

Speech delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the Launch of the MAANCH Platform, London, 14 November 2018

Distinguished guests,

Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to address you at this important event. An event which will be, as I am informed, a special preview of the important space, that is being created, for diverse stakeholders to come together, through Maanch, as an innovative platform for sustainable development.

I am confident that the initiative being taken to develop the Maanch platform has much potential to build effective collaborations among diverse stakeholders. Synergies, amongst civil society organisations, philanthropists, and the business communities, are truly essential, in today's world, where sustainability must be the way forward for the future of all humanity.

Let me therefore commend Darshita Gillies, Founder and CEO of Maanch, for promoting this important initiative, to entice diverse stakeholders, to contribute to the necessary sustainable development of our world.

I would also like to thank Serena Mukhi who has introduced the concept of Maanch to me, and also extended an invitation for me to be here today. I have known Serena for quite some time now, and have come to know her as an intelligent, enthusiastic and passionate activist for positive change. I can already see Serena as a future leader for the sustainability of our planet, and our human family.

Now let me take this opportunity to share with you some practical examples, through my first-hand experience, of how the business community, working in synergy with non-governmental organisations, are successfully making a real impact, to help in meeting the objectives of the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its SDGs, have been a major focus of my work, throughout my Presidency, as I believe that working to implement the SDGs is crucial, if we want to live in a world which prioritises on the values of social and environmental justice, equality, and equity.

Definitely, collaboration between civil society organisations, philanthropists and the business community, is essential to make these values a reality.

Let me share a very practical example from Malta.....A recent interesting conference, which was facilitated through my Office, was held earlier this month, to explore how civil society, businesses, and the media in Malta, can do more to collaborate in effective ways, to highlight and to meet the objectives of the SDGs.

We felt, that the efforts that are being undertaken need more visibility, to encourage everyone, to take responsibility of the much-needed drive, for sustainable development.

During this same conference, participants were impressed by the indicators reported by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which state that 70 percent of businesses, across the world, are already responding to the Sustainable Development Goals, and that their Corporate Social Responsibility commitments, are actually led by the SDGs.

Moreover, these same indicators report that an overwhelming 90 per cent of people are convinced, that all businesses should take action to implement the SDGs.

Therefore, it is clear that encouraging more effective synergies between civil society organisations and businesses, is the ideal way forward for the Sustainable Development of our world.

The SDGs offer us the most structured and powerful framework, to achieve effective corporate social responsibility and civil society collaboration, in today's world.

Moreover, corporate social responsibility and synergies with civil society stakeholders, are in synch with the commitment that our countries have taken up in 2015, through the worldwide approval of the Sustainable Development Goals, to implement a global social solidarity approach.

In contrast to this worldwide approval, it is disheartening for many, to see so many stories, which flood the media every day, of situations and occurrences that lack this spirit of social solidarity.

Regrettably, even the wider access to information, through new technologies, has not led to an increase in the concern that people show for one another.

This world-wide state of precariousness demands, of each and every one of us to act boldly, to demand strategies of global social inclusion; to address the inequalities that continue to hinder our progress towards more inclusive and peace-affirming societies; and to focus on approaches for sustainable development, so as to ensure more resilient communities.

I am confident that Maanch has the potential to help in addressing these concerns.

I believe that we need all hands on deck, as one human family, to address the many needs for sustainability.

We, as a human family, cannot go on ignoring the challenging realities of people who are facing persecution and discrimination; precarity and poverty; and global risks of violent conflict and social unrest.

From my experience, I can assure you that synergies between civil society and the business community do work to give positive results by means of sustainable investment, to address precarity, and vulnerability.

Back in 2015, I set up the President's Trust, which is a private organisation whereby, businesses and civil society work in tandem, in building social projects to empower vulnerable young people.

Within three years of existence, we have managed, through this organisation, to develop ten social projects which address the needs of hundreds of young people with an investment from the private sector, of hundreds of thousands of euros.

These social projects, which are operated by Non-Governmental Organisations, and monitored, assessed, and measured by The President's Trust, are addressing various social concerns, related to a number of communities, of young people, living in precarity, due to certain circumstances, or coming from vulnerable background.

We are working with:

- Teenage mothers;
- Young people coming from vulnerable backgrounds who are seeking employment;
- Visually-impaired children and young people;
- Street children;
- Multicultural communities of students;
- School children living in depressed areas;
- Young people with mental health problems;
- Children at risk of poverty; amongst others.

In this way, through our work, for sustainability, we are contributing towards most of the SDGs, namely:

- SDG 1 - Poverty;
- SDG 3 - Health and Wellbeing
- SDG 4 - Quality Education
- SDG 5 - Gender Equality
- SDG 8 - Decent Work
- SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 17 - Strengthening Global Partnerships for the Goals

A complementary organisation, which I have also facilitated to be set-up, from my Office is, what we call the CORE Platform.

The mission of the CORE Platform is “To promote, to debate, to raise awareness about, and to disseminate the concepts of Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Social Responsibility.” It aims to be a platform of exchange and mutual learning among members, its associates, civil society and other partners at national and international levels.

CORE Platform is also a member of CSR Europe.

Now that our economies are changing at an accelerated rate, responding to the demands of new technologies and industrial developments, I believe that we too must respond to these economic transformations with a parallel change in our approach to compassion and care, for all members of our communities and societies.

We need to ensure that a global fair distribution of wealth is achieved, based on sustainability and justice.

Without such a change, we will continue witnessing an escalation in global inequality, discrimination, and poverty.

Inequalities, discrimination and poverty breathe social tensions.

I am proud to say, that my country, Malta, is proactive by already responding effectively to the new technologies which are becoming a vital part of our businesses.

My government has responded to the potential of blockchain technology, by being one of the very first countries in the world to develop comprehensive laws, that regulate the world of digital assets and ensure maximum consumer protection.

Furthermore, in my role as Chair of the senior advisory board of the Blockchain Charity Foundation, a new and very innovative philanthropic organisation, I am seeing how businesses have the opportunity to be the pioneers of a new approach for sustainable development, by using the latest innovations in technology.

Developing Malta into this hub for new technologies is translating my country's important geostrategic and historical position, at the centre of the Mediterranean, as a centre for connection between diverse cultures and continents, into a new twenty-first century context.

On the other hand, by embracing the potential of cryptocurrencies, blockchain technology, and artificial intelligence, my government is making an important contribution to take our Maltese legacy of innovation another step further, and also to strengthen it, for the benefit of future generations.

Indeed, we are excited to share these innovations with others.

Exploring the potential of blockchain technologies, and how they can work in synergy with civil society organisations, was the rationale behind the recent Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between the President's Trust in Malta, and Binance's Blockchain Charity Foundation.

The relationship, which has been created between the President's Trust and the Blockchain Charity Foundation, is setting new standards, in the ways in which non-governmental organisations can benefit from advances in Distributed Ledger Technology.

I am convinced that every business has the ability to utilise such innovations, and make their own contributions, to improve the socio-economic conditions of individuals and families who are facing precarity or vulnerability.

The fusion between digital technologies and civil society organisations, guided by the overarching mandate of the SDGs, is a powerful step into the future, for the benefit of all of humanity.

Not only will this fusion be a way to nurture business interests and to promote prosperity, but it will also have parallel benefits for civil society organisations, by empowering their essential work.

Furthermore, blockchain technology is placing a spirit of trust at the heart of our socio-economic interactions, due to the transparency and accountability that it provides.

Blockchain provides opportunities for radical transparency, of all the donations made to civil society organisations. It also makes it much easier to channel the much needed financial aid, and to ensure that it is reaching the intended recipients.

We must be innovators, and embrace the potential of these new technologies, because our future generations will grow up in a world where these forms of digital exchange are the “new norm”.

I truly believe that, our young people are the necessary catalysts, for us to achieve the mandate of the SDGs, in synch with developments in global technologies.

For this reason, I urge everyone to continue to focus on outreach and empowerment for young people, throughout the potential work which will be done by the Maanch platform.

According to the United Nations’ Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, and I quote: “young people are key SDG accelerators. Drawing on youth expertise, know-how, networks, and adopting promising practices for youth engagement, sets the stage for the discovery of innovative solutions and actions, which can multiply development gains over the lifetime of the 2030 Agenda.”

The Sustainable Development Goals are not only a guide for governments and policymakers, but they also speak, directly and powerfully, to young people.

There are 1.2 billion young people in the world today, which is over 14 per cent of the global population.

This is why we must do more to ensure that the voices of our young people are heard, respectfully, and taken seriously, because I firmly believe that their experiences, concerns, and aspirations have so much to teach us.

The exclusion of young people from our decision-making and development initiatives is a mistake we cannot afford to make. If this happens, it will delay our ability, as one human family, to achieve the full force of the SDGs, and to embrace a better, more prosperous, and peaceful world.

The SDGs give us the opportunity to achieve the necessary global social solidarity approach, to build a new and sustainable world.

On concluding, let me urge you, to work relentlessly, for a world that thrives, and not survives.

Thank you for your attention.