**Human Rights Council – 51st session**

**Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation**

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann, Permanent Observer**

14 September 2022

Mr. President,

Acting High Commissioner,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

My Delegation welcomes this timely Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, whose report highlights many obstacles that indigenous peoples encounter in the realisation of these rights.

As the Special Rapporteur notes, indigenous populations often find themselves in a disadvantaged situation in terms of access to the infrastructure and services that are necessary to obtain an appropriate water supply. This calls for sustained investment in projects and other mechanisms aimed at providing and maintaining reliable water systems, which should also be protected through measures designed to identify, prevent and mitigate relevant risks. Partnerships between all stakeholders, including local communities, governments, public entities and private actors, are essential to advance in the achievement of these objectives.

In this context, the Sovereign Order of Malta maintains its strong commitment to provide and enhance the access of vulnerable populations to water and sanitation. Moreover, a number of its programmes have been particularly undertaken to provide water services to indigenous peoples.

Within the last year, we have made important contributions in this regard. In India, in the Thar Desert, Rajasthan, Malteser International has contributed to introduce a crop scheme adapted to the local climate and water-saving irrigation systems. This has enabled the population of beneficiaries, including tribal groups and other vulnerable groups, to remain in their traditional territories.

In Colombia, in the Guajira region, we have been providing on-going support to Wayuu indigenous peoples. In the area of water and sanitation, Malteser International has helped them to establish hygiene and health protocols, it has offered them training programmes and it has directly provided hand-washing stations, soap and either new or repaired water tanks. Importantly, our programmes have been implemented in culturally sensitive ways, incorporating material and training in Wayuunaiki language, and incorporating Wayuu cultural and spiritual practices.

Also in Colombia, the DUNI project has enabled the construction of a tubing system servicing villages inhabited by the native Kogi and Arhuaca communities, in order to provide them with safe drinking water.

The Order of Malta hopes that further progress may be steadily made in this direction, and expresses its willingness to contribute towards the full realisation of these rights for all individuals without discrimination.

Thank you.