

E.S.O. Congress - Malta 2012

Thursday 19th April 2012

Active Aging – Vital for Europe

Address by Mr Anthony DeGiovanni
President Għaqda Veterani Laburisti

Dear Friends,

I welcome you all to our Islands and to this Congress. I augur that you had a pleasant flight and that you find yourself well in your hotel. In such a short visit you will not be able to see what is on offer here in Malta. This visit will suffice to whet your appetite for a longer one.

It is an honour for me to host and address this Congress. It has been the wish of my organisation to have the ESO congress in Malta for several years now and I must confess that I am undeservedly benefitting from the hard work of my predecessor, Mr Charles Mahoney who led the organisation for quite a few years and who is now mentoring me. Due mention must also be made to a person you must know very well: Mr Nick Bonello who led the way in our international relations. My Executive Committee has been greatly supportive and especially the General Secretary Mr Joe Xerri and Mr Vincent Bone the International Secretary have borne the lion's share of the work involved.

I am particularly pleased which the topic of the Congress: '**Active Aging , Vital for Europe**', and I'm sure it will elicit reflection and fruitful discussion. It is usual with international years to bring about a spate of speeches, conferences and events that promulgate buzz words and lengthy documents interlaced with cliches that, finished the year, would be dutifully catalogued and put in some musty depository. I believe it will not be the case with the European Year for intergenerational solidarity and Active Aging.

I dare say this because irrespective of the degree of success in the awareness raising that is hoped to be achieved by these celebrations, the issues involved are real tangible ones that will remain with us long after the year has passed.. At first glance our topic Active Ageing, Vital for Europe seems to involve this specific sector of society. It would seem that today we're going to talk about ourselves, about our interests, about what society can do for us, about how to retain, and possibly improve the quality of life of our age bracket in relation to other groups. In doing so we would be only perpetrating a stereotype that dominant interests continuously disseminate in order to pit one sector of society against the other, one interest group competing with another, one age group against the other.

Active ageing is inextricably linked with intergenerational solidarity. Looking at issues related to the aging society from any single standpoint is in my opinion only very partial and one-dimension view. Indeed issues related to the aging society transcend time and stretch

across the age spectrum. When we talk of the sustainability of social protection schemes and health care services we are indeed talking about today's youngsters. Hence we must be concerned with the education and training that young people need as well as with job opportunities, with the creation of wealth and the technological advances that can eventually support and enhance their quality of life as they age. We cannot abdicate, we cannot stay passive, we must be active politically active.

My association is called Labour Veterans. The word 'veteran' has a connotation of times gone by, of ex soldiers decked with medals who had fought long forgotten wars. There is some truth in this regarding my association. I would like to give tribute to those before us and those amongst us who through their activism have contributed to society, who have brought change, strived to construct a better world. Very often confronting all sorts of adversity they nevertheless managed to become an instrument of change building together a welfare state which gave dignity to the weakest in society; those who worked hard so that no person be considered useless and simply a burden on society.

My organisation is a branch of a political party, the Labour Party of Malta. Its members are labour party members who are 60 years and more, making it one of the biggest senior citizens associations in Malta. It functions as a political organisation in a democratic system promoting political activism, debate and the generation of ideas. Senior citizens have an active political role to play: their perspective is indispensable in the construction of a holistic collective view. I believe that society does need political activism involving the whole spectrum of adult life. Active ageing also means political activism amongst senior citizens.