

**Speech by Prime Minister Robert Abela in the Conference - ‘The Right to Good Administration: Myth, aspiration or reality?’**

Esteemed Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than an honour, being here with you today is a grand opportunity to share my thoughts with you on this important subject that is often discussed in relation to the effective governance of nation states. Today’s world demands us not only to be creative but also effective and efficient in all the policies that we administer in the best interest of our citizens. As politicians and administrators, our job goes beyond ensuring transparency, meritocracy and accountability, each being an essential element of good governance.

Indeed, we must ensure that policies and strategies consistently improve our citizens’ lives. Naturally, the end should not justify the means. Policy-makers, public officials and politically-appointed officials must ensure that we uphold the highest standards in everything we do; the policies we design and the projects we implement. I feel that the existent collaboration between Government ministries, department and entities with the Office of the Ombudsman is testament of our will to put good administration into practice.

We may not necessarily agree on everything. However, I am pleased that year after year, there is an increasing rate of acceptance of the recommendations made by the Office of the Ombudsman. A case which is closed and recommendations are implemented contributes to an over-all improvement in the practices and services provided by the Government. Not just for the complainant but for all the members of the public who would be dealing with that entity or department in the present and future.

I am pleased that 85% of the recommendations in the last *Governance Action on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Report* were implemented. These results show a positive trend, one which is based upon the ability to find a compromise and the will to improve the procedures and services provided by the Government.

Politics is the art and craft of serving people, of trying to steer a ship towards the right port. A question that I often ask is: How can we reconcile multiple views of different stakeholders with government policy? The national budget is an example of the transformation of strategic direction into practical measures; initiatives which are meant to improve the people's standard of living and quality of life.

Educational attainment, high-quality health services, economic growth and a reliable social services system. Main policy objectives which cannot be separated from our obligation to implement measures in a fair, responsible and accountable manner. This brings me to today's theme: *The right to good administration*. Today, we need to ascertain that public administration is fully equipped to implement policies that can look attractive and revolutionary on paper but challenging to be managed on the ground.

A country is effectively administered when the state's institutions serve a check and balance in a complex grid of power distribution but work in harmony to ensure that the citizen is served in an effective and timely manner. In my view, while instruments such as the Ombudsman can serve and assure us that citizens can seek redress from maladministration, we should not be passive and rely on the wisdom of citizens to lodge a complaint.

So, in this regard, how can we have a good administration that functions in the real world?

- i. First, citizens have increasingly higher expectations and aspirations regarding how public services are to be managed and delivered. Nowadays, at a time when Malta has consistently ranked first in Europe in electronic government, there cannot be any more excuses for delays, red tape and miscommunication between public entities and members of the public. Long gone are the days when everything goes. Therefore, politicians and public officials are expected to create structures that make sense and function well.
- ii. Secondly, public administration must acknowledge that our societies are changing dramatically. Nothing can stop the global drive for change. Our role is to adapt to the new societal reality whereby citizens have to juggle between their careers, family life and other commitments. The Public Service is a role model for employers in the private sector with respect to family-friendly measures and modern work practices. These measures help us, the Government, attract and retain talented human resources, the main driving force behind the advancements in the modernisation process that we have been constantly undergoing.
- iii. Third, technological advancement is not the only solution to serve the public appropriately. The human element should not be foregone for the sake of promoting technology. Good administrations entails serving citizens at localities and communities through specifically designed services and one-stop shops. In our case, the Servizz.gov tool is serving as an avenue that provides user-friendly services to our citizens. It is a useful tool which increases the accessibility of services, especially when

considering the long and complex lists of government services that are easily available to the public, yet some of which are still not popular with many of our citizens.

- iv. Fourth, good administration requires policies that are not shaped in a vacuum. During the drafting of next year's budget, we have strived to take on board practical and useful ideas put forward by social partners, members of the public, non-government organisations, workers, business owners and parents. We strived to streamline these ideas into a single and coherent strategy which addresses the country's main priorities at the moment.

Good public administration can never be perfect or utopian. This is an ongoing process and there will certainly be room for improvement. Yet, public administration can certainly be a reality if we always remember that, ultimately, we are trusted with serving our citizens and our country in the best ways that we can.

Thank you.