

**‘An offence to the entire nation’
Our reaction to the use of abusive language in Malta’s
House of Representatives**

The interaction between two Members of Parliament on Friday 20 November was an offence to the entire nation. It highlighted the almost absolute lack of accountability at the highest levels of Malta’s democratic institutions, and confirmed that Malta is miles away from ensuring a society that is free from harassment and violence against women.

We are extremely concerned at the comfort enjoyed by Malta’s Members of Parliament that they are free to adopt a language and tone that would be totally unacceptable in any other context. Beyond formal considerations of Parliamentary privilege, we find it unacceptable that the altercation did not trigger an outright condemnation by every single other Member of Parliament. As an NGO working with vulnerable and socially excluded communities in Malta, we are too familiar with such language being used against our clients, staff members, and volunteers. We are also too familiar with the lack of shame accompanying such bullying and harassment. Yet what else can we really expect, when Malta’s highest democratic institution behaves with such impunity, such impropriety, such disrespect?

We also strongly condemn the laissez-faire attitude of all Members of Parliament before an episode classifiable as violence against women and possibly punishable under Malta’s criminal legislation. In 2011 the Commission on Domestic Violence reported that around one in every four women in Malta have experienced a form of violence or abuse. The example set in the House of Representatives, a spectacle of a woman being harassed and bullied before her peers and the entire nation, is of deep concern and should immediately attract the condemnation of Malta’s equality bodies, relevant civil society organisations and all political stakeholders. Anything short of this tells violent partners, colleagues and parents that their behaviour is, in fact, quite fine.

“Malta hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, together with the important People’s and Women’s Fora, is an excellent opportunity for it to stand firmly on the side of human rights and good governance. Friday’s episode and reactions to date do not seem to indicate that Malta is actually capable of such a stand.” (Dr. Neil Falzon, Director)

Date: 24 November 2015

aditus is an independent, voluntary & non-profit organisation established with a view to monitor, act & report on access to fundamental human rights by individuals & groups.

aditus believes in the *universality, interdependence & indivisibility* of all human rights & strives to promote their rights-based understanding & application. Whereas **aditus’** focus is Malta, it works towards highlighting the regional & international dimensions of human rights in Malta.