on holistic approaches, if we are going to achieve sustainable development.

Maintaining such a holistic approach means that we must promote the integrity of our ecosystems, as an essential component, to achieve and to sustain human wellbeing.

We cannot tackle poverty, inequality, and environmental issues in a fragmented way. We must recognise that social justice is intrinsically linked to environmental justice.

Permit me to suggest that, during your deliberations, you keep in focus the powerful potential of the United Nations' Agenda 2030.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a call to action, not only at the level of our governments and authorities but also within our communities, and in our own individual lives.

Let me encourage you to help, to ensure that sustainable development remains high on the agenda of our nations.

On concluding, I must say I am convinced that we have the potential to eradicate poverty, to achieve greater equality, and to restore and to maintain the integrity of our ecosystems, when we work together for one common objective.

However, we must first be prepared to step away from the “business as usual” attitude, and begin the long but necessary process of developing a new mentality, rooted in the principles of sustainability, and empowered by a cultural shift towards true equality.

I augur you all a successful congress and I look forward to exploring the outcomes of your deliberations.