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## Stop animal cruelty

by David Casa

If we regard human rights as something possessed by all human beings, no matter how limited their intellectual or emotional capacities may be, how can we deny similar rights to great animals? To do so would be to display a prejudice against other beings merely because they are not members of our species, and this can very much be comparable to racism.

The use of the term "slavery" in relation to something that it is wrong to do to animals is especially significant, for until now it has been assumed that animals are rightly our slaves, to use as we wish.

The Universal Declaration of Animal Rights states that animals have a right to life free from deliberately inflicted pain, suffering, exploitation and death. However the question is: do we all of us really believe this, or put it into practice?

On the occasion of World Animal Day, that was celebrated on 4 October, I visited the SPCA in Floriana. It was a great experience as I could see what working in such an association entails, and what these people deal with every day. It also put me back into perspective, and I urge anyone to visit places like this and experience first hand the number of animals that are saved, many a time from the wrongdoings of our own species.

The SPCA promotes animal welfare, encourages the public not to harm animals and raises awareness about the reality of animal cruelty. More importantly, the SPCA makes sure that any sort of legislation that directly or indirectly affects animal care and welfare is respected according to the law.

The work done by the SPCA is essential and indispensable, and it is thanks to organisations like this (and others like it), that more people are realising the importance of animal welfare. I absolutely condemn whoever harms innocent animals. No animal's voice can be heard, so we are the ones who have to take action.

On hearing of incidents of animal cruelty within our society, like the time a dog was burnt alive last May, I fail to comprehend how anyone would be able to carry out such deeds. And while we are talking about dogs, we cannot but utter words of disgust for those who are entertained by dog fighting. We have heard in the past how this was not uncommon, although arrests had been made.

Another incident that comes to mind is when some cats were tied up and tortured, a few years back. The images are still vivid in my mind, as I am always struck by such disgusting news. We must give harsher penalties to those caught disrespecting animals, and send out a clear message.

The animals with whom we share our world, and our lives, have no voice. It is up to us, all of us, to speak for the animals to defend their rights and to ensure their survival in a world in which all life is valued, nurtured, and protected.

Why does society not tolerate a harmful action of a man against another man, but very often they overlook a harmful action of a man against an animal? I think this question must be understood if we are ever to change the rights animals have. I feel strongly that animals should have rights. When I was a child I didn't believe animals had any actual rights, rather humans had rights that involved animals. My view of this has changed over the years. If we allow animals to have rights the same or similar to humans then we must first define what it is that makes us feel as if they are entitled to rights. But in order for us to do this we must first define equality.

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Animals are creatures just like us. They feel pain and emotions just like us humans. When someone violates our rights, we get hurt which often results in some kind of action. But animals are helpless, they can't take any action because they are less intelligent than humans. However, I do believe that humans are the supreme beings on this planet and that we are on the highest evolutionary scale, but still that does not give us the right to commit wrong acts to the animals.

We must show that we are on the highest evolutionary scale, by our actions and not just by saying it. We must respect animals as if they were one of us. Words of appreciation go to all organisations and associations that promote animal rights. It is thanks to these volunteers that we have come to realise and learn how some animals are treated, or mistreated.

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