



SETTE GIUGNO

2025



Valletta
6 June 2025

SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF SETTE GIUGNO 2025

Today we gather, as we do every year on this occasion, to pay tribute to our forefathers who enabled the beginning of our democratic freedom with their humility, their courage and their blood. The Sette Giugno is not just a commemoration but it is the eternal spirit of a nation that chose dignity over weakness, justice over apathy and hope over fear.

After World War I, Malta faced major challenges. The price of bread and food had risen in an exorbitant manner, unemployment was widespread and social conditions were becoming increasingly difficult. The Maltese people were not only demanding a better material life; they were asking for something much greater. They were demanding the autonomy and the power to govern themselves. Despite these fair demands, this was continuously resisted by the colonial rulers.

In those June 1919 days, the people were tired of waiting; they had had enough, they took to the streets of Valletta. As weapons the crowd only had their voices and the fact that they were united. On Sette Giugno shops that were colonial symbols were attacked. The British flag above the shop À la Ville de Londres was set on fire and the protests spread to other buildings. The military, under great pressure, opened fire on the crowd and it was at that time that Manuel Attard, Ġużè Bajada, Wenzu Dyer and Karmenu Abela were wounded and killed. Their blood marked the birth of a modern Malta. These were the times that built a state, not one of supremacy but of a people who stood up for justice.

This tragedy paved the way for demands for democratic governance and in 1921 Malta gained the Self-Government Constitution, and its first Legislative Assembly. The path towards Independence and becoming a Republic would not have been possible without the events of the Sette Giugno 1919 which we have a duty to commemorate today with due reverence and respect.

Today this legacy lives on in our Parliament, the heart of our democracy, the place where the people speak through their representatives, the elected Members of Parliament, where laws are passed for the common good. In this Legislature, 117 laws have been passed so far, of which 32 were enacted in the past twelve months. The House has debated and voted on a considerable number of motions during this Legislature. To these we must also add several meetings of the Parliament's standing committees, which, like the bills and motions, dealt with crucial issues such as civil rights, education, the environment and health issues.

67 rulings on points of order and procedure were delivered by the Chair to safeguard the integrity of the work of the House and its committees, 21 of which were delivered in the past twelve months.

This shows unrelenting and important work; however, this work would not be worth anything if it were not carried out in a wholly open and transparent manner.

Democracy must be visible, the work should be seen by everyone. Since Parliament moved into its new building 10 years ago, every citizen has been able to follow the plenary sittings and committee meetings in real time. We must keep in mind, however, that live broadcasting should not turn parliamentary work into some kind of mass meeting, nor should it serve as teleshopping for the candidacy of one party or another. It should only be used for the people to follow the honourable work carried out in their name. Parliament must remain the place where

respect and dignity prevail at all time. Political criticism is not only necessary but also encouraged; however, every word and every argument should be based on ideas and facts, not individuals. This is the spirit of a mature democracy and this is the true meaning of the title of “honourable” that we often hear. “Honourable” is not just a ceremonial or protocol title, nor is it a flower worn during a speech. It is a renewal of a pledge of service, a commitment to truth, and dedication to the common good - not to the convenience of any individual.

As stated in the Code of Ethics for Members of Parliament:

“A member of the House of Representatives shall at all times, both inside and outside the House, conduct himself in a manner which reflects the status and dignity of the House of Representatives.”

The word “honourable” reminds us that every action and every decision carry weight. We are not here to raise our voices but to elevate the standing of Parliament as the symbol of a strong democracy. This word should not pass from ear to ear as if it were nothing. It should be in the hearts of each and every one of us.

We must remain mindful that public service should not be there to serve personal ambitions but must always be built around service to the Maltese people.

The Sette Giugno events teach us that every generation has a responsibility to build on the courage of those who came before, and to leave a better Malta for the future generations. Let us take our heritage seriously. Let us be the ones who work for a country where justice and unity can prevail.

I believe that we can play our part by tweaking further parliamentary procedures and, in doing so, the overall work of Parliament, with the aim of further strengthening democracy in Malta.

As I have had the opportunity to say a number of times on this occasion of the commemoration of the Sette Giugno, and as I reiterate today, the time has come for our citizens to have a right to remedy when a Member abuses parliamentary privilege in Parliament in their regard. I have addressed this point years ago, the first time in 2015, when I had insisted that the time had come for the introduction of a mechanism in the procedures of the Maltese Parliament that grants citizens what is referred to as a ‘citizen’s right of reply’. I believe this can be done by way of amendments to the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives, with amendments to other legislation possibly being required. What is certain is that this needs to be done. Year after year we say and agree that we need to give this matter due attention. Yet, unfortunately, to this day, the citizen has no right to seek a remedy when untrue words are spoken about him in Parliament, or when a Member breaches parliamentary privilege in any other way.

This should be addressed without further delay. We are already too late.

I believe that the Government and Opposition Parliamentary Groups should work together and in the process of revising and updating the Standing Orders of the House, include this procedure which ensures that the rights of our citizens are safeguarded. At the same time I would like to reiterate that it is the duty of each Member of Parliament to use parliamentary privilege cautiously, including when making allegations against persons or companies that might be subject to legal procedures in our Courts of Law.

This also applies to the work done in the parliamentary committees, and here I specifically refer to the Public Accounts Committee. The work of this Committee is to ensure that the country's finances are being used diligently and responsibly, with a large part of its work consisting of hearing witnesses who are summoned to appear before the Committee and answer questions related to reports prepared by the Auditor General on various issues. A recent practice has developed whereby not only heads of government entities responsible for public spending are summoned, but also third parties, who may be undergoing court proceedings related to allegations against them. This has at times given rise to legal and even constitutional issues. There are guidelines and there are also constitutional rulings in this regard, but there is certainly room for significant progress in how evidence is heard by the Committees, and this can be done by incorporating the relative rules in the Standing Orders that regulate parliamentary procedure. I believe that the time has also come to introduce the necessary provisions so that any evidence given before a committee such as the Public Accounts Committee cannot be used as evidence in any tribunal or Court of Law. This is a provision found in several other Commonwealth countries and could address the issue of doubt as to whether a witness before the committee is subject to legal proceedings in the courts. This provision also ensures a clearer demarcation between the powers of the courts and those of Parliament.

A similar situation is one that has been raised by the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life on several occasions, both in writing to me, and in various reports concerning investigations submitted to the Committee on Standards in Public Life. I am referring to the fact that the time has come for both sides of the House – Government and Opposition – to consider together what amendments need to be made to the Standards in Public Life Act and to the codes of ethics for Members of Parliament and for Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, annexed to the same Act of Parliament. These amendments should also reflect the OECD recommendations related to the declaration of assets by Members of Parliament, including members of the Executive, contained in reports also presented to me as Speaker.

On an international level, Parliamentary work has been unrelenting and for this I thank all the Members who actively participate in the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and other inter-parliamentary meetings. I would also like to add that as Speaker, I was elected to an ad hoc IPU task force concerning the war between Russia and Ukraine. This year, we worked to address the issue of children who have remained unidentified by their parents as a result of this conflict.

I must also refer to the ongoing war in the Middle East, particularly in Gaza. Parliament is also playing its part to help bring about a breakthrough in this ongoing conflict. Just a few weeks ago, as Speaker I had an important meeting with ambassadors from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League, and Middle Eastern countries. During this meeting we discussed the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the Palestinian territories, as well as the importance of ensuring that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees – a vital UN organisation – is not hindered or stopped from continuing its operations in Gaza and the West Bank. Although a breakthrough still seems distant, we will not lose hope.

In this context, I would also like to express both my personal and institutional satisfaction that our Parliament played a role in this process. Today, we can say that our country – in a significant gesture of recognition toward the Palestinian people – will be officially recognising Palestine as a state. Every contribution – both small and large – led to this historic moment.

This act not only shows solidarity, but also recognises the universal principles of justice, human dignity, and peace, that we hope to see achieved concretely throughout the Middle East region.

In this context too, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation for the mature way in which the Government and the Opposition worked together, both within and beyond Parliament, regarding the alleged drone attack on the vessel Conscience in April while on its way to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Parliamentary work on an international level was also possible through the friendship groups with various parliaments, welcoming delegations from a number of parliaments – including the most recent led by the Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament.

Also during the six-month Maltese Presidency of the Council of Europe, which ends in November, Parliament will remain committed and engaged especially through the work of the Maltese Parliamentary delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. As a Parliament, we will have organised several meetings that bring together parliamentarians from across Council of Europe member states to discuss topics of common interest, as well as matters related to the priorities of the Maltese Presidency.

All of this is only a small part of the work being done in Parliament. Whilst thanking all Members of Parliament for their contribution and cooperation, I must also acknowledge the work carried out by the parliamentary staff. Though small in number, they carry out their work with dedication and in a professional manner. Had this not been the case, Parliament would not be able to achieve all this.

In light of the fact that in today's world we face a growing challenge of attracting and retaining human resources, I am pleased to say that just a few days ago, the second Collective Agreement between the Parliamentary Service and the General Workers' Union has been concluded. This agreement aims to continue offering the best possible conditions so that Parliament can ensure it has the best human resources, as befits this highest institution. I thank all parties who made this possible.

Against this backdrop, it is clear that a thriving parliamentary democracy requires that we not only reflect on what has been accomplished, but – more importantly – on what could have been done better, and what still needs to be done to continue strengthening our Parliament. Our goal is not only to meet the aspirations of the Maltese people, but to build further on the respect our Parliament enjoys among other parliaments and interparliamentary organisations of which it is a member.

There is no doubt that all this requires the cooperation and commitment of all of the Members of Parliament. I take this opportunity to once again thank them for their full cooperation – even in those circumstances where the work at hand may stir up strong emotions.

I believe that the annual Sette Giugno commemoration, held to honour and appreciate the struggles of our forefathers, should also serve to celebrate our individual and collective achievements – achievements that continue to inspire us to strengthen Parliament as the highest institution in the country, not only for the benefit of our nation today, but also for the generations to come.