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## **PRESS RELEASE BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER**

### ***The Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue held in Rome debates how interfaith dialogue can strengthen trust and embrace hope for our common future***

The Maltese Parliament represented by Deputy Speaker David Agius and Maltese parliamentarians Davina Sammut Hili and Ryan Callus participated in the second Parliamentary Conference on interfaith dialogue that took place in Rome.

The Maltese Parliamentarians participated in two panel sessions. The first panel focused on advancing inclusive societies, ensuring freedom of religion or belief. Davina Sammut Hili in her intervention stated that ensuring freedom of religion or belief means more than protecting the right to worship but also involves protecting the right to change beliefs, to hold beliefs privately or publicly, and to live without fear of discrimination or violence. She stressed that our laws, policies, and social attitudes must work hand in hand to create a safe environment for all. This includes education that promotes intercultural dialogue, media that fosters respect, and public institutions that treat everyone fairly. Sammut Hili informed that Malta has seen great progress in fostering inclusion as society benefits from increasing diversity. She however remarked that progress does not mean the absence of challenges as discrimination, prejudice, and misunderstanding can still threaten social harmony and individual freedoms. Sammut Hili concluded her remarks with a commitment for a Malta where diversity is celebrated, freedom is protected, and everyone feels they belong in an inclusive society.

The second panel debated how to promote ethical leadership and invest in education for peace. During the debate Ryan Callus referred to the intergenerational hatred that is being created by the ongoing and developing wars. It took Europe centuries of instability to develop freedom of religious freedom. In this context, ethical leadership in this time is required to stop ongoing wars, particularly in stopping those who use God as an excuse to justify political wars. Peace is however achieved not only through the absence of violence, but it also requires sustainable development, climate action for access to clean water and food security for all generations and youth and children across the world. In his conclusion, Ryan Callus referred to the UNESCO constitution, that states that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”

The general debate of the conference focused on the role of parliamentarians in dialogue with religion and belief. Deputy Speaker David Agius in his address to the plenary stated that never as today, our nations are experiencing people with different backgrounds; be it national, ethnic, cultural and religious sharing the same space. He remarked that Malta is not an exception as it experienced a sudden increase in foreign people that live on the islands. Deputy Speaker Agius remarked as elected representatives of our respective communities, Parliaments enact legislation and are in direct contact with their respective constituency. Therefore, he stressed that Members of Parliament are instrumental to promote and foster fundamental values of non-violence, respect and openness



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to others, tolerance, solidarity and peace. In conclusion Deputy Speaker emphasised that this is the best way that we can build trust and fight discrimination on all levels as Parliamentarians together with spiritual leaders have a duty to do this in order to embrace hope for our common future.

The conference adopted the Rome Communiqué which focused on the main subject debated during the proceedings. The Conference closed with a private visit to Pope Leo which took place on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June. The Maltese delegation also had the opportunity to meet Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech in which they discussed his role as secretary general of the Synod of the Bishops and the efforts taken by the church on interfaith dialogue.