

Securing Human Rights in Malta

The human rights agenda in Malta has been developing and strengthening for over 60 years and continues to do so. Important initiatives are being taken by Government to reinforce the national equality structure by the transformation of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) into a new Human Rights and Equality Commission.

Human rights recognise the inherent values of all women and men, regardless of our background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. They are thus based on the principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect, which are shared across cultures, religions and philosophies.

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, it is crucial to acknowledge that women's rights throughout the life cycle are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls is thus essential for the advancement of women. It is the responsibility of everyone to not only refrain from violating the human rights of all women, but also to work actively to promote and protect these rights. This is why International Women's Day is an annual event marked around the world! Regardless of gender, nationality, place of residence, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, birth, age, race, religion, language, disability, family status, or any other status, we are all equally entitled to the enjoyment of all human rights without discrimination.

In view of this and inspired by international instruments and mechanisms, the setting up of the new Human Rights and Equality Commission in Malta will take into consideration the legal context, social needs and aspirations of all persons. This Commission will be the first such national instrument to address and oversee the enjoyment of human rights, democracy and the rule of law for the whole of society.

It was in 2014 that the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties launched the initial scoping consultation followed by the publication of a White Paper to further enhance the consultation process in preparation of the publication of the two legislative documents.

The first is the recasting of the *Equality for Men and Women Act* into an *Equality Act* providing for a general principle of anti-discrimination in all spheres of life, also tackling intersectional discrimination thus building on and strengthening the current Act adopted more than 10 years ago.

The second legislative development is the publication of the *Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill* establishing the afore-mentioned Commission. It is envisaged that the new Commission will be an autonomous body answering to Parliament. It will have the power to investigate cases of discrimination and violation of human rights and provide binding opinions and adequate redress. It will also be empowered to monitor the implementation

of the human rights provisions found in Maltese law and international human rights treaties ratified by Malta, and issue reports, opinions and propose legislative changes as it deems fit.

NCPE, as the main stakeholder, has extensively and consistently contributed to the consultation process since its initial launch in 2014 with proposals based on the sharing of knowledge and experience in this field.

These legislative developments further strengthen the successful democratic governance of our country whereby the focus on the promotion and protection of human rights is inevitable. Without this protection there can be no democracy in any meaningful sense. The Human Rights and Equality Commission, soon to be established, will be there to ensure that all individuals benefit from the enjoyment of their human rights in their every day reality. It is up to all of us to be responsible to promote and protect the rights of each and every person in society.

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