

***Press statement by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)***

***NCPE's International Women's Day Conference 2023***

***'Strengthening equality. Where are we headed?'***

Despite remarkable developments over the past years, women still face challenges to enjoy equal opportunities in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres. International Women's Day, marked annually on 8<sup>th</sup> March, is a day to reflect on the achievements made and to call for further progress towards equality in society.

To commemorate this day, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) organised a conference to discuss two key themes: (i) the proposals for two new Directives on standards for Equality Bodies and (ii) sexual harassment in the workplace.

Minister for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality Dr. Byron Camilleri spoke about the importance of supporting reforms in equality. He reiterated that discrimination has no place in our country and that more efforts should be made so that everyone has the right to enjoy fundamental rights in a framework of laws, policies and practices affecting society as a whole. Dr Camilleri maintained that even if one person experiences inequality, as legislators, we should make the necessary reforms to achieve holistic systems of equality for all. Minister Camilleri concluded by saying that we should continue with such endeavours in a national framework that persists in offering employment opportunities for everyone, among other incentives, in a safe society, with protection systems that continue to be updated and improved.

Parliamentary Secretary for Reforms and Equality, Hon. Ms. Rebecca Buttigieg stated that the roles and mandate of equality bodies, such as those of the NCPE, make a difference in the daily lives of different groups of women and men in society, especially for those at risk of or victims of discrimination. To this end, the Government is committed to continue strengthening the equality infrastructure and to safeguard equality in all spheres.

Hon. Ms. Graziella Attard Previ, the Opposition Spokesperson for Equality and Children's Rights spoke about the Bill filed by the Nationalist Party proposing that companies employing

more than 50 workers would be obliged to have policies on sexual harassment at the workplace. This Bill would contribute to strengthen a zero tolerance approach towards sexual harassment at the workplace and to strengthen equal treatment, in the context that statistical data shows that 3 out of 4 victims of sexual harassment in Malta are women.

The NCPE Commissioner Ms Renee Laiviera stated that the proposals for new Directives on standards for Equality Bodies published by the European Commission contribute to strengthen the endeavours towards equality for the benefit of society as a whole. The role and work of equality bodies is indeed crucial both for the investigation of cases of alleged discrimination as well as for the promotion of equality. Moreover, Ms Laiviera expressed her concern that 75% of women worldwide, who are 18 years old or older, reported experiencing sexual harassment, and a third of the experiences of sexual harassment by women in the EU occurred at work.

Ms Laiviera gave a presentation on the proposals for new Directives on standards for Equality Bodies that seek to ensure that equality bodies are consolidated by stronger guarantees for their independence, adequate powers to achieve their objective of full equality, wider mandates for a more comprehensive protection against discrimination, adequate resources to promote equality and fight discrimination, and higher standards to ensure full accessibility to all.

Following Ms Laiviera's presentation, a panel with different stakeholders discussed how these standards can affect us in everyday life, how and why strong equality bodies are vital to combat discrimination, highlighting the way forward.

Mr André Callus, NCPE Executive (Policy and Training) followed on the subject of sexual harassment in the workplace. Mr Callus defined sexual harassment as unwelcome behaviour that violates the individual's dignity and creates an unsafe and humiliating environment; it is a form of discrimination that hinders equality between women and men and that negatively impacts the individual and the workplace.



A panel discussion on sexual harassment followed highlighting related challenges, the rights and duties of employers and workers and what can be done to further foster safer workplace environments.

In her concluding remarks, Ms Laiviera thanked all participants for their participation in the Conference. She pointed out that the NCPE will study the issues raised and take them on board and in order to keep the discussion alive the NCPE is disseminating two leaflets on the topics discussed during this Conference.

**13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**