

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
STATE DINNER HOSTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF MALTA
PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, VALLETTA, MALTA
14 NOVEMBER 2008

Thank you for your warm and generous welcome to Michael and me this evening:

- . and throughout our stay in Valletta,
- . allowing us to glimpse the splendour of the Maltese archipelago - its unique culture, lustre, colour and fragrance.

And, on behalf of all Australians, I respond with affectionate greetings to you, our friends and fellows.

How special it is to join you here in this exquisitely beautiful building:

- . so rich in Maltese history,
- . and yet at the heart of your country's fine contemporary democracy.

Neptune in the courtyard and the Armoury within are indeed well placed to safeguard the treasures of this deep blue pocket of the Mediterranean!

My friends, this is my first overseas trip since commencing in my role as Governor-General of Australia.

I feel so immensely privileged to be in a position that offers boundless opportunity:

- . for renewing and nurturing friendships of nations;
- . for furthering international cooperation and community engagement;
- . and participation in the gathering of people and organisations from vastly different worlds, united by a common ethos.

I come to Malta with much to be grateful for:

- . we share a bilateral relationship that has endured for 170 years;
- . for the last 60 of those years, our governments have together forged productive agreements delivering social security, taxation, employment and travel benefits to Maltese people migrating to Australia,
- . and our leaders and parliamentary delegations demonstrate a mutual respect, understanding and interest that are so fundamental to sustaining our affinity and commitment to one another;
- . I treasure the contribution of the Maltese people to Australian society - migrants, Australian born, Maltese-Australians;

. the early settlers, pioneers in difficult circumstances and unknown territory, yet their camaraderie, work ethic, and love of their culture fostered new communities in Australia that preserved their homeland memory and opened their arms to Australian society.

Recently, I was delighted and fortunate to be welcomed by the Maltese community of Blacktown in New South Wales.

All of the connections and sentiments I speak of found their expression that evening in handshakes and embraces, stories shared and gifts bestowed:

- . golden threads in the fabric of Australian life;
- . and the underpinnings of our global citizenship,
- . and our commitment, like yours, to developing our presence and influence in the international community, and to the principles of multilateralism.

Malta, of course, has enjoyed a sophisticated and mature status as a world nation for some years:

- . as a liberal, parliamentary democracy and republic;
- . a member of the European Union and, this year, the Eurozone,
- . a continuing member of the Commonwealth;
- . and an active participant in the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Australia too has had a long association with the United Nations whose remarkable work I witnessed first hand twenty years ago:

- . although only in a small way,
- . as a member of Australia's delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights,
- . and as an observer at the meeting of the expert body overseeing the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

How lucky I was to have taken part in the UN, at a time when women's issues - issues then central to my work, and always close to my heart - were being brought to the forefront of the world's consciousness.

I came to understand and respect enormously:

- . the vital interaction between local and global initiatives;
- . and the processes for consultation and decision-making that encouraged individuals to act.

As social, economic, cultural, environmental, and human rights issues increasingly challenge us as one, without deference to country borders:

- . our attention is revived in this global organisation,
- . its capacity and potential for united engagement and action;
- . and for Australia, the pathway it offers renewed ambitions of achieving future membership of the UN Security Council.

And, indeed, it was only a few weeks ago, that Australia and the European Union adopted what has been described as a "historic partnership agreement":

- . a pledge to work closely together on the global financial crisis;
- . a document that represents a genuine conviction by signatories in the efficacy of multilateral fora.

A Maltese woman in Australia once spoke of the lure to the vast southern continent:

"People used to say that in Australia everything was so good that even the water in the water jug danced."

Ladies and gentlemen, I will be thrilled to let Australians know of the water dancing on Maltese tables.

With my sincere thanks and pleasure, I now propose a toast to His Excellency the President, and the people of Malta.