

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).

HER FAMILY

The young Maria Teresa Mestre—along with her parents, Jose Antonio Mestre and Maria Teresa Batista-Falla de Mestre, her two brothers and her sister—left Cuba in 1960, at the time of the revolution led by Fidel Castro.

The family, of Spanish origin, settled in New York, where the Grand Duchess attended Marymount school. From 1961 onwards, she pursued her education at the French School (*École Française*). In June 1965, her parents stayed 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 worked in the world of finance, her mother, enthusiast of the arts and literature, dedicated herself to her family and conveyed to her children notably the values of Christian faith.

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

On Valentine’s Day in 1981, Maria Teresa Mestre married 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 ascended the throne and becomes Grand Duke of Luxembourg. Princess Maria Teresa has since borne the title of Grand Duchess of Luxembourg.

Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess is today grandmother to three grandsons and one granddaughter: Gabriel (born 2006) and Noah (born 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. She hereby continued a family tradition that had already led her grandparents Augustin Batista Y Gonzalez De Mendoza and Maria Teresa Falla Y Bonet to actively shape philanthropic and cultural life in Cuba. The construction of medical dispensaries offering free treatment in deprived rural areas count among their most remarkable feats. Her grandparents also contributed to the creation of the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra, and remained its principal patrons until the Cuban revolution.

On the occasion of her marriage, the Grand Duchess received a donation that allowed her to create the Foundation that bears her and her husband's name and which She presides. This fund has enabled Maria Teresa to contribute to the integration of vulnerable people or people with special needs into the Luxembourg society. In 2016, she organised 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 the past several years, she has been working with Professor Mohammed Yunus (Nobel Peace Prize laureate 2006) and has implicated herself in the development of inclusive finance in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Since 2006, the Grand Duchess has been Honorary President of LuxFLAG, the Luxembourg Fund Labelling Agency, and the first agency to grant a quality seal to investment funds in microfinance worldwide. The Grand Duchess has chaired the international jury for the European Microfinance Award since 2005; an honour awarded annually to the organiser of an inclusive finance and microfinance initiative in developing countries.

In April 2007, the Grand Duchess was nominated Eminent Advocate for Children by UNICEF, a recognition of 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 received an honorary doctorate of the *Seton Hall University* (New Jersey, USA). In February 2003, the Grand Duchess received 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 conferred to 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 bestowed upon her the International Solidarity Award for 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.

During a visit of the main prison in Bujumbura, capital of Burundi, in June 2009, the Grand Duchess discovered 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 2006, the Grand Duchess joined 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 1200 young women.

LOISIRS ET INTERÊTS

The Grand Duchess loves to spend time with her grandchildren. She is interested in the decorative arts and design, and in her youth she practiced classical dance for 18 years. She also enjoys singing and playing the guitar, and she especially loves walking her dogs.

The Grand Duchess is also fond of skiing, skating, and nautical sports.

A lover of literature, she was on the jury for the *Prix des Princes* prize for historical fiction in Paris in 2016.