



**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**

## **United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week**

### **5th Annual Interfaith Dialogue**

#### **Loving one's Neighbour**

Palais des Nations, 14th February 2020

Excellencies,  
Distinguished panellists,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to thank UNITAR for organising this 5th Annual Geneva Interfaith Dialogue. The Sovereign Order of Malta is proud to be a founding member and regular participant of this important event, in particular on this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly Resolution A/RES/65/5. We are grateful to His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan for this initiative and his tireless efforts in promoting interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

This year's theme "Loving one's neighbour" is a very simple, yet strong and fundamental message that is founded in all beliefs. Since more than 900 years and until this day, the Sovereign Order of Malta, a lay/religious Order of the Catholic Church, remains true to its founding principles summarized in the motto "Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum": witnessing and protecting the faith; and serving the poor and the sick, without any discrimination. I have been asked to share with you some of our experience and best practices.

As the Order of Malta carries out its work on all continents, one could ask oneself whether this necessarily means that its humanitarian activities at the same time reflect in concrete terms the expression of our faith? This would mean that humanitarian action is clearly embedded in the practice of one's own faith, thus illustrating Christ's commandment to love one's neighbour. Respect for the dignity of one's fellow human being in his diversity creates the necessary conditions for inter-faith dialogue, thus ensuring the expression of one's own faith.

The Order of Malta promotes interfaith dialogue and action through its humanitarian activities in 120 countries. Its diplomatic relations with 109 States are an essential asset in contributing to the effectiveness of its humanitarian diplomacy. Our active participation in the 2016 **UN World Humanitarian Summit** and in the consultations leading to the adoption last year of the **Global Compact on refugees** and the **Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration**, enabled the Order of Malta to ensure that the important role played by faith-based organizations and religious institutions in humanitarian action be fully recognized.

Its worldwide relief agency, Malteser International, gives priority to peacebuilding by promoting social cohesion and interreligious dialogue. In view of its historical link to the Middle East with its particular religious and political context, the Order of Malta is engaged in several countries, assisting refugees, migrants and IDPs. Allow me to illustrate this in practice with the following three examples:

In **Iraq**, Malteser International has implemented the “Ninewa Return Programme” supporting reintegration of conflict-displaced persons into their communities of origin. In addition to reconstruction and medical assistance, the programme is aimed at community building and social cohesion amongst various ethno-religious groups. This is done through cultural activities, sports, youth centres and education, fostering reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, thus contributing to healing societies. So as to improve its efficiency, Malteser International has set up “Religious literacy training” for its staff, so that they can better understand and cooperate with local partners.

In **Palestine**, the Order of Malta’s Holy Family Hospital provides the population of Bethlehem and its surrounding area with an indispensable service, offering the only possible place for women of the region to give birth under good medical conditions. Its primary objective is to offer high-quality maternity care to all women, regardless of origin, religion, culture or social condition.

Our **Lebanese** Association has a long-standing expertise in interreligious cooperation. The religious diversity in Lebanon makes it necessary for all communities to work together in order to serve those in need and alleviate suffering. It therefore maintains medical facilities with Sunni Muslim, Druze and Shiites. Christian and Shia doctors and nurses work hand in hand, wearing the same uniform, bearing the Order of Malta’s emblem of works, a red shield with a white eight-pointed cross.

As an expression of its contribution to interfaith dialogue and inclusive cooperation, Malteser International has established partnerships with international networks such as the “International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development” that serves as a platform for exchange on best practices, capacity building and advocacy. It also works with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the Department of Religion and Foreign Policy of the German Federal Foreign Office, as well as research institutions and academia. Furthermore, the Order of Malta was invited to attend the 2019 World Assembly of “Religions for Peace” in Lindau, Germany. On that occasion I was elected to serve their World Council as Honorary President and I now look forward to supporting the efforts of this organization to advance effective interfaith cooperation for peace on global, regional, national and local levels. As the world’s largest and most representative

multi-religious coalition which advances common action among the world's religious communities, Religions for Peace will be celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year with new initiatives.

In the perspective of developing further its commitment to interfaith dialogue and cooperation, the Order of Malta is presently elaborating a new document entitled "Religions in Action - Compact for Religious Communities and Faith-Based Organizations responding to conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies". It has a special focus on the relation between Islam and Christianity with inputs from both faith groups. This Religious Compact contains principles and guidelines on the role of religious communities and institutions in resolving crises. It aims at alleviating the consequences of conflict situations on communities involved, under the banner of values shared by all religions. We hope to launch the Compact in the course of this year.

In concluding allow me to refer to the historic document entitled "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together", signed on 4<sup>th</sup> February last year by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of AL-Azhar, Ahamad Al-Tayyib. Their introductory sentence appears most relevant to our discussion to-day, as it reads "Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved".

I thank you for your kind attention.

*Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann*

*Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations Office at Geneva*