

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



**Address by the Head of Delegation of Malta the Hon Dr. Mario de Marco,
Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Environment at the UN Conference
on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, 22nd June 2012**

President of the Conference, Heads of State and Government,

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to thank the government and people of Brazil, for hosting us in this unique city of Rio de Janeiro; a city that welcomes the world community once more with open arms, as it will do again in the years ahead.

Madam President,

I stand here like those before me, as one of fifty thousand delegates who together represent every single living person on our planet. Equally important,

we represent the interest of those who are yet to be born, those who will inherit the Earth from us.

We are here to voice concerns and recognise the problems that our fellow human beings are facing: the problems of hunger, water shortage, depleting resources and conflict.

Some of us are sheltered from the daily horrors of unbearable suffering and useless and untimely death. Others endure it every day.

Some of us have the luxury to plan twenty years ahead. Others pray that they will see tomorrow's sunrise.

Some of us can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Others cannot see at all.

What started forty years ago, at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, under the banner of "Only One Earth", has now evolved into a broad recognition of the value of the ecosphere in which we live. We accepted the need to protect it and manage it soundly. We recognized that our aspirations as citizens of our countries must be tempered by our

responsibilities as citizens of planet Earth. We launched efforts to integrate this awareness in national and global governance.

Two decades later at the Earth Summit in Rio, our thoughts coalesced around the concept of sustainable development. We adopted principles to guide national actions and international relations in pursuit of these goals. We signed off on important action plans and conventions.

But the road has been bumpy - above all, because of the difficulty of keeping long-term vision in focus, when immediate problems demand to be addressed.

It is a challenge to all political leaders to persuade ourselves and our constituents that the long term matters, that it makes short-term sense.

It is a challenge to us all to understand and accept why so many of the aims of the Earth Summit have remained, in the words of the President of Brazil, “on paper”, despite a common understanding twenty years ago of the very sense of urgency.

Madame President,

The people of Malta, a country with one of the highest population densities in the world, with one of the smallest per capita freshwater resources, have learned over millennia to survive and prosper in the midst of external forces outside our control.

Situated at a maritime cross-roads, we have an interest in the politics and resources of the sea, and in averting pressure on our scarce water resources arising from climate change.

It is not surprising therefore, that Maltese diplomacy at the United Nations has been amongst the prime movers of initiatives in these two areas in the General Assembly:

Starting in 1967, Malta piloted the ocean agenda towards the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which the Conference Outcome Document recognises the importance of towards advancing sustainable development.

In 1988, Malta initiated consideration of “protection of the global climate for present and future generations of mankind”, leading to the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

At the Rio Earth Summit Malta highlighted the fact that we lack an institution which could be entrusted with our collective concern for our common heritage, which is planet Earth, and had proposed, the creation of a Guardian for Future Generations. At the national level we have proposed legislation mainstreaming sustainable development in the working of government at all levels and introducing the function of a Guardian for Future Generations.

Malta continues to be motivated by the protection of the global commons and welcomes institutional initiatives in this direction at this conference.

Cognisant that the failure to implement many of the Earth Summit commitments could be, in part, attributed to the current lack of a well-resourced supra-national sustainable development watchdog, we are in favour of more effective working arrangements within the United Nations framework.

In particular, we support the “upgrading” of the United Nations Environment Programme and the initiation of intergovernmental high level political forum, as a necessary prerequisite for strengthening institutional framework..

I would be unfaithful to my conscience however if I were not to admit that we desired the level of commitment to have been higher. Without a strong inter-governmental stewardship for sustainable development, our commitments today risk remaining hollow.

We cannot afford to meet in in twenty, ten or in five years’ time at that and admit again that many of our aims have remained “on paper”. Time is against us more than ever before. The world today is facing a stark and inescapable choice: adopt a model of development that is globally sustainable, strategic, future-oriented and long term, or face the real consequences of dealing with an ever deepening crisis.

But a stronger institutional framework is only a part of the solution, albeit a crucial one. It is not an end in itself. We need to steer growth along the path of increased prosperity, social equity, well-being and environmental health. And this is why we welcome a strong focus on developing a sustainable “**green**” **economy**. In this respect however, Malta strongly believes that **technology**

transfer, research and education are absolutely essential for greener, sustainable growth. Otherwise we risk a sustainable development imbalance.

For Malta, as it is no doubt for many other maritime states, the **“blue economy”** is **an additional path to sustainable future**. We depend on a clean, healthy and productive marine environment for a multitude of reasons, not least of all - our coastal and maritime economy. Hence the importance of giving more value to marine protected areas and marine reserves.

The oceans are, in our case however, not only a source of economic livelihood.

We produce sixty five percent of our freshwater from the sea by desalination process at a cost of almost 5% of our electricity output. The importance of securing a reliable and sustainable water supply is therefore an issue of long term sustainability.

Madam President,

The evolution of political and economic capabilities and responsibilities is natural and will continue. It is important to recognize it in reaffirming and applying the basic principles on which this conference is founded. Otherwise, we will lose touch with reality.

Keeping our eyes on the present and the future, what can we do, as governments, to move our countries and the global community towards sustainable development?

We can – we must – commit to:

Focus on the real economy – the green economy that produces goods and services responding broadly to the diverse needs of the majority of our citizens;

Integrate long-term sustainability in our current economic strategies and decisions;

Provide frameworks and incentives for innovative corporate investment in sustainability – making the long-term profitable;

Combat poverty at home and abroad.

Madame President,

We have to take note however of the statements made by the representatives of civil society and major groups who expected us, who expect us to do more, to be more precise in our commitments and deliverables. Clearly the expectations and the deliverables are not matching. We need to heed civil society's warning. They have too often seen the proverbial writing on the wall before the political class has. The establishment of Sustainable Development Goals, accompanied by targets and indicators is an opportunity for us to provide those deliverables.

In conclusion, allow me to recall how at Stockholm in 1972, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared that poverty is the worst form of pollution.

Over the past decades we came to recognise that poverty transcends the social, economic and environmental domains. It is a three dimensional problem. Trying to address it at one level alone, be it economic, environmental or social will simply not suffice. We need action on all three fronts in the interest of true sustainability.

Madame President,

The process that started in Rio twenty years ago, is today, gaining a critical momentum. This momentum must be sustained, not only because today more than ever the world is at a cross-roads; but also because at stake is nothing less than the Future We All Want.

Thank you.