



Press Release

PR 0193

30. 01. 2012

SPEECH BY THE HON. MARIO DE MARCO, MINISTER FOR TOURISM, CULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT, DURING THE OPENING OF THE COMMONWEALTH JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE - ST. JULIANS – MONDAY 30TH JANUARY 2012

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 9th Conference of the Commonwealth Journalists Association. You come to Malta to discuss “Journalism and Democracy in the New Media Age.”

It is a difficult as well as interesting time for journalists. The financial crisis is still affecting many countries at different levels. This puts a heavy burden on all of you as you strive to balance the budgetary restrictions affecting many media organisations with the best interest of your viewers, readers and listeners who expect from you nothing but the best quality journalism. We are living during times where restrictions on journalists are still very strong in a number of countries. The democratic deficit of these countries puts on you great pressures which you will discuss during your conference. Unfortunately, there are still too many instances where journalism is, as you aptly title one of your panel discussions, a matter of life and death. Almost 900 journalists had been killed since 1992; 46 of them were killed last year.

On the other hand, we are living during interesting times. Technology is providing you with more possibilities. What was impossible years ago, is now possible, what was difficult is now easy. Technology is also challenging the traditional border line that divided the professional broadcasters and journalists from the rest. You rightly say that this is not only a new age but that this new age is fashioned by the media which is at the fulcrum of contemporary culture.

In recent months we have all experienced the hopes and anxieties, the joys and the fears of the men and women who brought about the Arab Spring. The dictators controlled all the traditional mass media. The common people controlled the new media. The dictators controlled the tanks, the common people controlled the smart phones and the social networks. They used these new media to communicate, to congregate, to inform the world about what was happening, to expose the feet of clay of the regime. The Arab Spring has changed one of the most sapient and most popular dictum about journalism. We can say today that the Smart Phone is more powerful than the sword! Besides, the Arab Spring, more than any other political or cultural upheaval, has amply demonstrated that citizen journalism has come of age.

The theme of your conference shows that you intelligently recognised the present developments as multifaceted ones combining together technology, politics, the legal system and your profession. The programme of your conference shows that you are more than ready to face this new era with courage and creativity. You are looking ahead. The coming decade will be for you a decade of promise and a decade of vision. I augur that your quest will reach its destination.

Attachments: None

Page: 1 of 2

The environment that surrounds you during your discussions and deliberations is both beautiful and symbolic. From your hotel rooms you can see the new Malta with its modern hotels as well as the old Malta, a glimpse of which you get through the views of Valletta on the horizon. If you drive for a few minutes you can enjoy our Grand Harbour, a picture of which is on the front of your conference brochure. Both sides of Malta provide you with exhilarating views. The colour of the sea basking in the warm Mediterranean sun and the sound of its waves lapping the rocky seacoast will surely provide you with an atmosphere that elicits creativity.

Need I mention the fortifications that guard the harbours? During these few days that you will be in Malta, you will be literally enveloped in history. Enjoy it. Look at the beauty and sturdiness of the fortifications built by the Knights of St John, also known as the Knights of Malta. Do image the battles that were fought, the toil needed to build them; the creativity of the architects and the vision of the leaders who dreamt them. This was the work of men from different European countries striving together to actuate a common vision.

The harbour you see, so justifiably called grand, has a varied history. Only a few months ago it was the hub for journalists wanting to cover Libya and the centre of comfort for the thousands of people fleeing from the conflict in Libya. Many journalists from diverse countries around the world benefitted from the myriad services we provided them during that conflict. Many people benefitted from our hospitality. Many governments thanked us for the hospitality proffered on their citizens. Little Malta played a very important regional role. You journalists documented it.

We inherited the European vision of the knights together with the vision of hospitality and adaptability that characterises the Mediterranean people. We are geographically a small nation; but what we lack in size we compensate by our vision of being a bridge between Europe and North Africa, a vision which proved to be providentially useful during the recent conflict in Libya.

You too are in Malta to-day in the pursuit of a vision. The theme of your conference makes it clear that you are here to develop a vision, though of a different kind of vision. It is not a vision built in stone but a vision built on the best traditions of the journalistic profession and aided by the creative development of electronic technology. I am certain that you want to use these two tools to ascertain that the new media age would be one that enhances human dignity, expands freedom and serves the truth.

I trust that your discussions and sharing of experiences will help you evolve your theme - "Journalism and Democracy in the New Media Age"- for the benefit of the journalistic profession, the media industry and, more so, for the millions that benefit from your skills.