

Address by the Speaker of the House of Representatives

Parliament of Malta

Hon. Anġlu Farrugia

16th Sept 2025

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Hon. Rebecca Buttigieg, Parliamentary Secretary for Equality and Reforms,

Hon Graziella Attard Previ,

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, esteemed guests,

Allow me first to express my thanks to the three speakers who addressed us before me — the Parliamentary Secretary, Hon. Rebecca Buttigieg; Hon. Graziella Attard Previ, Member of the Opposition; and Mrs Maria Ellul from the Human Rights Directorate within the Office of the Prime Minister. Their reflections have given depth to this occasion, and their words set the stage for what we are about to inaugurate together.

As Speaker of the House of Representatives, it has been my privilege to welcome you this evening for “Her Voice” here in our Parliament — the very heart of Malta’s democracy.

For far too long, women’s voices in our country were silenced. That silence was broken in 1947, when universal suffrage gave Maltese women the right to vote and to stand for election. From that moment on, her voice could no longer be ignored.

Agatha Barbara turned that right into reality — elected in 1947 as Malta’s first woman Member of Parliament. In the post-Independence era she served in Cabinet, first as Minister for Education (1971–1974) and later as Minister for Labour, Culture and Welfare (1974–1981). She then became President of the Republic in 1982, at a time when very few women worldwide had reached the highest offices of their nations — among them Golda Meir as Prime Minister of Israel, Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of India, María Estela (Isabel) Perón as President of Argentina, and Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as President of Iceland. Her path came with sacrifice: in 1958 she was imprisoned for 43 days during the constitutional crisis. Even behind prison walls, her voice endured.

From her courage rose others:

- Myriam Spiteri Debono, the first woman to preside over this House as Speaker, and today President of the Republic, who gave her voice both to Parliament and to the Nation.
- Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, who served as Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity and later as President of the Republic (2014–2019), giving her voice powerfully to social inclusion, children’s rights, and solidarity at the highest level of our State.
- Giovanna Debono, entrusted time and again with one of the strongest mandates from the people of Gozo, who showed how the people’s trust becomes a voice that resonates nationally.

- Helena Dalli, Malta's first European Commissioner for Equality, who carried Malta's voice onto the European stage and shaped laws that safeguard millions.
- Roberta Metsola, re-elected President of the European Parliament, who amplifies Malta's voice at the very heart of Europe, proving that leadership knows no gender.

During my tenure as Speaker, three legislatures have passed through this House. Each one brought women whose voices shaped Malta's democratic life — some serving as Ministers, some as Parliamentary Secretaries, others as MPs in Government or in Opposition, each giving meaning to representation.

- Miriam Dalli, as Minister, has led Malta's energy and climate transition.
- Julia Farrugia, as Minister, gave her voice to inclusion, especially the rights of persons with special needs.
- Justyne Caruana served as Minister for Gozo and later for Education.
- Deborah Schembri, as Parliamentary Secretary, reformed planning and governance systems.
- Rosianne Cutajar, as Parliamentary Secretary, advanced civil rights and LGBTIQ+ reform, and continues to fight against cyberbullying.
- Alison Zerafa Civelli, as Parliamentary Secretary, strengthens local democracy through Local Councils.
- Alicia Bugeja Said, a marine biologist turned policymaker, brings science to politics as Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Animal Welfare.
- Amanda Spiteri Grech, as MP, has presented a bill to guarantee the right to be forgotten for cancer survivors.
- Naomi Cachia, as Government Whip and Head of Malta's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, carries Malta's voice at home and abroad.
- Paula Mifsud Bonnici, as Chair of the Social Affairs Committee, steered discussions on family policy.
- Claudette Buttigieg, as Deputy Speaker, has stood with me to ensure fairness and respect in this House, while serving as a vigilant Opposition voice.
- Therese Comodini Cachia, as Opposition MP, contributed expertise on constitutional reform and education.
- Marlene Farrugia, as MP, gave a fearless independent voice on governance.
- Graziella Galea, Janice Chetcuti, Julie Zahra, Bernice Bonello, Abigail Camilleri, Davina Sammut Hili, Katya De Giovanni, Cressida Galea, Romilda Baldacchino Zarb, Ramona Attard, Kirsty Debono, Marthese Portelli, Maria Deguara, Graziella Attard Previ, Rebekah Borg and Eve Borg Bonello, the youngest MP ever, continue to enrich this House with voices from every generation and community.

These women did not come here to fill numbers. They came here to legislate, to challenge, to serve. The gender corrective mechanism opened the door — but it is their voices that gave strength to Malta's democracy.

And if I may end on a personal note: though not Maltese, Mother Teresa, who visited Malta and left her footprint in Cospicua, remains for me the example of what a woman's voice can mean. Her mission of service and compassion mirrors the mission of so many Maltese women who, in politics and beyond, have given their lives to others. She reminded us: "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

For me, she is the woman who embodies the quiet but enduring power of Her Voice.

Mother Teresa's voice is my voice. The women legislators I have mentioned — their voice is my voice. Their voice is our collective voice. Their voice is my voice.

And so, as we now turn to the exhibition itself, may these voices — past and present — continue to inspire us. It is with this spirit that I invite you to experience "Her Voice."

Thank you, and I now declare the exhibition open.