

UN High Level Political Forum, New York

General Debate, 17th July 2020

**Recorded Speech delivered by
Hon. Evarist Bartolo,
Minister for Foreign and European Affairs for
the Republic of Malta**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year will, without a fraction of doubt, go down in history as one that lent itself towards the surreal. The unexpected challenges that ensued with the emergence of COVID-19 changed life, as we know it, for everyone. Somehow, the instinctive trigger for resilience for survival has urged each nation and each individual to respond to the new, presented reality, in various ways and at different levels, and it is this challenge that lays at our feet that pushes us to review where we can do things better.

COVID-19 may have very well caught us off guard. However, we have had other challenges over the years, which we managed to collectively surpass, whatever their form or context. As an island nation with a multilateralist outlook, Malta has always maintained that global challenges require global solutions. In this spirit, revitalising and refocusing our efforts towards multilateral endeavours can secure lasting solutions through effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order with the United Nations at its core.

In the face of COVID-19, unity remains auspicious more than ever. The current pandemic only sheds more light on how interconnected our world really is, and how local and regional events can have repercussions on a global scale.

Over the last decades, we witnessed countless efforts by the international community to address issues that have plagued our people. Success was at times elusive, and results were only achieved when collective action was sought. We have learnt numerous lessons and whether we have grasped those opportunities is debatable for words are futile if pledges are not followed up by actions.

This year's 75th anniversary of the United Nations could not be celebrated at a better juncture. As a champion of international cooperation and effective multilateralism, the United Nations has always sought to uphold three major priorities: eradicating poverty, preventing conflict and promoting democracy. Five years on since when we set the 17 sustainable development goals until 2030, we discuss today a transformative agenda and accelerated actions to aid us in the timely delivery of sustainable development. Only by strengthening our action now can we honour our pledges made in 2015.

Indeed, there has never been a more important time to act. The current crisis is a reminder that the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda is essential to equip the world better for future unprecedented systemic shocks. In reaching our targets by 2030, we need to safeguard the gains already attained, as we accelerate our collective efforts.

COVID-19 has set back some of the SDGs' progress and meaningful progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals should be considered as more urgent than ever before. This challenges us in

identifying opportunities and creative ways of addressing the timely attainment of the 2030 Agenda, and by keeping these targets as our compass to achieve a global recovery that secures the concepts of sustainability and inclusion.

We cannot overlook the fact that the pandemic has accentuated inequalities between and within countries. More than ever before we need to take this opportunity to build back a healthier, greener, fairer and more resilient world, which is crucial to ensure that no country or person is left behind.

This brings us to recall that there is no one-size-fits-all solution and that we need to take into account the different starting points that each country has left from in order to factor in the national contexts and realities. In doing so, we will ensure resilient societies, capable of rising to a given challenge and equipped to address issues with the potential of creating solutions.

Even though our commitment did not change towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, the urgency to act is more impinged on us, for our own selves, our children and our future generations in a spirit of solidarity and perseverance that unites us as one world.

It is in this spirit of oneness that we can continue to fight and overcome the global challenges in today's world for a better tomorrow.

Together we can get out stronger than before.

Thank you.