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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Address by The Hon Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice and Home Affairs Dr Tonio Borg during the Heritage Malta Annual Conference**

When on behalf of the Government and people of Malta, that great man, Arvid Pardo, whom history will certainly count among the greatest of our compatriots, proposed to the United Nations that the oceans should be declared to be the “Common Heritage of Mankind”, he insisted that the concept of Heritage should be sharply differentiated from that of property, or even that of patrimony, as these concepts were used both in municipal and international Law.

The motion of ‘property’ was not used according to the Christian understanding of it, but according to that of Ancient Roman Law. Christians hold that the right to property is never absolute, since nothing on earth elsewhere is totally manmade, and only creation out of nothing could constitute entitlement to total ownership. But Roman Law recognized to a proprietor the right both to use and not to use, as well as to destroy, property of his own.

Heritage, on the other hand, implies receiving resources on trust, with the right to manage and possibly enhance them, but also with the duty to care for them, not to allow them to be destroyed or to deteriorate, insofar as it is humanly possible to prevent it. Heritage, received from past generations is to be handed over intact or improved by present generations to their successors. The Government of Malta, in fact, as a corollary to the introduction of the norms related to the Common Heritage of Mankind, also took the initiative which led to the proclamation by UNESCO of the Charter of the Rights of Future Generations.

Malta is the guardian, trustee and manager of a share of the Common Heritage of Mankind that is disproportionately large in relation to its size. It is also the custodian of many other inherited resources that are, if not of equally great value to the whole of humanity, of enormous significance to us as a nation with its own cultural identity. Collective identity is embedded in time. Medieval kings and clergy, when branding places to attract pilgrims were mainly concerned with their antiquity, like the Grandmasters of Malta who seem to have been the first rulers of our islands to have attracted numerous pilgrims to our shores, as well as to have stimulated local devotion to our Pauline shrines as a major hallmark of our identity.

Unfortunately, today the dominant trend is for modern marketing to diffuse instant and transient images as if the product to be sold was some item of mass consumption, not a heritage of enduring quality with a strong, spiritual dimension. Fortunately, economists themselves are today proclaiming with ever stronger and more emphatic voices that even the material yield has proven to be greater if

preference is given to the authentic historical products and the living traditions, the so-called “immaterial heritage” of real people, sights, sounds and smells, rather than to what have been called “dream works”, such as a type of totally inauthentic theme-parks that have often gone bankrupt with the same astonishing rapidity as that with which they had burgeoned. I am not here, of course, speaking generally against theme-parks. Rather the contrary, I am urging that they serve to support the upkeep of our authentic heritage, not to create an ersatz and rootless form of merely momentarily popular form of entertainment.

A wise man from Scotland, the director of the Glover Institute, Magnus Fladmark, has written: “The past is indeed omnipresent, and the future depends on whether we have the humility to look back and to understand. Sustainable tourism is not a late twentieth-century invention. The Vatican decreed the size of a medieval pilgrim town in line with the productive capacity of surrounding land so that pilgrims could adequately be fed and there were rules for security and welfare of travellers. But their purchasing power and gullibility were also targets, and the international trade in souvenirs which started then is still with us today.”

In spite of the frequent quite unreasonable and unfounded feelings of superiority that we express over our ancestors, it is a fact that today there is a much more general recognition among us all of the need and of the advantages to be reaped from preserving heritage.

There is no doubt that until just a few years ago, our legislation was as wobbly as Edward Lear’s Jumblies; but one of the most eloquent signs of the seriousness of the Government’s commitment to carrying out its responsibilities was the law in virtue of which Heritage Malta was constituted. Among other innovations, the new provisions created the conditions for the alliterative three-word label ‘Public-Private Partnership’ to cease providing us merely with a verbal buzz like an advertising jingle, but for it to be understood and put into practice.

This system has a close kinship with the structures we first advocated for the promotion of sustainable development in the wake of the Common Heritage concept at the international level, because the state of the public finances is giving us the queasy feeling of being at sea in a sieve. It is indeed the ideal means for the generation of synergy between the prudent guardians of the common interest and the enterprising, risk-running profit-seekers. It is not, alas, a magic formula and we are all still apprentices in the difficult craft of applying it. Humility is a keyword whenever Heritage is the horizon within which we have to operate.

The main reason why I am with you is to assure you that the ideal commitments implicit in the legislation that we have adopted will be steadfastly kept. I wish to heartily thank all of you who have either in their professional or in their voluntary capacities joined forces in order to encourage investment in our cultural heritage

from all quarters. I undertake to ensure that the Government as a whole will play its part in order to guarantee that the practical proposals submitted by you will be received with the maximum of goodwill and the operative spirit needed for their implementation. Likewise, I will see to it that the European and international level for information about best practices abroad and for enriching exchanges and assistance will be made available to all Heritage lovers.

I was told that once, a notorious Minister, when asked to intervene to protect a megalithic temple near his own hometown from an imminent threat, puckered his lips and replied: They are just standing stones! Sometimes you may feel that you are like Sisyphus rolling up a stone to the hilltop only for it to roll down again to the bottom. At least, you now know that the Government knows that these stones are more precious than gold.