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Active Aging – Vital for Europe

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Ladies and Gentlemen

My speech will today evolve around gender equality.

In Malta throughout the last few years, there has been quite a considerable amount of progress regarding gender equality, progress in the light of innovative legislation, maternal leave and the promotion of child care facilities. However when it comes to putting theory into practice there is still a bridge which yet still has to be abridged.

Statistics:

Year 2011 : Despite the fact that 60% of female teenagers have graduated, only 40% of them are actively involved in the workforce. We have the same issue when we come to the members of Parliament where we have only 6 out of 69 members of Parliament who are female. With regards to board of directors, only 3% are female. According to statistics, working females earn 33.25% less than males; which is also discriminatory. Statistics cannot be provided for everything. When it comes to the issue of domestic violence which is still highly present in Malta, such statistics cannot be made with accuracy and this is due to the fact that many women are scared to go and report their partner or husband with regards to verbal or even physical abuse. Pre 1993 the local Civil Law, which provides for family matters provided that the husband was the head of the household. That has been repealed and now both partners have equal obligations.

Notwithstanding amended legislation, unfortunately in Malta several families yet still remain dominated by the husband.

Victims of domestic violence, mainly women eventually withdraw their complaints in court, because when such acts of domestic violence constitute a criminal offence. Once a report has been filed, the Police have to prosecute the perpetrator in courts of

Magistrates as a court of Criminal Judicature. However when it come to 'yes' or 'No', women usually withdraw these claims. So that's why actual statistics cannot be kept.

With regards to the political arena, women are still yet greatly disadvantaged when it comes to politics. I believe that a cultural change is required within our country the latter of which in my opinion can only occur through further education of the nation.

For instance many women who come to my office do not even know about their rights given by certain laws, they do not know about legislation in connection with certain rights. That will come through education. Even perhaps better use of the media education, educating the nation.

Duties and responsibilities

Duties and responsibilities should be shared by both males and females. However, the norm and not the exception is that women are actually mostly responsible for bringing up the children, that's why women find it more difficult to take part in politics. They find it difficult to attend the political activities on a regular basis and also taking part in a political campaign when it comes to door to door activities; they prefer staying with their children and in a way they are forced to stay with the children, because unfortunately the male is considered in a way the head of the household. There is still a mentality whereby woman's place is still in the kitchen.

Recently there was a call for the introduction of quotas in general and local council elections. This might be a bit unfair with regards to the male candidates but on the other hand it is a risk worth taking in order to tackle the imbalance between male and female candidates.

When it comes to the aspect of work and workers, statistics show that there are a greater number of male workers rather than female workers. There is also the issue of males earning more than females especially for the same job and service given.

Legislation has been enacted in order to cater for this discrimination, but it is different between theory and practice, there is a great difference..

There are appropriate measures which are required to encourage more females to venture in the world of work, especially when it comes to remuneration.

Another problem which females face at the work place is the issue of harassment, not excluding the fact that males may also be harassed. But usually the females are most vulnerable to this kind of harassment. Usually females fear reporting the person harassing them, due to fear of getting dismissed from work.

Another issue which is very discriminating is that when there are job applications, they usually ask for photos. This may give advantage to pretty girls. This is quite unfair. This should also be eliminated.

Legislation

Parliament has catered for legislation with regards to equality treatment. In 1964 with the enactment of our Constitution which provided for the protection against discrimination by race, sex, colour, gender, religion, etc. In 1987 Malta formed part of the European Convention Act. This provided for fundamental human rights and the fundamental freedoms. Every Maltese Citizen has access to the courts with regards to the infringement on the human rights or if they feel discriminated. There is also the provision of legal aid if they do not have financial means.

In Malta there are two more specific legislations which were enacted in order to cater for discrimination at the place of work: the Employment and Industrial Relations Act which deals about employers should not discriminate among employees; each employee should be given equal treatment.

A number of boards have been set up by this legislation... the Industrial Board, the Broadcasting Authority and also have the Public Service Commission and the Employment Commission.

If somebody feels aggrieved due to discrimination, he could present this grievance to one of these boards which have legislative authority.

One of the main acts in Malta which concerns equal opportunity is the Equal Opportunities Act which caters primarily for people who have physical and mental impairment, it gives them redress

Obviously before this was not allowed, but now through legislative amendments certain people could be represented by associations or body of persons. Before it was only the aggrieved part which could have redress. Through the introduction of such equal opportunity Act the law caters for employment, education, good services, accommodation, access and insurance with regards to the more vulnerable people.

This Act is purposely amalgamated in a manner that certain vulnerable people may not be discriminated

There is also an authority in Malta, the National Commission for People with Disabilities, which has a legal status with regards to amend the authorities body for this legislation. They have the authority to amend such legislation.

We had good progress when this year Government has introduced a number of amendments for harsher penalties including fines of 2500 Euro and also six month imprisonment when it comes to harassment and discriminating of persons. The purpose of these laws were to make these laws in line as much as possible in line with European Convention of Human Rights and to raise awareness also and monitor the United Nations Convention of the rights of persons with disabilities and any optional protocols as ratified by Malta.

Any persons who feels aggrieved can bring action in Courts in Malta before Civil Courts or the Constitutional Courts. However in reality few people are ready to take these steps because of further fear of being further discriminated. And that in itself is quite a substantial problem which should be catered for most drastically.