



**27 November 2015**

## **CHOGM Opening Ceremony – Mediterranean Conference Centre, Malta Speech by Prime Minister of Malta Joseph Muscat**

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Your Majesty, Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Merhaba.

Welcome to Sunny Malta.

Malta prides itself with having 300 days of sunshine every year. Unfortunately we picked one of the remaining 65 for the opening of the Commonwealth Summit.

One of the few things one cannot choose in life is one's parents. Not only we cannot choose them, but we are their product, and most of the times, their choice. Parents are like the history of generations past. We have no say about the choices that have been made before our time, but we are their result.

We achieve our aspirations in life not by shackling ourselves with the past but by working hard for the future. That is how social mobility takes place. That is how society progresses. That is how children achieve more in a short span of time than their parents managed in their whole lifetime. In doing so, they also fulfil the legitimate aspirations of previous generations.

In other words, the best way to pay tribute to the past is by focusing firmly on the future.

The Commonwealth today stands at a crossroads. It has, we have, to decide whether we are about the past or whether we move onwards towards the future.

Most of the countries gathered here in Malta for the second time in a decade, have one thing in common: our past. That past at time controversial, was equally essential for most of us to

build the foundations for what we are today, to help many generations achieve their aspirations.

But as time goes by, there are increasingly less citizens in the Commonwealth's two billion strong population who remember that past, let alone directly relate to it.

I would like to speak to you today not only as Prime Minister of the host country of the Commonwealth Summit and its incoming Chair, but also, if we got our maths right, the youngest Prime Minister of the lot.

As a 41 year old who cannot imagine but living in an independent and free Republic, I feel not only at ease but also proud to be a member of the Commonwealth and having Her Majesty as its inspirational head.

But I know, as we all know, that our organisation has to, it needs to change in order to be part of the future.

Change not because it has not done anything. Quite the opposite. The number of initiatives it has embarked upon over the past years is indeed impressive. But we need to be more relevant and close to the aspirations of our citizens.

The Commonwealth should not resemble extended family reunions where you accidentally bump into second-cousins you barely knew you had.

Instead, it should be about the excitement of meeting someone new, almost for the first time. It should be about extending our networks beyond regional and economic affiliations.

The Commonwealth, we, should be about the future.

To be about the future, we have to be frank with one another, speak honestly and admit that we might have reservations about each other's actions. Silence does not help anyone, and the Commonwealth's most glorious days were when it spoke out. Our focus should be firmly on values and not membership numbers.

The Commonwealth should be a grouping of good countries. It should be a good Commonwealth, a standard and an aspiration that two billion citizens, especially those not bound to the past but more interested in the future, will directly relate to.

I believe that we should have an agenda with clear priorities for the next few years. An agenda that helps a good Commonwealth Add Global Value.

The first is the fight against radicalisation. We live at a time where young people, within the Commonwealth and beyond, are attracted to join terrorist groups that want to destroy democracy and our way of life. Part of the immediate fight is, unfortunately and necessarily, of military nature.

Nevertheless, on the long term there are much more powerful weapons that need to be unleashed to eradicate radicalisation and its causes. They are called education and employment.

Terrorist are more scared of well-educated girls and boys who manage to get a good job than they will ever be of any army.

This is the Commonwealth's natural territory and this is where our organisation is already giving its input and should increase it exponentially. By tackling this issue, we would also be touching on a series of other crucial issues, most notably migration, which is a phenomenon that needs institutions and regulation at a global level.

Education is a key competence of the Commonwealth, but so should be employment and economic prosperity. The signing of a statement of intent to set up a Trade Finance Facility to assist business in small countries is an excellent example of what we can do together, where every Euro, Pound or Dollar we utilise to cover risk for providers of trade credit will lead to increase trade for Commonwealth small states exponentially, to the ratio of 1: 20.

The second is good governance. Political and business leaders must be ready to subject themselves to increased scrutiny, especially from the free media. We must be willing to take bold steps. The removal of time barring for cases of political corruption, the introduction of protection for whistle-blowers and legislation regulating the financing of political parties are excellent tools. Locally, we have implemented them over a short period of time and I am sure they can be equally effective elsewhere.

It is also within this context, that Malta and the Commonwealth Secretariat have this week launched the Small States Centre of Excellence, which will provide online toolkits and assistance in capacity building for small states across a number of policy areas.

The third priority is equality. We still need to work a lot on this. Yes, we must be appreciative of the different cultures and mind-sets, but time is ripe for a genuine self-assessment by Commonwealth countries on equality, be it racial, gender or sexual orientation. Equality is an absolute and cannot be rendered relative to our liking. The first ever Commonwealth

Women's Forum held this week in Malta was a stark reminder of how much still needs to be done to bring full equality between women and men. When it comes to the equality for the LGTBIQ community, we are in a worse position. We are still discussing decriminalisation when the debate should be about non-discrimination and equality. Equality is equality. If we turn a blind eye to this, history will judge us as harshly as it did with those who pretended that racial segregation was something the Commonwealth had to live with. The Commonwealth tall today because it did not turn away but acted firmly. Malta is proud to put this item firmly on the agenda.

The fourth priority is being at the forefront of the quest of saving our planet. The Commonwealth has all the credentials in place to be a credible vehicle of a realistic and ambitious plan to address climate change. The fact that our organisation brings together some of the world's most prosperous economies together with some of the most vulnerable territories makes it an ideal forum for mutual understanding and convergence of thought. If done smartly, all this will make not only environmental sense, but it will also make good business sense. It also helps address migration, a phenomenon that I already mentioned.

As you are all aware, the world faces a very considerable challenge in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and, hopefully, the forthcoming Paris Agreement, which we will discuss tomorrow with UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, and French President, Francois Hollande.

Most of the required investment will have to come from the private sector and a very considerable amount of that will be driven by relatively small projects, which find it very difficult to attract affordable finance. It is critical that this log-jam is broken within the Commonwealth, particularly for those smaller countries which are so vulnerable both to the

impacts of climate change but also to the financial consequences of their financial graduation.

His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales and I discussed this issue when we met in Scotland last year. With his strong encouragement and leadership, I am delighted that the chair of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, Lord Marland, and the Director of the Prince of Wales' International Sustainability Unit, Justin Mundy, have been working on the concept of a Commonwealth Green Finance Facility, initially of \$1 billion, that will provide cost effective guarantees and credit enhancement for small scale green and blue initiatives, that is environment and maritime-related projects, across the Commonwealth. The intention is for this facility to become operational in 2017.

I also welcome the new initiative, the queen's Commonwealth Canopy which will preserve forests across the Commonwealth for the future generations. As incoming chair in office, I thank the outgoing chair for agreeing to support. We will pick up the baton and continue this important work.

I can think of no better way for the Commonwealth to Add Global Value than to focus on these priorities: Fight against radicalisation, encouraging good governance, embarking on a quest for equality and being at the forefront of saving our planet.

To embark on such an ambitious agenda to Add Global Value, we need a sharp and focused organisation. The outgoing Secretary General has done a very good job at providing leadership and introducing new initiatives during his tenure. We do thank Kamlesh Sharma for his unflinching commitment to the Commonwealth. His legacy will undoubtedly be a positive one.

His successor will need to take the operational side of our organisation to a new level. It has to be leaner and meaner in order deliver the full potential of the Commonwealth.

Malta has a reputation for being the place where the world meets.

70 years ago, in a building not far from here, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met to discuss and plan a common position on the liberation of Europe, before going to Yalta.

26 years ago, George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev met in the Grand Harbour beneath us to assess the global position just a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Barely two weeks ago, in this same building, the leaders of 28 Member States of the European Union and 36 African countries met to map out a way forward on migration.

I hope that this meeting will be another watershed moment that will help bring the needed change to make our Commonwealth a Commonwealth of aspiration, a Commonwealth of the future, a good Commonwealth.