



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

***Human Rights Council – 43rd Session – Item 3
Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on freedom of religion or belief***

Statement by Mr. Jean-François Kammer

Deputy Permanent Observer

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Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

The Sovereign Order of Malta thanks the Special Rapporteur for drawing our attention once again to the serious topic of gender specific human rights abuses, in particular violence and discrimination against women and girls related to the exercise of religion or belief.

As the overwhelming majority of the world's population identifies itself with a religion or belief let us here repeat that freedom of religion is a fundamental individual human right. Freedom of religion, as the expression of liberty and choice, must be considered as an inalienable part of the dignity of each human being, and thus guaranteeing his right to believe or not, to criticism, to blasphemy, to apostasy and to change his religion. Freedom of religion is also the adequate tool for promoting and developing peaceful, just and inclusive societies, where minorities of all kinds are protected and respected, being understood that each religion is entitled to define its own values and rules.

Faith based organizations have here an important responsibility in developing further inter-faith dialogue and inter-religious cooperation, and particularly education and faith literacy training. The promotion of inter-religious education focusing on shared civic virtues and appreciation for social diversity will increase trust and improve understanding, respect and relationships between people of different faiths.

This effort will be in line with the endeavor of strengthening the concept of full citizenship, thus reducing, in particular for minorities, the feelings of isolation and inferiority. Our goal is to strengthen humanitarian relief for our communities, since many of the religious institutions are first responders. Humanitarian response enables us to meet the unique needs such as interfaith prayer services, coordinating psycho-social and spiritual support, medical treatment, and basic supplies for those affected by crises.

We welcome the Council's efforts in focusing on the necessity for the international community to implement freedom of religion as an essential human right.