



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 2023

8th Annual Geneva Interfaith Dialogue “Faith, Multilateralism and Public Policy”

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

10th February 2023

Excellencies,
Mr. Executive Director,
Distinguished panellists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to express my gratitude to H.E. Ambassador Walid Khalid Obeidat and Assistant Secretary-General Nikhil Seth for this kind invitation to participate in the 8th Annual Geneva Interfaith Dialogue, organised by UNITAR and the Permanent Mission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Sovereign Order of Malta is proud to have co-sponsored and participated in this important event since the very beginning.

As a lay religious order of the Catholic Church, subject sui generis of international law and a humanitarian institution, the Order of Malta occupies a unique position within the community of nations. Its increasing involvement during recent years in multilateral diplomacy is closely linked to its spiritual and humanitarian mission - *Tuitio fidei et obsequium pauperum* - protect the faith and serve the sick and the poor.

Through its **humanitarian diplomacy**, the Order of Malta engages in multilateralism on different levels. It aims at fully recognising the diversity and the equal value of all partners so as to uphold human dignity and care for those in need. Through its National Associations and its worldwide relief agency, Malteser International, it provides assistance in 120 countries. Its diversified programmes are run independently or in partnership with governments, international and local agencies.

Malteser International operates in areas affected by natural disasters, conflicts, and massive displacement. It focuses on delivering emergency relief, medical and social assistance, humanitarian supplies, shelter, food, and clean water. At the same time, it implements rehabilitation, reconstruction, and disaster risk reduction measures.

For example, on Monday, Malteser International immediately responded immediately to the devastating **earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria** through its teams on the ground, who have been caring for refugees since 2012, as well as by sending an emergency response team to the border region.

The objectives of the Order's **humanitarian multilateralism** are to foster the exchange of information and best practices while contributing and sharing its expertise in the following fields: global displacement, humanitarian assistance, global health, human rights, social justice and integration.

The principal task of the Order of Malta's **multilateral diplomacy** is to develop and strengthen its relations, promote cooperation, and forge partnerships with the United Nations, other international organisations and faith-based institutions, to inform the community of nations on its actions worldwide, as well as to promote its ideals which are closely linked to the UN Charter's principles and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In this spirit, we attended last year the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion in London, in our capacity as Observer to the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Alliance (**IFRBA**).

At present we are organising a high-level panel, to be hosted by our Grand Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs at the forthcoming **Munich Security Conference** entitled "*Peacing it together: Religion, diplomacy and conflict*". We are also contributing to the **Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue**, organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to be held in Marrakesh, Morocco, this June.

Indeed, **multilateralism and faith** are complementary in the sense that they have common values and share the aims for peace, protection of human dignity and diversity in all its forms. Mutual respect and a balance between Religion and State are necessary to build inclusive societies that observe religious beliefs and cultural identities which are inextricably connected. This reflects the 84% of the world's population that identifies itself with a faith or belief. Thus, religion has become a central topic on today's international policy agenda. Governments need to take into account the return of religion to public life and its growing importance on the multilateral stage. In parallel we are witnessing the gaining of strength and visibility of the role of religious institutions and faith-based organisations in this global architecture.

It is also generally acknowledged that religious traditions can have a strong impact on foreign affairs. Therefore, decision makers need to recognise religions' contribution to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Today, the world faces unprecedented crises which call for a truly **universal approach** and the development of global strategies to contain them. In addition to man-made and natural disasters, a number of widespread trends such as demographic growth, increasing urbanisation, poverty, food insecurity, water scarcity and climate change trigger major population movements leading to new crisis situations.

In this regard allow me to refer to the upcoming **UN Water Conference** to be held next month in New York. Our Mission has been part of the Geneva Group of Friends on Water and Peace created in line with the UN Water Action Decade, preparing for this event. At present, our Mission in New York is co-organising two side-events on water, sanitation and hygiene issues.

I have just returned from a field trip to northern **Kenya**, where I witnessed the terrible drought affecting the area, resulting in the loss of livelihood afflicting the local populations which in turn has brought hunger, lack of water and extreme poverty upon them.

Furthermore, development issues, health emergencies, terrorism, asymmetric threats, organised crime, large-scale human trafficking, radicalism, and cybersecurity can only be addressed successfully by all actors working together in a spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and burden sharing. **Climate change** is presently considered the most overwhelming long-term challenge requiring unprecedented efforts by all parties. It has become a top priority on the multilateral agenda that is being addressed by concerted action for universal application.

Humanitarian law is an essential element to limit the devastating effects of armed conflicts and ensure protection of innocent civilians and forcibly displaced persons. The Order of Malta is ready to support global efforts to further develop methods adapted to modern crisis situations so as to alleviate physical, moral, and spiritual sufferings and reduce the risks of conflicts. No country has enough influence to pursue such ambitious aims alone. Furthermore, we need to multiply our endeavours with regard to promoting respect and achieving the worldwide fulfilment of human rights, thereby advocating for the rights of the most vulnerable.

The **renewal of multilateral cooperation** in the 21st century requires new mechanisms to strengthen its diversity and ensure that forward looking players are part of an inclusive global approach. Strategic reforms within the United Nations and its agencies need to be pursued and adequate funding guaranteed by Member States and the private sector. This entails a shift in the UN's organisational culture and mentalities at all levels, as requested by the Secretary General.

At the traditional New Year's **Audience to the Diplomatic Corps**, H.E. Fra' John Dunlap, Lieutenant of the Grand Master of the Sovereign Order of Malta, said that "we cannot help but note the increasing role that religion is taking in international relations and the importance that the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief is taking on at both bilateral and multilateral levels. The Order of Malta is present, as a member or as an observer, in international fora – in particular at the UN in New York, Geneva and Vienna – contributing its values, experience, ideas and proposals".

Finally, through its engagement in the **strengthening of multilateralism**, the Sovereign Order of Malta aims at consolidating the protection of the human rights of all and promoting human dignity, freedom of religion, interreligious dialogue, and as well as the role of faith-based institutions.

Thank you.