



HELENA VAZ DA SILVA AWARD CEREMONY Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 23 October 2020

Highlights of the SPEECH by **Graça Fonseca, Minister of Culture**

I would firstly like to greet the organisations and the personalities that represent them, without whom this Award would not have been possible: the Secretary General of Europa Nostra, the President of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the President of the Centro Nacional de Cultura and the President of the Portuguese Press Club. It is an honour for the Ministry of Culture to participate, once again, in the Helena Vaz da Silva Award Ceremony.

The Award evokes the memory of **Helena Vaz da Silva** and her valuable contribution to culture. This contribution was brilliantly made in all areas in which she exercised her fruitful activities.

As one of the pioneers of cultural journalism in Portugal, Helena Vaz da Silva made new paths for journalism and the dissemination of culture, at a time when doing so was a courageous and visionary act. As President of the National Commission of UNESCO, she played a fundamental role in the defense, preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage, assumed as a cause. As President of the Centro Nacional de Cultura, with an indefatigable energy, she demonstrated that it is possible to combine cultural demand and quality with openness to new ways of making culture and attracting new audiences. As a European MEP, she made her mandate an intense and continuous time of cultural initiative and political imagination.

For Helena Vaz da Silva, culture was a combination of duty and pleasure, enthusiasm and devotion, joy and participation, necessity and sharing, aesthetics and ethics. For this cosmopolitan European, culture is what roots and identifies us. **For her, culture had no walls, but bridges. For Helena, culture is, after all, the best way to transform a day that passes into a day that endures.**

In these times of so many dangers and concerns, the defense of memory, of cultural heritage, both material and immaterial, and of creative freedom is a condition of hope for a better future and for a better world.

This Award is a golden opportunity to honour influential figures of European culture who, like Helena Vaz da Silva, through their life and work, are notable examples of how to defend and promote culture and heritage. Among these illustrious figures is **Cardinal José Tolentino Mendonça: a Madeiran, Portuguese, European and universal citizen, thus conveying the true meaning of the word "Catholic".**

The high position that Tolentino de Mendonça holds as Archivist and Librarian of the Holy See is, after all, an eloquent and happy consequence of a life dedicated to books and devoted to people.

Through his life and his work, Cardinal Tolentino has demonstrated himself to be a man of **alliances, dialogue and communication.**

A conscious and committed heir to the cultural traditions and artistic disciplines that make up European culture, Tolentino de Mendonça gave them the bright tone and the unmistakable accent of his personal voice. In these times, we need poets that return us to the roots of who we are and the utopia that we dream of becoming. That is why **the best art of living is inseparable from the art of remembering the past, creating the present and believing in the future. José Tolentino Mendonça has told us that ceaselessly.** For that, we are deeply grateful to him.