

WELCOME SPEECH

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to welcome you to this Conference on Human Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility. This event is being organized as part of the post-graduate programme in Human Rights and Democratisation, which is now in its third year of operation and is quickly gaining a high level of international exposure and reputation.

The Mediterranean Master's course in Human Rights and Democratisation is co-ordinated by the University of Malta on behalf of a network of universities and human rights institutions, receiving financial aid from the European Commission. It focuses on the integration of human rights and democratic principles and plans to analyse human rights principles from the operational and policy-oriented views. Such an arrangement is surely one which is essential to the future of the Mediterranean and to efforts to create co-operation therein.

An important feature of this post-graduate programme is thus the holding of this afternoon's conference, a unique occasion where we welcome with us once again last year's students who will be having their graduation ceremony within the next few days, and also, this year's intake of students who are just embarking on this post-graduate experience.

The featured topic over today and tomorrow shall be Human Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility, and I must say, that it is a good sign that such level of interest has been shown in this endeavour. The idea of corporate social responsibility reflects the ever-increasing link between corporations and human rights – it emphasizes the fact that human rights is the business of business, if you will.

Corporate social responsibility is about how companies manage the business processes to produce an overall positive impact on society. It focuses on the business as a main actor in society.

Mary Robinson, the former UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights, (07/05/2002, {first World Leaders} in her lecture this year to the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in London) stated that:

'Business leaders do not have to wait – indeed, increasingly they cannot afford to wait – for governments to pass and enforce legislation before they pursue 'good practices' in support of international human rights, labour and environmental standards within their own operations and in the societies of which they are part. The public increasingly expects corporations to act in a socially responsible way.'

Human Rights are a central feature of Corporate Social Responsibility – especially when one considers that new approaches need to be sought in order to solve persistent and serious global problems. The link between human rights promotion and protection and good governance is constantly being advocated and evidenced – this will be the focus of your attention for the duration of this dialogue.