

It is a great honour for me today, as a Queen's Young Leader - to be delivering this reflection. I am delighted to witness such a wide representation of different nations and religions. Today we celebrate the establishment of a unique and global community, a community with a strong sense of unity and inclusivity. A community that cannot thrive if there is racism, xenophobia, homophobia and other divisions of fear and hate between us.

An inclusive Commonwealth champions the values of respect, understanding, equity and fairness. One cannot embrace these values without understanding that beyond each of these words there lays a long struggle to attain such harmony and for this reason I would like to honour those people who have lost their lives in the pursuit of dignity and equality to be achieved in this world.

It is not enough that these values are established in the Commonwealth charter; together we must ensure that we bring them to life by practicing them every day of our lives. Every day I strive to eliminate racism, xenophobia and discrimination in my community, by promoting an inclusive education, discussing with young people the way forward and encouraging dialogue to bridge differences and live in an inclusive society. We aim to reduce Islamophobia, overcome fears and eliminate prejudices and judgments by educating and informing people about Islam. It has been a challenging year for the Muslim community because of the rise of violent extremism and the terrorist attacks all over the world. Together with millions of fellow Muslims, I condemn these barbaric acts.

I live in Malta - a developed country, where I have food, shelter and a good education. However, I have been the victim of racism and xenophobia because of my faith. We must not underestimate the power of the virtual world, especially social media, where hatred and vitriol can be expressed with impunity. In an effort to address the bad experiences of my community, my colleague Naomi Burge and I established the social media campaign #RedefiningUs. This campaign is intended to raise awareness about what defines a Maltese person, and strives to empower people who have encountered discrimination, helping them identify the best ways of confronting people who share racist and xenophobic sentiments through meaningful dialogue.

In a Commonwealth that welcomes everyone, we should strive together to ensure that all human beings have their fundamental rights respected and that the values of the Commonwealth charter are put into practice. This is not just a call to action for young people, who form 60% of the Commonwealth's population, but a call to our leaders also. My experience of advocating for social inclusion and peace has taught me that change is not a single action but rather a long, and time consuming process. However, I have also come to realise that every single action, no matter how small, can bring about positive change.

It is time, for us to wake up to the realities around us, to understand the pain others are going through. Indifference is no longer an option - support, empowerment and education are the way forward. We must empower the vulnerable people in our communities because humanity does not live up to its full potential when we are divided, and not united.

Thank you!