

Honourable President,
Distinguished Guests,

Thank you all for your hospitality and your very warm welcome to one of Europe's most beautiful cities. I come from the Greek island of Lesbos, which is in the Aegean Sea. This is the island where arriving travellers "leave behind the entire known world and enter uncharted seas", in the words of Odysseas Elytis, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1979 in this very city, filling his fellow-islanders and all Greeks with great pride.

Lesbos, a remote Aegean island, has today become an emblem of genuine humanity and solidarity. A source of hope for the society envisaged by Olof Palme, where mutual respect and responsibility provide everyone with equal opportunity and equal value. A society where, in Palme's words, "human beings will be in equilibrium when doing good things, not because God says to, but because they feel like doing them."

Responding instinctively to the call of their conscience and their humanitarian sense of duty, my countrymen in Lesbos have handled a tremendous humanitarian crisis in a way which has set a compelling example for the international community, showing the world what it means to be truly Greek. They have done so by standing up to a crucial historical challenge, even when this has meant acting alone. For we were alone during the first months of the crisis, fighting to save lives, to provide warmth to young children and their mothers who kissed the ground upon arriving in Lesbos – for them a promised land.

It was those acts of welcome by the local community which mobilised international organisations, NGOs and independent volunteers to come to Lesbos and help us provide a humanitarian response to the refugee crisis. Among them were ordinary people from Sweden who found themselves on the shores of Lesbos, at the Kara Tepe and PIKPA Refugee Centres. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people from the bottom of my heart, for our job would have been so much harder without their help. Their important contribution deserves special recognition, particularly as some organisations and volunteers came with a different agenda, often causing problems in our attempts to manage the crisis.

But the efforts of people in Lesbos to manage the crisis were not restricted to local action. Based on our experience, we made proposals for a better, more effective and more humane response. These included a proposal for registering asylum seekers in Turkey and for creating a network of cities with facilities to house them. Such proposals were welcomed by officials in Greece and in Europe, inspiring national and European policy, but were never implemented in a comprehensive way, so that a single, coordinated European Policy on the refugee crisis is still lacking today.

Lesbos is an island of peace, solidarity and European values. It is a beacon of light for the world, at a time when fascist, xenophobic and far-right narratives are taking centre stage in one European society after the other. All forces which stand for peace and humanity must uphold and strengthen this light, which is our only hope in fighting against the darkness of fascism and xenophobia which threatens us. This light must continue to grow, spreading from ordinary people in Lesbos to international volunteers, to organisations and foundations such as the Olof Palme Foundation, to mayors of other islands in Greece and Italy, such as the honourable mayor of Lampedusa, to the clergy, with the support of the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, the Archbishop of the Greek Church and the Pope, and to political forces which recognise the danger for Europe. My dream is that this small light, which started in Lesbos, will grow stronger and awaken people throughout Europe. For great ideas can survive any crisis and can even withstand bullets, such as that which caused the untimely loss of Olof Palme, whose memory will never be forgotten. Our common fight to uphold those ideas and ideals must be a fight to the end – or, as you say in Swedish, *ände in i kaklet*.

It is a great honour for me to stand here today on behalf of my countrymen from the island of Lesbos, to whom this prize is being awarded. Today Lesbos is struggling to stand on its feet again, and in that struggle we need allies. My island is a beautiful and eminently safe place to spend your holidays. A unique land with wonderfully hospitable people. So I would like to invite you all to come to Lesbos and experience its world-famous hospitality. Captivated by its beauty, you are sure to succumb quickly to the Stockholm syndrome.

Thanking you once more for this great honour, I assure you that we will continue to follow the call of our conscience and stand up to the challenges of our times. The shining light of Lesbos was, is and will remain forever bright.

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