

Immigration and Refugees Experience in Europe

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Hon. Dr. Michael Frendo, the former Speaker of the Maltese Parliament and former Foreign Minister of Malta, originally had been due to speak on the second day on the subject of 'Immigration and Refugees Experience in Europe'. It is an issue of concern that is close to his heart that therefore presented during the Plenary.

'Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states; All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Although these ideals have been promoted throughout the world since its declaration and the establishment of Human Rights Day, we see numerous states where these rights have been violated on a massive scale. You have to remind yourself of the rights in the Universal Declaration.

Human Rights Conventions and the Rule of Law should apply in democratic nations because this is what fundamentally defines democratic nations to all human beings whether they are immigrants or not.

There is a distinction between those people who are economic migrants, who are looking for a better life for themselves and their families, and those who are refugees fleeing in fear of their lives. Refugees have a right to humanitarian status. This is right that stems from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights convention to which many nations in the world adhere. This defines refugee status and gives rights and obligations to refugees.

There is absolutely no space for giving way to any compromise in dealing with refugees who are in fear of their life, of torture or persecution. They are legally entitled and should expect support from those nations that have signed that convention.

The UN High Commission for Refugees is doing a brilliant job in standing up for those rights. Those who are fleeing conflict should be granted humanitarian support for a temporary time while refugees should receive that support permanently. Australia comes to mind. They have an arrangement whereby if someone is granted refugee status they are able to stay in Papua New Guinea not in Australia. This is due to the public opinion in Australia and the reaction of politicians to that public opinion. There is tension between the public opinion and the refugee's rights because they fear the uncontrolled flow of immigration. These tensions exist but the line must be held because that this is a duty of the democratic state. If we want our societies to reflect certain values we must hold that line.

There is a distinction when we discuss economic migration. There are large numbers of people towards Malta which is the most densely populated nation in Europe and maybe in the world. There are 1300

people per square mile. People are fleeing from Eritrea, Somalia etc. and many other nations that have conflict or war or post- conflict situations.



They take boats from Libya and sometimes they make it. They are picked up by Malta's small navy or Italy's larger navy when they will be taken to Lampedusa. Pope Francis' first visit outside Rome was to Lampedusa. Many of them lose their life in the process of finding their economic dream in Europe.

We are arguing for an important principle of solidarity over migration. In the EU we are asking for burden sharing with other nations. There are nations that need migrants. We need to develop the principle of solidarity because the response so far has been so cautious, restrained and limited from other nations. They are so worried by the public opinion in their nations.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has an annual quota of economic migrants and refugees. Finland made a commitment for so many for their national goal. They had not made their national goal by the November. They were short of about 700 people. We wanted them to take some of Malta's refugees to reduce our burden but the UNHCR would not allow this to happen because another EU nation should not have their burden reduced. This was unfortunate.

We developed a new programme for economic migrants where we would train people and gave them \$5,000 to start a new life in their nation of origin. This repatriation was humane and successful. It is a voluntary repatriation programme. Many set up small businesses and are successful.'

Dr. Michael Frendo is the former Speaker of the Parliament of Malta, and a former Member of the Maltese Parliament for the past 23 years. From 1990 to 1992, he was Parliamentary Secretary (Minister of State) for Youth, Culture and Consumer Protection. From 1992 to 1994, he was Minister of Youth and Arts. From 1994 to 1996, he was Minister of Transport, Communications and Technology. He was Parliamentary Secretary (Minister of State) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from March to July 2004 before serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta from 2004 to 2008, during which he was also a Member, and later Chair, of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), and Chair of Commonwealth Connects, the Commonwealth ICT for Development Programme. He lectures on law and international relations in Malta, Italy and the UK and is the author of a number of articles and books. Dr Frendo has a Doctorate in Laws from the University of Malta and a Master of Laws in European Legal Studies from the University of Exeter.