



ORDRE SOUVERAIN MILITAIRE ET HOSPITALIER
DE SAINT-JEAN DE JERUSALEM DE RHODES ET DE MALTE

MISSION PERMANENTE D'OBSERVATION AUPRES DE L'OFFICE DES NATIONS UNIES
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Sovereign Military Order of Malta

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General Segment

Statement by:

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Permanent Observer

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Mr. President,
Madam High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to begin by expressing to you, Mr. President, my Delegation's appreciation for the significant achievements that have been made under your presidency and to thank you for your wise guidance of the Council's work.

The Agenda for this Session includes several subjects of immediate interest to the Order of Malta's worldwide humanitarian action.

The Order runs institutions and programs in many countries offering a wide range of services for people with physical and intellectual disabilities. It is therefore fully aware of the importance of eliminating discrimination faced by persons with disabilities and noted with satisfaction the declaration adopted at last week's first session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promising to afford equal attention and priority to all persons with disabilities. It also emphasized vulnerable groups, which are of particular concern to the Order such as women, children, older persons, migrants, asylum seekers and those living in rural or in areas of armed conflict. My Delegation welcomes the thematic study prepared by the High Commissioner's Office on enhancing awareness and understanding of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. We look forward to the dialogue of the interactive panel to be held on this subject on Friday.

For a long time leprosy relief has been one of the main activities of the Order's work in several countries. In Southern Sudan, on the occasion of World Leprosy Day 2009 on 25th January, the Order organized in its project location in Yei a number of community events, including discussions on discrimination against leprosy patients and issues concerning the dignity of sufferers. The **"Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members"**, as outlined in document A/HRC/10/62, is therefore of particular interest to the Order of Malta. My Delegation has been participating in the informal consultations held with a view to exploring standards applicable for elimination of discrimination and drafting guidelines for the Council's next resolution on this matter. We also noted the recommendation adopted by the Advisory Committee at its second session and are most grateful to Mr. Shigeki Sakamoto for emphasizing in his working paper the links to the Right to Health and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We also thank the Delegation of Japan for having initiated this process and we shall continue to cooperate with the Council in this field.

In her conclusions and recommendations, the Special Rapporteur on **freedom of religion or belief**, Mrs. Asma Jahangir, states in her report (A/HRC/10/8) “discrimination based on religion or belief preventing individuals from fully enjoying all their human rights still occurs worldwide on a daily basis.it often emanates from deliberate State policies to ostracize certain religious or belief communities and to restrict or deny their access to, for example, health services, public education or public posts”. Urgent measures to remedy these persistent violations of human rights need to be taken. While the obligation to respect and protect lies with States, every citizen should engage in the defence of the dignity of the human person, especially with regard to freedom of conscience and of religion. We all share this responsibility.

Confronted with human rights violations in various countries where it carries out its humanitarian work, we are also following the newly established **Universal Periodic Review** process and we sincerely hope that this innovative mechanism will have the expected impact on the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations. Only broad consultations with all stakeholders prior to a country’s review and full cooperation with the process will ultimately lead to the improvement of human rights situations on the ground and relieve the terrible suffering of people caught up in tragic situations.

Mr. President,

Through its programmes in many areas of crises and conflict, the Order of Malta offers assistance to **internally displaced persons**, helps **women and children** victims of violence and discrimination, combats **hunger and malnutrition** and ensures **access to safe drinking water and sanitation**. The **Issue of Palestinian pregnant women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints** also remains of concern, as the Order’s Holy Family Hospital provides the population of Bethlehem and its surrounding area with the only possible place for women of the region to give birth under good medical conditions. My Delegation is confident that the Council’s debates will contribute to making progress on these important human rights.

In concluding I would like to emphasize the Order of Malta’s commitment to the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights. Allow me also to pay tribute to the High Commissioner for her leadership and to express our appreciation and full support for the work and independence of her Office as well as our readiness to closely cooperate in order that human rights gain effectiveness and a more central position in the action of the international community.

Thank you.