

**Opening Speech, delivered by HE Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management Conference, with the theme “Professional Learning: a Leadership Opportunity and Challenge”, 13 November 2018**

**[Salutations]**

**Distinguished guests,**

**Dear friends,**

**It is my pleasure to welcome to Malta so many international academics, educators, experts, and professionals, from diverse fields in the educational sector.**

**Let me begin by commending Ken Brien, President of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management, and Professor Christopher Bezzina, from the University of Malta, for bringing, for the very first time, this important conference in the Maltese Islands.**

I am sure that this conference will create the opportunity to share your experiences, to explore the latest research about educational leadership, and to discover new strategies for your work.

Coming together from diverse cultures and regions to work in synergy, as a family of nations within the Commonwealth, gives a clear message of the importance that should be given to education and empowerment.

I am convinced that there is so much to share, amongst you, and there is so much to learn from each other.

I am also convinced that our Maltese educators have a lot to say, about the ongoing process of educational reform in my country.

Even though we have, for many decades, been working to ensure that our national educational system is inclusive, more student oriented, and more focused on the professional aspirations of

our educators, and we have managed to overcome many challenges to reach our objectives, we do not sit on our laurels.

We continue to monitor and continue to introduce innovative measures, so as to keep streamlining inclusivity in our system.

For these reasons, and more, I believe that the Maltese Islands will provide a perfect setting for your deliberations.

As we all know, our societies are changing rapidly, and education has to respond to the many concerns and challenges of the twenty-first century.

**Educators are leaders for change.**

**Educators are central to our communities and to our societies.**

**Educators are key, to create awareness about social justice, and can provide the practical means to effectively empower our**

children, young people, and communities, with the necessary skills to have the resilience to overcome the challenges of life.

In this context, let me quote the words of the British philosopher, Herbert Spencer, who said that “the great aim of education is not simply knowledge, but action.”

In order to achieve the most effective action, I believe that our educators must be empowered and given the necessary resources, to implement reforms which meet the challenges and demands of our globalised world.

In practical terms, empowerment is key to the creation of leadership for teachers, who must be given the opportunity to an ongoing system of self and professional development.

This is essential, because teachers are the ones who work in closest contact with students.

Teachers are therefore well placed, to develop the appropriate education strategies, to ensure that they can give the best educational experience to all the children and young people under their care.

A 2016 survey carried out by the Times Educational Supplement in the UK, indicated that eight out of ten teachers, globally, do not feel that their profession is sufficiently valued by society.

Furthermore, this same survey states that 90 per cent of school leaders, that is, the top management of our educational institutions, feel that teaching is undervalued.

Therefore, the empowerment of our educators must be part of a larger transformation within our respective societies.

We must work, to restore the dignity of the teaching profession.

As the daughter of an educator, myself, I have had first hand experience of the fact that being a teacher is not simply a “job”.

**It is a vocation, a commitment, towards the intellectual development and the holistic wellbeing of all the members of our societies.**

**In the context, I would like to take the opportunity to encourage our governments and our universities, to effectively invest in the professional development of our educators.**

**The empowerment of our educators is a crucial component of the social empowerment strategies that must be in place, to create a constructive educational system in our countries.**

**Teachers must be encouraged to regain their sense of pride and self-worth, while also being able to apply their creative energy to seek their constant and consistent improvement.**

**A study which explains this issue, entitled “Towards an evolving conceptualisation of instructional leadership as leadership for learning”, which was published earlier this year by the Journal**

of Educational Administration, presents a comprehensive review of 25 years of quantitative instructional leadership research.

The outcomes of this impressive study reveal that two of the most important factors, which motivate the instructional leadership abilities of educators, are teachers' satisfaction and teachers' commitment.

Therefore, a practical approach to encourage teachers to develop their full potential, is by focusing on the sources of satisfaction and commitment, which empower our educators to pursue opportunities for leadership, and to ensure that they are safeguarded at a national and professional level.

For this reason, I believe that it is essential for the voices of our teachers to be heard.

Our political authorities and policy-makers must respond to the first-hand experiences of educators, and their concerns.

Teachers' aspirations must be given the consideration that they deserve, in the formulation and implementation of the relevant legislation and policies.

This can be achieved most successfully by establishing a professional culture, which highlights the importance of value-centred leadership.

I believe that, to provide appropriate and effective education across our societies, we must emphasise the need for ongoing professional development and the empowerment of our educators.

In this way, I am convinced that we will be better equipped to transform our Commonwealth of Nations into a global role-model for educational leadership, and the holistic wellbeing of our educators and their students.

Moreover, I am confident that this necessary transformation can only be achieved by prioritising an inclusive and multicultural



education, which is built upon universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Educators are the most important catalysts, to create such an inclusive, rights-based, and respectful educational system.

This is why effective leadership for teachers must be rooted in the values of inclusion, equity, and equality. Each one of these values has been identified explicitly, as a critical objective for teacher empowerment, by the Commonwealth Ministers of Education.

I would like to encourage you, as academics, educators, and professionals, from diverse fields in the educational sector, to continue to seek opportunities to develop your own capacity, to achieve these goals in your careers and professional development.

In this way, you will also be making a practical contribution towards the commitment, made by all of our countries, to

achieve the mandate of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals.

In particular, SDG Number 4 commits all of our countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable education by 2030. In this way, we will be providing an effective pathway to empower our citizens, but also our educators.

On concluding, let me share with you the inspiring words of the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, who was himself a citizen of the Commonwealth.

Kofi Annan said that “knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.”

I am convinced that in your capacity, as teachers and educators, you will be able to achieve the necessary progress in the educational sector of our countries, our regions, and our entire Commonwealth of Nations.

I have learnt, from my own experience as a politician for many decades, that trust and respect are essential values for effective and genuine leadership.

In my opinion, if you embrace trust and respect as an intrinsic part of your work with students, you will be ensuring that our communities, our Commonwealth of nations, and our entire world will be empowered to overcome the challenges of the present and the future, as it will translate into the necessary skills for resilience.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to exploring the outcomes of this conference.