

CURRICULUM VITAE OF HER ROYAL HIGHNESS GRAND DUCHESS MARIA TERESA OF LUXEMBOURG

“A woman of heart and conviction, Grand Duchess Maria Teresa puts the protection of the most vulnerable and the defence of women’s and young girls’ rights against all forms of violence at the heart of her social and humanitarian action.”

Maria Teresa Mestre was born on March 22nd 1956 in Havana (Cuba).

FAMILY

In October 1959, during the revolution led by Fidel Castro, young Maria Teresa Mestre leaves Cuba with her parents, José Antonio Mestre and Mara Teresa Batista-Falla de Mestre. The family of Spanish descent settles first in New York, where the Grand Duchess enrolls in the Marymount School. From 1961 onwards, still in New York, she pursues her education at the French School (*École Française*). In June 1965, her parents stay on the family property in Santander, Spain, for a few months before choosing Geneva, Switzerland, as their permanent home. Just as her two brothers and her sister – Antonio, Luis and Catalina – Maria Teresa has enjoyed an excellent education. While her father works in the world of finance, her mother, enthusiast of the arts and literature, dedicates herself to her family and conveys to her children notably the values of Christian faith.

Her Royal Highness then continues her education at the Marie-José Institute in Gstaad, before pursuing her studies at the Marie-Thérèse boarding school in Geneva, where, in June 1975, she obtains her French Baccalaureate. In the meantime, Maria Teresa obtains Swiss citizenship. She graduates with a Bachelor of Political Science at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva in 1980.

It was at university that the Grand Duchess meets her future husband, Prince Henri of Luxembourg. They both read Political Science for four years. At the end of their university curriculum, their engagement is announced.

On Valentine’s Day in 1981, Maria Teresa Mestre marries His Royal Highness Hereditary Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Luxembourg, and became Princess Maria Teresa, Hereditary Grand Duchess of Luxembourg.

The Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess have four sons and one daughter: Prince Guillaume (born 1981), the current Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg, Prince Félix (1984), Prince Louis (1986), Princess Alexandra (1991) and Prince Sébastien (1992).

On October 7th 2000, the Hereditary Grand Duke ascends the throne and becomes Grand Duke of Luxembourg. From that time on, Princess Maria Teresa bears the title of Grand Duchess of Luxembourg.

Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess is today grandmother to three grandsons and one grand-daughter: Gabriel (born March 12th 2006) and Noah (September 21st

2007), the children of Prince Louis of Luxembourg, Amalia (born June 15th 2014) and Liam (November 28th 2016), the children of Prince Félix and Princess Claire of Luxembourg.

SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT

Very early on, the Grand Duchess has shown her interest for social and humanitarian causes, hereby continuing a family tradition that had already led her grandparents Augustin Batista Y Gonzalez De Mendoza and Maria Teresa Falla Y Bonet to actively shape the philanthropic and cultural work on Cuba. The construction of medical dispensaries offering free treatment in deprived rural areas count among their most remarkable feats. Her grandparents have also contributed to the creation of the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra, whose main contributor the family remained until the Cuban revolution.

On the occasion of her marriage, the Grand Duchess receives a donation that permits the creation of the Foundation that bears her and her husband's name and which the Grand Duchess presides. This fund enables Maria Teresa to actively contribute to the integration of vulnerable people or people with special needs into the Luxembourg society. In 2016, she organises the first international forum on learning disabilities in Luxembourg. The Foundation also supports international projects in Africa and Asia.

Since 1997, the Grand-Duchess has been Goodwill Ambassador for UNESCO, through which she aims to promote the education of young girls and women, as well as micro-credits and fight against poverty. For many years, she has been working with Professor Mohammed Yunus (Nobel Peace Prize laureate 2006) and has been implicating herself in the development of inclusive finance in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Since 2006, the Grand Duchess is Honorary President of LuxFLAG, the Luxembourg Fund Labeling Agency, the first agency to grant a seal of quality to investment funds in microfinance worldwide.

In April 2007, the Grand Duchess is nominated Eminent Advocate for Children by UNICEF, a mandate given to her for her action to help children orphaned by AIDS and child soldiers.

Her commitment to social causes is reflected in her patronage of many charitable and socio-cultural organisations in Luxembourg, among which the Luxembourg Red Cross and the *Fondation Cancer*.

The honourable distinctions the Grand Duchess has received for her humanitarian actions are the illustration of her extraordinary commitment: in October 1999, Her Royal Highness the Hereditary Grand Duchess receives an honorary doctorate of the *Seton Hall University* (New Jersey, USA). In February 2003, the Grand Duchess receives an honorary doctorate of the University of León (Nicaragua) and on June 13th 2006, the representation of the Holy See at the Council of the United Nations confers her the *Path to Peace Award*, which is granted every year to a personality distinguished by extraordinary humanitarian and social engagement. In 2013, the ELPIDA association bestows her the *International Solidarity Award* to laud her work for children suffering from cancer.

Her social and humanitarian actions have often led the Grand Duchess abroad to supervise the progress of those projects she actively promotes, for example to

Nepal, Mali, Bangladesh, Thailand, Bosnia, Laos, Kenia, Senegal and Burundi, journeys during which children in need have always been the closest to the Grand Duchess' heart.

Following a visit of the main prison in Bujumbura, capital of Burundi, in June 2009, the Grand Duchess discovers the fate of underage children imprisoned for minor crimes. Over the course of four years, with the help of *Maison Shalom* founded by Maggy Barankitse, the Foundation of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess has succeeded in freeing the 600 minors that were incarcerated under inhumane conditions in the various prisons in Burundi. These children subsequently received help in terms of psychological treatment, education and judicial support, thanks to the *La main tendue* project, entirely financed by the *Fondation du Grand-Duc et de la Grande-Duchesse*.

In September 2016, the Grand Duchess joins the Council of Patrons of the Asian University for Women (AUW). Based in Chittagong in Bangladesh, the university has helped to qualify, since its creation in 2008, more than 500 young women. The AUW has enrolled 150 young women for the academic year 2016, 25 of which originating from Afghanistan.

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

During her youth, the Grand Duchess has practiced classical dance for 18 years. She also likes to sing and to play the guitar. She also practices sports actively, for example skiing, ice skating and nautical sports.

The Grand Duchess has an interest in the decorative arts and design.

A passionate reader, she has been part of the jury of the "Prix des Princes" – a prize for historical fiction – in Paris in 2016.