

Pursuing self-evident Truth

H.E. George H. Abela Douglas W. Kmiec | Jul. 18, 2010



Kmiec and Abela

On the 4th of July, America's birthday, we stood together before an estimated 1000 of our countrymen to celebrate our mutual commitment to the self-evident truth that all men and women are created equal before the law.

Both of us reflected in our remarks how much Malta is known today, and praise God, shall always be known for her kindness. Our nations understand that all people -- of whatever color or ethnicity or belief -- are unique; that each of us hold within our hearts the desire to know, love, and serve others; that each of us try to find our way in this world, and we rely upon God and each other to carry us at times farther than we can go ourselves. This is realized every day in Maltese and American homes alike, where mothers and fathers look upon their children and silently hope that each child will see the meaning of life more clearly and purposefully than they have.

It is thus with sadness of heart that we note in some places within our respective communities a worrisome acceptance of the discredited idea that it is all right to treat people of different color or of different ethnicity or of different faith less well than ourselves. We both know in our respective countries that individual acts of discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, ethnicity and religion are occurring; that these hatreds are

hurtful to their victims and corrosive of the public commitment to equality. Some recent acts of apparent discrimination that have received public notoriety in both of our countries have prompted us to put pen to paper.

We feel the need to write now because the meaning and hope symbolized by the 4th of July remains fresh in our minds and because it is but a few months ago that His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI reminded us upon his farewell to not cease to welcome the stranger, including the migrants that come to Malta's shores from Africa, and by parallel reasoning the families from many lands that are drawn to America.

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Yes, the presence of migrants in our respective lands requires responsibility on the migrants' part to observe our laws and to seek gainful employment, but there are correlative obligations on the part of each of our countries as well.

There is no justification for treating another with less than full respect, in recognition of our 'common humanity,' as President Obama made reference in his greeting to Malta. We no longer see July 4 only as an American holiday; President Obama rightly urged in his letter to Ambassador Kmiec that he read at the Barrakka Gardens to see the day as a celebration of the common ground upon which our two nations and all nations must stand.

It has been suggested to us that the ill treatment of people of color often results when people in our countries see the person before them through a narrow lens or classification, for example as simply an irregular migrant rather than as an individual as a whole. But how can a Maltese or American citizen in either of our countries know whether a person of color is well educated and employed, or is instead someone who makes the sea crossing to Malta or traverses the borders of the U.S. and "burdens" our scarce resources?

This way of viewing people is not easily reconciled with the welcoming kindness that is the hallmark of the Maltese character or the self-evident truths proclaimed in America's Declaration of Independence.

As individuals given leadership roles in our countries, we pledge never to tolerate a national policy built upon animus and hatred. Of course, individual incidents of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion do not constitute policy, but the failure to clearly object to such discrimination might be so perceived, and it is for this reason we write. This is especially important to say because in our countries, where the virtue of solidarity thankfully remains strong, we know that there is a tendency among victims to 'turn the other cheek.'

We commend the victims of discrimination for their generosity of heart and willingness to forgive, but any form of racial discrimination or epithet is worthy of our mutual concern and resolution to oppose its recurrence.

At the July 4 celebration, we reflected on the words of the anthem of the Republic, '*L-Innu Malti*,' and referred to the words of prayer and blessing upon the Maltese people as a nation. Malta has been abundantly blessed, but we should never lose sight of Malti's call to 'confirm us all in unity and peace.' Likewise, the recounting about Abraham Lincoln illustrated how devastating were America's losses when she tolerated the tyranny of slavery.

In the spirit of the '*L-Innu Malti*,' let us together work toward a renewed ethic of nondiscrimination 'with,' as Lincoln observed, 'malice toward none and with charity for all.'

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