

Public Lecture delivered by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta and Honorary Professor, at the University of Warwick with the theme “Achieving Inclusive Prosperity for the Twin Continents”, 19 November 2018

Distinguished faculty,

Dear students and friends,

It is such a pleasure to be here in Warwick, and to once again address all of you.

I will use this opportunity to share some of my thoughts, about the importance of creating a more sustainable, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationship, between the peoples of Europe and Africa.

I believe that the countries of Europe cannot afford to wait any longer, to transform the long and complex history which we share with the peoples and countries of Africa.

Europe and Africa are, in the words of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, “twin continents.”

When we acknowledge that we are linked, in this essential way, then we must also recognise that our peoples will stand, or fall, together.

Understanding this point is a crucial first step, to create the much-needed opportunities for dialogue and friendship, which are rooted in a sense of solidarity.

This is so perfectly expressed in the inspiring words of the activist Lilla Watson, who said:

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

My country, Malta, has always understood the importance of working alongside others. We know that solidarity can only be

achieved, in the most practical ways, through respectful partnerships with neighbouring peoples.

Malta's historical and geo-strategic position, as a bridge between Europe and Africa, gives us a unique perspective on the challenges that lie ahead, for both of our continents.

As Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, and Champion for the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa, I believe that when we speak about the future of the European continent and our world, then we must also focus on the immense potential of Africa.

This is why the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2016 to 2025 as the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa, and tasked UNIDO to lead its implementation.

The vision for this ambitious framework is to encourage Africa on a path towards inclusive and sustainable industrial

development, thereby collaborating with the peoples of Africa, to develop the necessary skills for full-scale industrialisation.

This is especially important because, by 2050, indicators from the United Nations are telling us that Africa's population will reach 2.5 billion, which means that one in four people on the face of the earth will be African.

We must do our utmost to ensure that all of these women and men, girls and boys, will live in a world that celebrates their identities and supports their aspirations and ambitions.

This is why we must respond, urgently, to the need for sustainable investment, through fair and equitable partnerships, in the countries of Africa.

I am sorry to say that, as yet, these fair and equitable partnerships are not the order of the day.

In fact, the latest Honest Accounts report, released a year ago by a coalition of African and European NGOs, offers a compelling and deeply troubling argument.

It states that the rest of the world is benefitting from Africa's resources, at the expense of African citizens.

As a result of these injustices, many people are being trapped in poverty, while more money is being made to flow out of Africa than is being put into the continent.

The key factors for these inequalities, stated by the report, include unjust debt payments and the illicit practices of multinational companies.

Such reports make it clear that Africa does not need charity from Europe, or any other countries in the so-called "developed" West.

What Africa needs, alongside respectful investment and partnerships, is an end to the systematic exploitation of its resources and its people.

I believe that such reciprocal commitments, and the pledge to end exploitative and undignified behaviours, are the only way forward, to build new collaborations with African businesses, African communities, and African countries, which are built upon a spirit of mutual trust.

This was the spirit of trust that my government displayed, during the high-level Valletta Summit on Migration, held in 2015.

The Summit was an example of Malta's ability, to bring together so many European and African leaders, around one table. While the Summit focused on the challenges posed by migration, the outcomes also included a particular emphasis on investment in the countries of Africa.

The outcome document explicitly commits the leaders of European, Mediterranean, and African countries to “further promote regional economic integration between European, South Mediterranean, and sub-Saharan countries”, while also developing educational networks “between European and African vocational training institutions.”

The Summit directly contributed to the European Union establishing an Emergency Trust Fund, to promote development in Africa, and since that time, further investment has been channeled into the countries of Africa by European stakeholders.

Another example of investment by the European Union is the proposed creation of an Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, between the countries of Europe and Africa.

It is projected that this Alliance will help to create up to 10 million jobs in Africa, within the next five years alone.

The European Union's External Investment Plan, launched two years ago, is already mobilising over 44 billion euros, in both the public and private investment, to achieve these goals.

Furthermore, the creation of a stable and inclusive Free Trade Area in the African continent is a vital prerequisite to ensure that such investment has the most impact, where it is most needed.

Establishing an African Free Trade Area will also bring us closer to the proposed launch of an African Economic Community, in 2028.

However, as we all know, the successful implementation of these initiatives will depend on the effective development of the socio-economic potential of African societies.

As President, I have been to a number of African countries where I led business delegations from Malta.

It was clear to me that African governments, entrepreneurs, and business owners are ready to find genuine collaborations, and to build strategic partnerships.

I have also had personal experiences with diverse civil society organisations and activists, who impressed me with the tangible results they were achieving to create community-level empowerment, and a clear vision for the future of Africa.

This is why I am convinced that the African continent is waiting for us, Europeans, to wake up.

We have the responsibility shift our mentalities to an attitude of sustainable investment, in order to maximise the incredible potential of Africa's peoples.

In fact, countries all over the world are becoming more aware of this potential, and they are making it their business to invest in the African continent.

In September, at the opening of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the President of China reiterated that plans for Chinese investment in Africa would amount to 60 billion dollars.

China is well known for its pragmatic approach to global affairs.

Therefore, the fact that it has identified Africa as an exciting emerging market, with so many opportunities, is a clear indication of the mutually beneficial partnerships that are possible, when our countries and regions work together.

My dream is for such partnerships to be built upon a true spirit of global social solidarity, respectful of human dignity, and promoting the long-term wellbeing of entire communities and societies.

I believe that one way to make a real impact, and to practically achieve this spirit of solidarity, is to invest in quality education.

By 2020, the European Union will have supported 35,000 African students and researchers through the Erasmus+ initiative, and by 2027, this figure is projected to reach 105,000.

Education must be a two-way conversation, and I am convinced that our communities, here in Europe, need to be better informed about the benefits of a more open and respectful relationship towards our African brothers and sisters.

Disseminating this important information is one of the objectives of Global Diaspora week, endorsed by the European Union, and which takes place at a Europe-wide level.

This celebration of our diversity is another indicator of just how serious we must be, to take the relations between Europe and Africa to the next level.

In fact, members of the diverse African diaspora communities are already a vibrant part of all of our societies.

For this reason, I am convinced that the African diaspora has a crucial role to play, for all of our countries to achieve inclusive prosperity and equitably shared development.

I was pleased to host the various representatives of the African diaspora and civil society activists, during the closing session of Global Diaspora Week, held in Malta last month.

For example, it was inspiring to hear about the progress being led by Ms Marie Chantal Uwitonze, President of the African Diaspora Network in Europe, and her team.

Her organisation does not only work at a grass-roots level, but also in advocacy and the political sphere.

The African Diaspora Network presented its work during the Valletta Summit, held in Malta in 2015, during which European and African leaders came together in an unprecedented way to discuss the issue of migration.

Diaspora communities contribute to the Summit's final Declaration, while also raising the profile of the role that the African diaspora plays, as a positive contributor to the European economy and a collaborator, to effectively manage migration.

Addressing such issues is one of the goals that motivates another important initiative, of which I am a patron, called Global Africa.

Global Africa was launched in Malta at the conclusion of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in June 2017.

Global Africa is creating opportunities for partnership with diverse stakeholders, in a variety of sectors, thereby promoting job creation, investment, and skills-development in Africa.

Three areas of cooperation being undertaken over the next three years, between Global Africa and representative organisations of the African diaspora, include:

awareness-raising campaigns to entice business and trade, between European and African enterprises; highlighting the potential for digital innovation; and working together with the European Commission, to create a platform that will map the diverse skills that are being offered by Africans in the diaspora.

However, the President of the African Diaspora Network in Europe also said that there is still, and I quote, “a lot of stigmatisation of Africa and of migrants” in Europe.

From her considerable experience, working with the diaspora communities in European countries, she believes that there is still not enough effort being made to address the deep-rooted causes of social tensions, and prejudice.

I must agree with her, that we are living in a precarious period of our human history. The voices of populists and political extremists are becoming louder, often using the issue of migration as a way of promoting dangerous ideologies.

To deal with this effectively, we need our universities, our authorities, and our media, including social media, to work in full gear.

We must double our efforts, to educate our European communities about the contributions of the African diaspora, especially the young people of Africa, and to recognise the contributions being made by the diaspora to the prosperity of our European continent.

In fact, the diaspora representatives I met with, all said that we need to start putting young people at the heart of our strategies for European and African partnerships.

At the African Diaspora Young Leaders Summit, held earlier this year, it became clear that there is also so much potential for collaborations between young members of the African diaspora and their peers in Africa. I believe that this sharing of experiences is crucial, because the diaspora is an essential

stakeholder to strengthen the future prospects of Africa, as a whole.

Let me also take this opportunity to say that it is important for the social empowerment and economic inclusion of women to be a top priority, to ensure the success of our respective continents.

I believe that the implementation of sustainable socio-economic development in our world will only be possible when we learn to effectively protect, value, and promote the full participation of women, at every level of society.

Discrimination, injustices, and inequalities are a scourge that women and girls in all of our countries are facing, simply because of their gender.

While many governments in Africa are taking action, to promote women's participation through comprehensive strategies for

empowerment, education, and healthcare, there is still an unacceptable imbalance between women and men.

Let me quote the inspiring words of the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, who said that “Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”

Without working to achieve gender equality, we will never reach the full potential of inclusive prosperity and sustainable wellbeing which Africa, and our entire world, deserves.

I believe the we must encourage our partners to continue their efforts, to complete existing legal reforms for more gender equality.

Furthermore, women must be engaged at all levels of decision-making, particularly because we know that, when women are

involved in the resolution of conflict and peace agreements, they are more likely to be long-lasting.

Finally, we must ensure that discriminatory social institutions, which are preventing women from accessing adequate healthcare, education, and economic resources, are effectively restructured.

However, I am pleased to say that there are reasons for us to be hopeful. According to indicators for 2018, from the United Nations Development Programme, 34 countries across Africa have implemented strategies that generate employment and access to finances for women.

Furthermore, these same indicators also tell us that 31 countries are strengthening women's participation in positions of political leadership and ensuring effective access to justice; and 6 countries are enhancing their efforts to ensure equitable access to necessary public services.

It is important for us to place these indicators in the context of African women's participation in the workplace. According to the World Employment Social Outlook Report 2018, published by the International Labour Organisation, almost 7 out of 10 women in sub-Saharan Africa are engaged in the labour force.

Compare this to the fact that, in Europe, the figure is only 5 out of 10 women.

Although there are so many working women in Africa, the ILO also tells us that they are often engaged in low paid work, with 78 per cent working outside the formal non-agricultural sector.

It is also important to also note that, according to indicators from the World Food Programme, if women farmers in Africa were provided with more essential resources, we can reduce the numbers of people at risk of starvation by 100 to 150 million.

Women are feeding the countries of Africa, but they are doing so against the odds.

Can you imagine what we will achieve, as one united world, if these hard working women had equal and equitable access to the necessary resources, to achieve their full potential?

In this context, the decision of the African Union, to designate 2010 to 2020 as “the African Women’s Decade”, is truly inspiring.

Let me therefore take this opportunity to commend the African Union, for having the foresight to address this crucial concern, by promoting gender equality and addressing areas of injustice and exclusion.

Research, time and again, confirms the need for women to be full socio-economic collaborators in African countries, in order to achieve sustainable progress.

The Gender Equality Index of the African Development Bank, clearly states, that the women of Africa make a sizeable contribution to the continent's economy.

In fact, African women are more active as entrepreneurs than in any other region of the world.

For this reason, we must continue to be champions for our women and girls to achieve their aspirations, to start their own businesses, and to receive a top-level education, because these are not only of benefit for them, as individuals, but also for their families, their communities, and countries.

When all the girls and women of Africa have their rightful access to healthcare, education, and opportunities for participation, they will be in a position to take on leadership roles.

When women are leaders, they can more effectively transform social attitudes and cultural stereotypes, in order to build a united culture that values and promotes gender equality.

In fact, there is growing evidence from UN Women that the leadership of women in positions of political decision-making not only has a positive effect on the decision-making process itself; women are also, according to an Inter-Parliamentary “Equality in Politics” report, more likely to collaborate across party lines, to commit themselves to the elimination of gender discrimination, and to pursue inclusive electoral reforms.

For all of these reasons, and so many more, strengthening the role of women as equal contributors, innovative entrepreneurs, and inspiring leaders is essential, for the empowerment of Africa and our world.

I believe that, together, we can achieve such respectful partnerships, between women and men, and between the peoples of Europe and Africa.

This is what the peaceful pursuit of dialogue and dignity is all about.

Ensuring that UNIDO's Third Industrial Development Decade is a success for Africa will be a crucial component, to effectively implement the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

As we all know, Agenda 2030 is a framework for the nations of the world to work in synergy, to address the root causes of inequalities and injustices, while also creating positive peace, inclusive prosperity, and holistic wellbeing for the benefit of all.

I am convinced that, without nurturing dialogue between the peoples of Africa and Europe, and transforming that dialogue into practical investment initiatives, we cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

On concluding, I would like to address all of you, dear students.

You have the responsibility to be today's activists of positive change, maturing into the leaders of tomorrow.

You have the opportunity to be collaborators, in the great work of creating a culture that is built upon the values of dignity and social justice.

I am confident that you will work to achieve strong friendships between the peoples of our respective continents, in a spirit of equality and inclusion, not only for your own benefit and the benefit of society in the United Kingdom, but on behalf of the whole world.

Thank you for your attention.