

PRESS RELEASE:

Human Rights and Equality in Practice

The importance of reconciliation between work and family life and the strengthening of the legislative framework for equality and human rights in Malta were discussed during a Conference organized by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) to mark International Women's Day.

This is a day when women are recognised for their social, economic, cultural and political achievements throughout the years. Thus, it is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities. This day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender equality.

NCPE's Commissioner, Renee Laiviera, highlighted the European Commission's Roadmap – *A new start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families* - published to replace the 2008 Commission proposal to amend the Maternity Leave Directive. Ms Laiviera stated that NCPE welcomes this initiative and emphasised that the proposed roadmap should facilitate the reconciliation of care-giving with paid work and provide further assistance to employers in adopting more family-friendly measures and flexible working arrangements at the workplace.

The transformation of NCPE into a Human Rights and Equality Commission envisaged to become a reality in the coming months is indeed challenging for NCPE, stated NCPE's Commissioner. She explained that major developments are underway involving the restructuring and strengthening of the current legislation on equality and human rights. NCPE has been preparing itself with research and knowledge on how best to address this challenge since the announcement by Minister Dalli of the government's plan to establish a National Human Rights and Equality Commission, stated Ms Laiviera.

Addressing the conference on behalf of Minister Helena Dalli, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties Mr Joseph Camilleri said that finding a suitable balance between work and private responsibilities is a challenge for all workers. In effect, the Government is addressing this issue by encouraging supportive measures and practices, making it easier for parents and care-givers to strike a better balance. Mr Camilleri outlined some of the measures taken by Government, such as the free childcare services, that are contributing to a higher participation of women in the labour market as a result of better reconciliation of work and family life.

Referring to the government's agenda to prioritise human rights and equality, Mr Camilleri stated that this has continued to be emphasised in various spheres of life with the development of a number of important initiatives. These developments ensure that society not only upholds and protects the rights of every individual, but also challenges any discriminatory practices or breaches of human rights in order to safeguard the dignity and

well-being of all citizens. Permanent Secretary Mr Camilleri outlined the process leading to the establishment of the Human Rights and Equality Commission that will further strengthen human rights and equality in Malta.

An outline of the Roadmap of the European Commission was presented by Dr JosAnn Cutajar from the University of Malta. A presentation on the *Equality Bill* as well as on the *Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill* was delivered by Mr Silvan Agius, Director Human Rights and Integration highlighting the legislative leap that the proposals bring in the field of equality and human rights and how they will ensure that victims have access to justice. The link between human rights and equality was highlighted by Dr Ruth Farrugia from the University of Malta.

Two panels made up of stakeholders, academics, employers as well as trade unions discussed the thematic issues delved into during this Conference. Ways on how to reconcile work and family life were discussed, including the measures that can be taken, together with how the enjoyment of human rights and equality can be further promoted in Malta.

For further information contact NCPE on 25903850 or equality@gov.mt

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