



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 ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA

## World Conference

### « Religions, creeds and/or other value systems: joining forces to enhance equal citizenship rights »

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#### **Panel 3 - Equal Citizenship rights and vulnerable/disadvantaged/discriminated social segments: the case-study of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons**

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The Sovereign Order of Malta is a lay/religious institution with a long experience in caring for refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons by providing both material and spiritual assistance.. Present in 120 countries worldwide, we witness daily the challenges they are confronted with in all aspects of their lives. It is in this light that I wish to address the topic before us, regarding equal citizenship rights for the 65.6 million displaced persons across the globe.

Our discussion today is of particular relevance because citizenship rights are understood and applied in many different ways depending on national legal frameworks and different interpretations of international legal instruments.

By definition, refugees and migrants have not been included within the classical legal definitions of citizenship. It is therefore essential to review these concepts in light of today and tomorrow's rapidly evolving situations.

Permanent resettlement, with the future possibility of being granted citizenship, is one of the durable solutions in response to global displacement flows and governance, founded in human rights.

Today the barrier to attaining citizenship is one of the most powerful instruments of exclusion; however, religion's positive concept of belonging to a community can be used to create a new paradigm for citizenship - one that is based on one's contribution to society rather than on one's origins.

Allow me to refer to Working Paper 4.10., in which Dr. Azza Karam, says, “in many ways belonging to a faith community is a form of citizenship albeit of/to a faith tradition and herein lies a fundamental tension between citizenship understood as being part of secular nation-state and citizenship of a faith community which transcends nation state borders to become in many ways a quintessentially transnational phenomenon”.

With regard to refugees and migrants, this means that they should be fully respected in their own traditions and belief as so as to allow them to keep their culture enshrined in their first *religious* citizenship while opening up to their new national citizenship.

An insightful report from the Institute of Development Studies in 2010, entitled “Citizenship and Displacement”, demonstrates how the millions of displaced people today parallel this transboundary conception of citizenship, by challenging the “state-nation-territory triad”. Refugees for example have left their territory but can still be citizens of their country of origin. IDPs remain in the territory but may not be considered or consider themselves as citizens anymore. Globalization increases flows of people, displacements are longer, and more and more people are becoming stateless; these trends in turn challenge the idea that citizenship rests on belonging to a particular group, to a nation.

Faced with these different situations and flows, States create varying layers and stages of citizenship with more or less rights. The report argues that rights and citizenship would be a way to, quote “bridge divide between different forms of displacement”.

Also, equal citizenship rights would reaffirm Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” as well as Article 15 that “everyone has the right to a nationality” and “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality”.

There is, therefore, an ethical component that goes beyond the legal rules and jurisdictions that define citizenship. We should recall that citizenship is first and foremost about duties and rights. The Working Papers, from 4.1. to 4.10., presenting different religions’ perspectives remind us that the two are inseparable.

And undoubtedly, they are at the core of integration. Whatever their situation, all displaced persons, especially if they have little hope of returning to their respective countries of origin in the near future, are losing part of their identity and creating a new one. Yet, without rights, these populations have no incentive to integrate in their countries of arrival. As long as, they are not treated as full members of the community, they cannot participate in it. Here, Monsignor Robert Vitillo, in Working Paper 4.1. reminds us that it is also the host community that is losing out on the enrichment that comes with diversity.

On the other hand, obtaining these rights comes with obligations to fully respect the legal order and jurisdiction of the host country.

As we know, the balance between these two dimensions may be fragile but is necessary so as to ensure peaceful cohabitation between host and displaced communities. Equal citizenship rights are crucial for migrants, refugees and IDPs, but are also beneficial for societies and States. Refugees are future members of their new community. They bethink their tradition and roots

and are looking for a cultural environment they can call home. The sooner they obtain rights, the better they will be integrated.

The conference Concept note (Working Paper 1.1.) makes an important contribution to the present discussion in warning us that the formal granting of citizenship may not be followed by equality in practice.

For example, one important cause of displacement is ethnic and religious conflicts within countries, often based on the fact that religious minorities are persecuted and do not enjoy the same rights in reality. Therefore, ensuring that citizens have equal rights, without distinction of religion, within their countries can prevent such movements.

Ways to achieve this would be a better inter- and intra-religious dialogue together with faith literacy in order to prevent hatred, in addition to improving the implementation of equal citizenship rights.

The successful integration of a diversity of communities depends largely on cooperation between national and local authorities and civil society.

Another area in which we must ensure that equality exists in practice is between women and men, girls and boys. Women and girls must be given the same chance to participate in their host communities, in all aspects of life, especially in terms of right to education, right to work and right to healthcare. So as to enable them to exercise these rights, the international community must constantly strive to identify and address the additional challenges that women and girls face when they are displaced.

The lack of citizenship undermines human dignity and human development potential, which is why we must join forces to call on States to respect their obligations under international law.

Equal citizenship is a crucial contribution to a well-functioning society and the full enjoyment of human rights. One guiding principle to enhance equal citizenship rights is the assertion that citizenship must be founded in the human rights of all displaced persons, in particular, the freedom of religion and belief and expression.

Indeed, because religion is often a reason for displacement, religious leaders have a responsibility to unite and harness the power of religion as a peace-building instrument.

As I have mentioned before, religious leaders can intensify their efforts in dialogue and education to combat intolerance and hate speech through responsibility sharing with State and local authorities and civil society. In a world where individualization is increasing, and social coherence is decreasing, religion strengthens the sense of commitment to the community and can be a powerful tool for social cohesion.

Most importantly, the contributions of different religious leaders to the present discussion through the working papers, illustrate the extent to which all religions are founded on common values of love for one another, compassion, protection and assistance to the poor and the “traveler” and the ultimate goal of advancing the wellbeing of mankind.

Because more and more people are expected to move in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a result of conflicts, climate change, inequality, development and many other reasons, religious leaders of all faiths are ready to support States to tackle the issue of equal citizenship rights, the core elements of which are health, work, education, housing and justice, so as to ensure that sustainable and durable solutions are created to integrate future flows of migrants, refugees and IDPs.

In conclusion, allow me to propose the following recommendations:

- > Continue to advocate for displaced persons in negotiations on the Global Compacts, by promoting equal citizenship rights as a sustainable solution and guiding States accordingly.
- > Disseminate a “positive narrative of solidarity towards migrants, asylum seekers and refugees” as Pope Francis called for in the document: Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Action Point which was submitted by the Holy See for the consultations on the two Compacts.
- > Refrain from using the word “minorities” with regard to refugees, migrants and IDPs.
- > Devote particular attention to whether women and girls have the same rights as men in theory and in practice.
- > Be aware that gaps in equal citizenship rights exist both at the international and the national level and that our focus should be on both to ensure that all displaced persons, whatever their situation, refugees, migrants or IDPs, can enjoy their human rights and live their lives in dignity wherever they are.

I am happy to see that many of the points and recommendations I have made here are reflected in the draft of this conference’s Outcome Declaration.

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