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**SPEECH BY THE HON LAWRENCE GONZI, PRIME MINISTER,
DURING THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW FACILITIES AT
PEMBROKE ATHLETA FOOTBALL GROUND, PEMBROKE –
WEDNESDAY 27TH JANUARY 2010**

Honourable Minister
Honourable Parliamentary Secretary
Mr Platini
Dr Mifsud
Distinguished guests

It is indeed a privilege to be here this evening to inaugurate this new investment in sports facilities.

This development is just the beginning of a regeneration programme which will go a long way towards meeting the increasing demand for high quality sports and community facilities not just in Pembroke but also in surrounding areas.

It is also a celebration of the collaboration between different entities to achieve this common aim of supporting investment in modern facilities. This pitch and lighting that we are inaugurating was made possible due to the collaboration between Government, the Malta Football Association and UEFA. I would like to take this opportunity to thank UEFA for its support towards Maltese football complementing my Government's investment in the sector.

With a work programme focused on the centrality of the human person, my Government recognises the value of sports and its contribution to the development of the human person and to the country in general.

The success of increasing sports participation hinges on the availability of modern sports facilities. To this effect, we have continued investing in complexes which will provide adequate space and facilities for sports to

prosper. Works will soon be commencing on a €3 million new sports complex in Hal Kirkop which will complement existing sports facilities. In addition, all the new schools that have been built in the past five years also have extensive sports facilities which the local community and sports associations make use of.

Government also takes on a leverage role in investing in sports facilities by providing assistance to various sports associations. Today's event is the fruit of such collaboration and even in the further developments envisaged by Pembroke Athleta Football Club, Government will be taking a key role. The Good Causes Fund, which is administered by Government, is a main financial instrument towards the provision of sports facilities by associations. Throughout this year, 12 sports associations will be benefitting from such funds. In addition, sports associations also benefit from land devolved to them by Government. It is estimated that such land made available over the years to sports associations is valued at over €40 million.

However, sports participation programmes are essential to instill a sports culture in our youth. To this effect Government, through the Maltese Sports Council and Local Councils, is embarking on a number of programmes and initiatives to increase sports participation at all levels.

A number of programmes targeting school children attracted over 12,000 children to participate in extra sports sessions. Local council's were also encouraged to organise sports events through a specific incentive scheme. Twenty four local council's organised 84 events between them which saw the participation of over 4,500 people in sports activities. Government is also supporting public sector employees through the so-called 20/20 scheme which allows them to train during working hours.

We are also aware of the potential sports tourism has in Malta and last year Government introduced an incentive scheme for sports associations to hold international conferences and competitions in Malta. 22 sports associations benefitted from this scheme organising a total of 35 events which accounted for 22,000 bed night. Following this success, this scheme is being extended this year with an increased budget of €250,000 and a specific scheme targeting Gozo. In addition, Malta is hosting international sports events and training camps which are contributing to an expanding niche market.

Sports is also about values. A sports club such as Pembroke Athleta, has a wider social influence in that it imparts positive values to the young people of the club. A club like this provides its members with valuable opportunities to develop their social and leadership skills irrespective of sporting success. The club contributes in no small way to the education of its young members in a very enjoyable and safe environment. All of this would not be the case were it not for the extraordinary commitment and total dedication of so many people,

particularly those voluntary workers who have devoted themselves to sporting organisations.

Every sporting organisation in Malta relies heavily on the contribution of such volunteers. I particularly commend all the members of the committee of this club, who provide the environment for nurturing sporting talent among our young people. This should never be forgotten, and I would like to express my deepest admiration and gratitude for the vital contribution you make to our society. Without your unstinting efforts and your willingness to give of your time and your enthusiasm, this development and others like it would never get off the ground.

Ladies and gentlemen

Today's event extends well beyond the official inauguration.

It is a celebration of sports based on the notion that it contributes to the holistic development of the human person and of our society.

It is a celebration of values embodied by the collaboration between different entities and across borders towards this project.

It is a celebration of the value and contribution of voluntary work towards society.

It is above all an investment in our children, youth and society.

Thank you.

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