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DE SAINT-JEAN DE JERUSALEM DE RHODES ET DE MALTE

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Statement by :

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Permanent Observer

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Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

At the outset allow me to commend **the Secretary-general, Mr. Ban Ki-moon**, for his outstanding report on **“Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.”** It provides a much needed comprehensive analysis of the ever-increasing complexities, not only of the present challenges we are facing, but also a vision of the way forward in light of the rapidly changing global context. Due to the large number of current humanitarian crises, such as natural disasters, conflicts, high food prices, the global financial crisis, climate change and population growth, the world today faces, more than ever before, an urgent need for **enhanced cooperation and increased participation of multiple humanitarian actors.**

In cases of both **natural hazards** as well as of **complex emergencies**, the Sovereign Order of Malta aims to respond in a prompt and effective manner to humanitarian challenges on all continents. It also gives particular attention to one of the priorities addressed during last month’s second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction: **enforcing community resilience and disaster preparedness.**

As illustrated in the report’s overview, the past year has seen increased demands for humanitarian assistance. In this context, the Order of Malta’s worldwide relief agency, Malteser International, has continued its projects in crisis-affected countries such as **Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Sudan (the region of Darfur) and the Democratic Republic of Congo.** In accordance with its long experience, the Order conducts its humanitarian action in strict compliance with the fundamental principles of **humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence**, thus enabling it to provide assistance without any kind of distinction. The Order of Malta acknowledges the section of the Secretary-General’s report referring to the **challenges to principled humanitarian action.** An increase in deaths of humanitarian personnel is an issue of the utmost significance for all actors involved, thus the importance of ensuring proper conduct and discipline.

Furthermore, the Order of Malta shares the concern expressed in the aforementioned report regarding **access for humanitarian workers to affected communities.** This access often being impeded, it is necessary to repeat the appeal for the joint action of all stakeholders in order to overcome these constraints in a timely manner. By the same token, cooperation with local populations is essential, so as to ensure effective deployment and rapid delivery of relief items. As one of the first international organizations able to respond and to start relief measures immediately after Cyclone Nargis hit **Myanmar** in 2008, the good coordination and collaboration with local and other agencies enabled Malteser International to provide efficient relief despite the immense access problems for humanitarian aid.

We also fully support the Secretary-General in his call for greater **“coordination with non-traditional partners** (e.g. development, scientific, financial, legal and regional organizations; private sector, etc.)” in order to devise and implement new strategies for aid provision to affected populations, including the victims of **gender-based violence.** For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Order has, for several years, been assisting a high number of women and girls victims of sexual aggression throughout the war. Health centres provide

not only medical care but also psycho-social assistance to those victims. This includes information campaigns and group counselling concerning sexual violence, sensitisation campaigns addressing the population and the military in cooperation with local authorities, as well as qualified formation and supervision of local staff and NGOs concerning the treatment of victims of sexual violence with emphasis on trauma coping.

Turning to the report's conclusions and recommendations, and in particular to the point on **strengthening disaster preparedness and response capacities**, the Order is giving full attention to different approaches in this field. Be it by introducing the reinforcement of houses against earthquakes and cyclones, by constructing flood-safe emergency shelters, or training village emergency teams, Malteser International includes disaster-preparedness components in many projects. The focus is clearly on community-based disaster preparedness and risk reduction concepts aiming to support and to strengthen local capacities (and reducing vulnerabilities) of populations at risk, for example through specific work in the sectors of water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion.

A good example of a prepared disaster response was the immediate intervention of the Order of Malta in the region of **Abruzzo, Italy**, after the earthquake of April 2009. It was early in the morning of 6 April that volunteers of the Order of Malta's Italian Ambulance Corps - doctors, nurses and specialised helpers - arrived in the areas affected by the earthquake. With the reopening of the local health centres, the two advanced medical stations set up in the camps, which performed over 150 operations immediately after the quake, have now been replaced by first-aid posts with ambulance service.

Madam President,

The Order is also looking at innovative methods to assist vulnerable groups through **safety nets**. In Cambodia, we have introduced a community based health insurance system with the aim of improving access to public health care, reducing debts and preventing poverty. This health insurance scheme is based on the needs of the different communities and managed by elected community members.

In concluding, I wish to express the Order of Malta's appreciation for the progress made in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. We look forward to continuing our fruitful cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies. Although we are not part of the cluster approach, Malteser International's staff closely cooperates with cluster members in the framework of major emergencies. We also wish to thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for their regular invitations to country briefings which provide valuable information. Moreover, we would like to compliment them on the substantial improvements of the website **ReliefWeb**, which we use on a daily basis as an important working tool. Finally, we join the Secretary-General in calling on Member States as well as non-state actors to help ensure the **constant and predictable support to humanitarian funding channels**. Otherwise, the international community will not be able to meet ever-growing needs and confront numerous humanitarian challenges.

Thank you, Madam President.