



QUESTIONS TO THE PL LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES

MALTA LGBTIQ RIGHTS
MOVEMENT

2ND JANUARY 2020

INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years, the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement (MGRM) has worked hard for the achievement of several civil rights, most of which were achieved in the past few years. As a result of the change in leadership of the Partit Laburista, and therefore the position of Prime Minister, rights such as marriage equality, equality in adoption laws, the right to change name and legal gender, the right to treatment for trans people, and in a general sense, equality in the eyes of the law, could be threatened.

For that reason, MGRM invited the Hon. Chris Fearne and the Hon. Robert Abela, as the two candidates for this position, to answer an identical set of questions related to the above.

The two candidates were made aware that their responses were going to be published on our website, as well as on our social media pages.

We would like to note that both the questions and the answers were made in Maltese. Although the responses were professionally translated into English, please refer to the original language in case of any ambiguity.

QUESTIONS

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1) In a general sense, what is your position on civil rights?

CF - There hasn't been a Government in the history of Malta that gave so many civil rights in the various sectors of society, as a Labour Government has done since 2013. This is proven by facts. Have we done enough? No. And we will never do enough. This is because civil rights emerge from the very nature of civil society which changes continuously. Rights can be created and can change alongside society.

RA - As a Maltese citizen, I am proud of the achievements we have made in the past years. I swear that if I am given the trust to lead the Partit Laburista and thus become Prime Minister of the country, I will keep up the hard work to ensure that Malta remains a pioneer in this sector.

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2) Do you agree that same sex couples should be able to get married and start a family?

CF - Yes and that is why I have always voted in favour [of these rights].

RA - I agree that gay couples should be able to raise children. I also agree that they should be able to adopt.

3) Would you consider reversing partially or completely any civil rights such as:

- *Legal protections including constitutional protection against discrimination towards people on the basis of their gender identity and sexual orientation amongst others;*
- *The prohibition of conversion therapy;*
- *Marriage Equality*
- *Equality in Adoption Laws*
- *All rights currently listed in the Affirmation of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression Act*

CF - That would not even occur to me.

RA - None of the rights given should be reversed - on the contrary, we should work on what we have achieved as a country, and I intend to not only consult with you but also to involve you in a holistic manner for the strengthening of these laws.

Malta currently ranks first in the world in the fight against homophobia and I want Malta to remain the first in this sector. I feel that MGRM is the main stakeholder in this journey. We need to talk using facts:

Facts such as when it was under a Labour Government led by Dom Mintoff that it was no longer a crime to be gay;

Facts such as when in 2016, Malta was the first European Union member state that banned conversion therapy;

Facts such as when in Malta, in September 2017, I voted alongside the rest of Cabinet and the Labour Parliamentary Group in favour of the legislation for Marriage Equality

4) *What is your position on Marriage Equality?*

CF - I have already expressed myself in favour of altruistic surrogacy - where it is done as an act of love, which does not involve any payment or material compensation.

RA - On surrogacy which in Malta remains a criminal act to date, I believe that yes, we need to discuss within its wider context, not only for gay couples but also heterosexual couples. We need a very mature debate. In the past I have expressed myself publicly as personally in favour of surrogacy.

It is a reality that even heterosexual couples are currently accessing surrogacy outside Malta. By that same measure, I also know same sex couples who are accessing surrogacy outside of our country.

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5) *Do you agree that persons living with HIV should have access to a modern and dignified treatment? Would you consider introducing medical prevention such as PrEP trials?*

CF - I believe that government has already shown the highest ever degree of sensitivity and respect towards people with HIV. In fact, we have allocated large resources towards this aim, and in 2020 we will be introducing modern medicines, free of charge, which treat HIV. With respect to PrEP, I am already committed to introduce it shortly.

RA - I would only be able to answer this question upon consultation with the Minister for Health, Mr Fearne, along with the rest of the Cabinet

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6) Do you agree that men who have sex with men should abstain from sexual activity for a year before being able to donate blood? Why?

CF - I am already on record as having said that this one-year abstinence period should be reduced to four months, after we conduct and verify epidemiology tests. For me personally, it is a matter of absolute importance that whoever receives blood has his or her mind at rest at all times.

RA - So far this remains a debatable subject in several countries around the world. In my opinion, it is discriminator that a stigma is created on gay people, by prohibiting them from donating blood or through the creation of limitations/restrictions. I do understand that that there needs to be a mechanism that ensures safety. But when we use the word 'safe', what I do want to see is a safe mechanism that does not create discrimination between individuals or sexual orientations.

What is society saying? That a gay man is a bad person, and that it is always dangerous for them to give blood? Using that same measure, is a person who is not gay but has sexual relations with several partners without protection doing a good thing?

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7) Do you agree that our schools should always include literature that is inclusive and covers all spectrums?

CF - Yes I agree. The sooner we teach our students to embrace diversity in a wider sense, the more our society will be strong, creative and at peace with itself.

RA - I believe that in this debate we need to revolutionise our sexual education system, that starts from an age when our children would have come to understand their responsibilities, removing taboo once and for all on protection measures including contraceptives.