

OPENING ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR GEORGE ABELA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA AT THE 'Malta VI Conference entitled "Frontiers of Science: Research and Education in the Middle East – A Bridge to Peace and Development"

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentleman,

Good morning and greetings to you all. Welcome to Malta. In Maltese we say "Merħba"

In 2003, a great idea was born in Malta, this idea being the use of Science as a Bridge to Peace in the Middle East. At first, there were only slender hopes of it surviving, yet it has thrived, grown and returns home to Malta to celebrate the tenth anniversary of its inception.

It is with great pleasure that I open this distinguished conference that seeks through Science a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Today I welcome delegates from 24 nations around the world: from the Middle East to the Far East and from the European Continent to the American Continent.

It may seem ironic that today and in the coming days this Conference will be discussing ways and means of building bridges towards peace, through science diplomacy, in a region which is politically destabilized and torn with conflicts. However, to my mind it is still opportune and fruitful to gather as scientists from divergent and political spectra in an attempt to built or rebuilt these bridges of trust. After all we belong to one humanity.

This is also crucial because the instability and uncertainty in the Middle East, combined with water scarcity, global warming, nuclear proliferation and a civil society still in the process of development in

some areas, may present a threat not only to the region but to the whole world. The Malta Conferences address these challenges by organizing biennial conferences which include workshops on the Environment: Air and Water Quality, Energy Sources, Education at all Levels, Nanotechnology and Material Science, Medicinal Chemistry and Natural Products and Chemistry Safety and Security.

The Middle East's severely poor air quality and insufficient high-quality water can be successfully assessed and addressed by environmental science. However, the solutions have to be international because the badly polluted air-sheds and watersheds cross many national boundaries and are, therefore, regional and international, in nature. Only collaboration between countries in the region may solve these problems.

The Malta Conferences already developed the concept that strong regional activity on solar, wind, wave and other renewable resources would reduce the attractiveness of nuclear energy, with its inherent proliferation potential and political destabilization effects. The Middle East is blessed with abundant sunshine with its obvious potential for meeting growing energy requirements in the region.

I am very pleased to be informed that collaboration on solar energy is going on as a result of previous Malta Conferences.

Climate change, lack of clean drinking-water, chemical warfare and proliferation of nuclear technology are problems that span the globe. In order to build civil society, we must address these problems, which can only be solved by scientists within the region using cross-border collaboration and cooperation. But in order to have scientists who are capable of solving these problems, we need to improve science education at all levels.

The demographics of most Middle Eastern countries make education a pressing challenge for the entire region. Since science is inherently international, we have to develop a more effective science curriculum, different methods of teaching, and low-cost laboratory materials for all levels of education, an approach which we are also aiming at in Malta.

The common language of science helps to overcome chasms of distrust, building tolerance and

understanding, developing friendships, and building bridges between nations with diverse cultures and religions.

With these thoughts in mind, I wish you all a fruitful conference and a pleasant stay in Malta.

Thank you.

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