



SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE
AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN GENEVA

Sovereign Order of Malta

67th Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

General Debate

Statement by:

H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann

Permanent Observer

Geneva, 3 – 7 October 2016

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Mr. Chairman,

Mr. High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the Sovereign Order of Malta I would like to express our most sincere congratulations to H.E. Filippo Grandi on his appointment as High Commissioner for Refugees.

In his comprehensive and inspiring opening statement which illustrates the many tragic situations and the huge challenges faced by the international humanitarian community to-day, the High Commissioner calls inter alia on “faith-based organizations and religious leaders to set an example through humility, compassion and practical action”. Both at the *Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit* in May and at the *High-Level Meeting to address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants* held a fortnight ago in New York, the Order of Malta emphasized in the plenary sessions, at high-level round tables and side events the special role played by FBOs and religious institutions in the field of assistance to refugees, displaced people and migrants. There are fundamental reasons for including faith-based and religious actors in the different phases of a humanitarian crisis. They are often first responders, ensure solidarity and resource mobilization through their local networks and enjoy trust and influence with local communities. This position enables them to support afflicted populations by engaging in prevention, protection, emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconciliation and peace building measures. They also share common principles such as the respect for human dignity, the value of the family and the duty to help our fellow human beings, as well as taking care of spiritual needs, thus providing individuals with a sense of purpose and lifting assistance beyond the material component. The Order of Malta therefore applauds the inclusion of faith-based institutions in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by UN Member States on 19th September 2016 and hopes that the growing recognition of their role will lead to new approaches of engagement by all parties concerned.

Mr. Chairman,

The Order of Malta is on the front line offering assistance to refugees and displaced people, both in countries involved in conflicts and in the final destinations of asylum seekers. During the past year, the Order of Malta strengthened its action so as to address the mounting demand of humanitarian aid and provide relief to thousands of people taking perilous routes in search of a better life. Its worldwide network of associations, embassies, relief and volunteer corps rooted in 120 countries have scaled up- or in some cases newly introduced- assistance projects based on the local and geographical needs. Although the projects for refugees and displaced people focus primarily on the **Middle East**, the Order’s action also covers a diverse array of other regions, such as **the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, South Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda and Ukraine**.

In collaboration with local partners, *Malteser International*, the Order of Malta’s worldwide relief agency, provides humanitarian aid for refugees and displaced people in the north of **Syria and Iraq, Turkey, and Lebanon**. In 2015, its field hospitals, medical centers, and mobile clinics treated almost 170,000 sick and wounded people. In total, aid reached more than 266,000 refugees, displaced people, and vulnerable local inhabitants in the Middle East.

The surge of asylum-seekers in **Europe** is the greatest wave of refugees to the continent since the end of World War II. Suffering, abuse and exploitation, particularly for children and women, and the loss of life in the desert or at sea, are the dramatic consequences. Since 2008 the **Italian Relief Corps** of the Order of Malta has been actively present with teams of doctors, nurses and rescuers both at sea on the Italian Coastguards' vessels in the Strait of Sicily and on the island of Lampedusa. In December 2015, in the wake of the dramatic influx of migrants and refugees trying to reach the Greek islands from the Turkish coasts, the same Relief Corps launched the **Aegean SAR** Operation (Search and Rescue) which saved 2'000 people during its three-month mission.

In **Germany** the Order of Malta is responsible for 140 facilities on behalf of the federal counties and municipalities with space for more than 44.000 refugees. We are most grateful to the High Commissioner for having visited one of the Order's emergency shelters in Berlin last February. Asylum seekers and volunteers much appreciated this opportunity to engage with you on that occasion.

The many projects run by the Order of Malta in **Austria** focus on the integration of migrants and refugees into local communities. They include welcome services, medical assistance, language courses and leisure activities.

In 2015, psychosocial support was provided by the Order to 4,000 people displaced by the **Ukraine** conflict. *Malteser International* is also working to strengthen local support structures in their host regions.

Mr. Chairman,

The Order of Malta and UNHCR have a longstanding cooperation which we look forward to pursuing with the new High Commissioner. International Humanitarian Law, Human rights, partnerships, responsibility sharing and solidarity are at the heart of our action in support of refugees, displaced people and migrants. This commitment is based on the Order's centuries' old vocation to serve and care for society's vulnerable, helping them lead a life in dignity.

Thank you.