



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:

H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann

Permanent Observer

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

At the outset, on behalf of the Sovereign Order of Malta, I wish to express our heartfelt sympathy to the people of Chile and Haiti for the loss of lives caused by the recent earthquakes. The Order is providing emergency humanitarian assistance in both countries.

The Delegation of the Sovereign Order of Malta thanks the High Commissioner for her inspiring and in-depth opening statement. Her analysis of the Council's achievements and its shortcomings has given us much food for thought and will no doubt contribute widely to the discussions during the forthcoming review process. Once again the High Commissioner emphasized the need "for constructive, non-politicized dialogue and cooperation". It is the duty of all stakeholders in Government and civil society, to work in partnership so as to produce tangible results that will lead to the improvement on the ground of the lives of victims of human rights violations.

We also wish to commend her Office for having identified six priority areas, each of which requires immediate and sustained action in many areas. **Combating inequalities and poverty** is at the heart of the Order of Malta's mission. Its assistance to the poor and the suffering is carried out through its medical and social activities in 120 countries. As the least privileged members of our societies suffer most from human rights violations, our focus must be on the eradication of poverty through development, education and the basic provision of health care.

The report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Walter Kälin, on the **human rights of internally displaced persons** (A/HRC/13/21) has received our full attention. The Order of Malta's global humanitarian activities include many projects that support and assist IDPs. We entirely agree with the report's conclusions and recommendations, in particular with regard to the fact that "Much of the internal displacement taking place today is linked to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law". The Order will continue its efforts to protect and assist displaced persons in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, especially those displaced by natural disasters and armed conflict. Of particular concern to the Order are persons "with multiple layers of vulnerability", i.e. the elderly, those with disabilities and belonging to ethnic minorities, as well as women and children. We are also fully aware of the importance of undertaking consultations with local populations concerned and implementing disaster risk reduction measures. Disaster preparedness components are therefore included in many of the Order's projects for populations at risk whereby the focus is clearly on community based disaster preparedness and risk reduction concepts aiming to support and to strengthen local capacities. Furthermore, we support the report's recommendation for close cooperation between states and humanitarian and

development actors in a number of areas with a view to expanding activities and achieving higher synergies. As the Council will shortly be called upon to decide on the future of this mandate, it is our hope that member states will recognize the significant contribution the Representative has made towards the promotion and protection of the human rights of internally displaced persons. We would therefore welcome a renewal of the mandate in order to ensure implementation and follow-up.

Mr. President,

Another subject of particular interest to the Order of Malta is that of **freedom of religion or belief**. In her present general report, the Special Rapporteur, Ms. Asma Jahangir, (A/HRC/13/40) discusses early warning signs of discrimination and violence on the grounds or in the name of religion or belief and identifies some appropriate responses. Outbreaks of violence and ongoing tensions at national or global levels on the grounds or in the name of religion remind us all too often that the international community needs to give urgent attention to the problem of religious intolerance. Some of the Special Rapporteur's recommendations should be implemented without delay by states, for example by education of the public about religious diversity, by equal access for children from religious minorities to good-quality education and by the setting up of teacher-training programmes. In this context interreligious and intra-religious dialogue is equally important, provided all its dimensions are covered and participation of all stakeholders is ensured. Ms. Jahangir's recommendation that religious leaders, and I would add faith based institutions, and civil society as a whole, including the silent majority, women, artists, lawyers and actors in new information technologies should play an increasing role is a call for every citizen, from the grass-roots to the state level, to actively engage in promoting religious tolerance. Members and observers of this Council are well equipped to set an example by initiating such an action-oriented approach.

Mr. President,

The Order of Malta's worldwide humanitarian action brings it into daily contact with refugees, migrants, victims of disasters, the sick, persons with disabilities and others in need. The Council has addressed many issues fundamental to their lives, like the rights to food, health and safe drinking water and sanitation, human rights of women, children, migrants and internally displaced persons, human rights and extreme poverty and of persons with disabilities. The Order's Delegation has participated in the debates and welcomed the resolutions, most of which were adopted by consensus. However, as already mentioned by previous speakers, these achievements have yet to produce concrete results. The upcoming Review of the Council will have to examine its present weaknesses, in particular the lack of impact of the Council's work on the ground. There is a definite need to strengthen the Council's effectiveness and credibility by concrete responses which have a measurable impact on the lives of ordinary people by ensuring their enjoyment of individual rights and freedoms.

Thank you Mr. President.