

KAMRA TAD-DEPUTATI
PARLAMENT TA' MALTA



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

L-iSpeaker

The Speaker

**Opening Speech
Hon. Anglu Farrugia,**

Speaker of the House of Representatives,

Parliament of Malta

**Upholding good governance in challenging times: the role of the
Ombudsman**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ombudsmen and Commissioners,

Honourable Leaders and Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We gather under the theme “Upholding good governance in challenging times: the role of the Ombudsman.” These are not just challenging times. They are defining times. Across the world, citizens see abuse unpunished, decisions hidden in shadows, and truth strained by convenience. And yet — they also see one figure who still stands, unbending: the Ombudsman.

I have said it before, and I say it again today: “An Ombudsman Office is not simply a listening post for complaints. It is, at its core, an institutional conscience — its loyalty owed not to noise, not to factions, not to shadows, but to the people and the truth.”

And I have also said — and I stand by these words: “Truth — let us remember — is the one thing no institution, no narrative, no political preference can overturn.”

This is why Ombudsmen exist. Not to comfort the powerful, but to confront them. Not to echo parliaments or governments, but to speak with the voice of the people when all other voices are ignored.

But conscience without courage is silence. And “integrity must be felt in every action, not claimed in every speech.” Citizens will never be convinced by words alone — they demand to see integrity in action, and they measure us by whether their rights are respected, their dignity protected, their trust honoured.

I have also made this clear: “Parliament has a constitutional duty to ensure that institutions of accountability remain strong and independent.” This is not a formality. It is the difference between democracy that breathes and democracy that suffocates. If oversight is weakened, if Ombudsmen are ignored, then power becomes unchecked — and unchecked power is the enemy of good governance.

The history of Ombudsmen proves this. Jacob Söderman, the first European Ombudsman, said the Ombudsman “must not be popular, but must be effective.” And here in Malta, our own Ombudsman, Judge Joseph Zammit McKeon, has reminded us that the office “should also be a protector of human rights.”

Nelson Mandela taught the world that “courage is not the absence of fear — it is inspiring others to move beyond it.” He also reminded us that “strong institutions are the shield of democracy.” These truths apply directly to the Ombudsman. Because in times when power hesitates, the Ombudsman must not. In times when citizens feel abandoned, the Ombudsman must be present. And in times when shadows fall across governance, the Ombudsman must be the light.

And let me state this in words that cannot be diluted: Wherever wrong is allowed to hide, power becomes fiction. Let the law be our compass, truth our defence, and accountability our only shield.

Mr Citizen does not care for excuses. He does not applaud our speeches. He demands results. He demands that Ombudsmen fight for him when his voice is silenced. He demands that parliaments

give weight to the Ombudsman's word, not relegate it to polite nods. He demands that governments respect the independence of oversight, not undermine it.

In fact, as Speaker of the House of Representatives, I have consistently insisted on the need to involve Parliament in the minority of cases where the authorities fail to implement the Ombudsman's final recommendations. All such cases are reported to me to be tabled before the House, and they should not be simply shelved but debated to a proper closure — with Parliament giving Mr Citizen a clear explanation as to why such recommendations are not implemented. After all, when a recommendation is put forward by the Ombudsman — a Parliamentary Office — it carries weight: it does not come from the desk of a simple clerk, but from the pen of the Ombudsman himself, and therefore Parliament has a duty to give it the seriousness and consideration it deserves. Such recommendations must either be acted upon, or else explained with clear reasoning as to why they are turned down — not merely shelved and allowed to pass by.

Excellencies, colleagues, Ombudsmen, history is not written by those who whisper in comfort. It is written by those who speak when silence is demanded of them. By those who uphold the truth even when it costs them. By those who remind authority that it exists only to serve, never to dominate.

Today, in Malta, we mark thirty years of the Ombudsman. Let this not be a celebration of the past but a command for the future. Let every Ombudsman leave this room knowing that eyes are watching — not the eyes of governments, not the eyes of parliaments, but the eyes of citizens. They will measure you not by your titles, but by your courage.

Ladies and gentlemen, in these challenging times, the Ombudsman is not an accessory to democracy. The Ombudsman is democracy's last line of defence. And truth, let me repeat, will always prevail.

I thank you.