



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 2024

9th Annual Geneva Interfaith Dialogue “Common human values in multilateral diplomacy”

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

Palais des Nations, 9th February 2024

Excellencies,
Distinguished panellists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to seize this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Assistant Secretary-General Nikhil Seth and H.E. Ambassador Walid Khalid Obeidat, as well as to Mr. Alex Mejia, for their kind invitation to participate in the 9th Geneva Interfaith Dialogue, co-organised by UNITAR and the Permanent Mission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

It is always an honour and great pleasure for the Sovereign Order of Malta to participate and co-sponsor these annual Dialogues, as we have done since the very beginning.

Before sharing my thoughts on this year's theme “Common human values in multilateral diplomacy”, I would like to show a brief video explaining the history and the work of the Order of Malta today.

VIDEO

Thank you for your attention.

Dear Friends,



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While multilateral diplomacy often involves secular principles and considerations, it is widely acknowledged that religious values can play a crucial role in the diplomatic process, especially where faith is a significant part of society and politics. Many religious traditions emphasise the importance of peace, reconciliation, and resolution of conflicts. In this context, faith is a powerful source of inspiration and motivation for countless individuals involved in peacebuilding.

By bringing together diverse religious communities in dialogue and cooperation, interfaith initiatives lay the foundation for effective collaboration and the advancement of common goals. Interfaith dialogue helps build bridges of understanding and trust among nations with diverse religious backgrounds. By fostering mutual respect and appreciation for each other's beliefs, interfaith harmony lays the groundwork for diplomatic cooperation on global issues.

Despite differences in religious beliefs, most religions subscribe to the shared values of peace, human dignity, compassion, justice and fairness, solidarity, charity and social welfare, cultural understanding and respect for others. Interfaith harmony highlights these values and promotes them as universal principles that can guide international relations. By emphasizing common ground, interfaith initiatives facilitate cooperation on issues of mutual concern, such as poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and human rights. Moreover, by addressing the underlying religious tensions, interfaith harmony can contribute to peaceful resolutions and the prevention of further conflict. Many conflicts around the world have deep-rooted religious dimensions. Interfaith dialogue can play a crucial role in resolving these conflicts by facilitating reconciliation, forgiveness, and understanding among conflicting parties. It can help prepare governments and international organizations to take proactive roles in building trust during negotiations.

The promotion of tolerance, moderation, inclusivity and interfaith initiatives also undermines the appeal of extremist ideologies. This, in turn, creates an enabling environment for multilateralism by reducing sources of conflict and instability. In



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such contexts, human and spiritual values can have a tremendous impact on the shaping of diplomatic efforts and agreements.

As a lay/religious institution of the Catholic Church, the Sovereign Order Malta is engaged in humanitarian diplomacy with a strong spiritual component. It undertakes its worldwide humanitarian activities without distinction as to the regions, political consideration or the status of the beneficiaries from a cultural, religious, or social point of view.

To illustrate this point, H.M.E.H. the Prince and Grand Master Fra' John Dunlap said earlier this year in his traditional New Year's Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Sovereign Order of Malta:

“The duty to assist the poor is indeed universal, and the Order strives to mirror this universality in its approach to the problems of global poverty. Assisting the poorest and the most vulnerable at the international level, however, requires several conditions, in particular the widespread respect for some basic universal principles and a framework of effective international cooperation. The Order of Malta believes in an international order based on principles of human fraternity and solidarity. This is the reason why it upholds the norms of International Humanitarian Law and recognises itself in the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. Multilateral co-operation and a system based on universal principles of solidarity are also requisites for dealing with fundamental themes of our time. International co-operation and respect for universal principles must be employed to effectively deal with migration, global health, debt, climate change, energy transition and the many challenges – as well as huge opportunities — posed by the development of the artificial intelligence.”

With regard to the protection of human dignity, effective engagement and dialogue among communities, human rights advocates and policymakers are essential within diverse cultural and religious contexts. The basic human right of freedom of religion must be upheld to guarantee human rights, protect religious minorities and promote tolerance. Freedom of faith for all is a moral imperative that strengthens peace and stability worldwide. The Order of Malta is particularly concerned by the rising global crisis of religious persecution. Believers of all faiths continue to be victims of



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persecution, as illustrated by numerous statistics (Pew Research Centre and the 2024 Open Doors World Watch List). Yet, despite mounting evidence of the disastrous consequences of religious persecution, opinion leaders in the academy, the media and the corporate and policy worlds pay scant attention to this global decline in religious freedom that represents a grave threat to international security and stability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Sovereign Order of Malta will continue to play its traditional role on the world stage as an advocate for Peace, Solidarity, Human Rights and as a provider of Humanitarian Assistance. The Order believes that there is an increasing need for stronger and more effective Multilateral Diplomacy, supported by a greater emphasis on interfaith dialogue which is a fundamental component in the quest for Peace and Justice. Entities and organisations, whose mandate and vocation are deeply rooted in the richness and diversity of faith traditions, should work together to ensure a greater impact through advocacy directed at political leaders, the media, educational institutions, and other channels of public communications. We all need to do more to promote a culture of peace based on solid mechanisms of co-operation, mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. In this context, religions can inspire humanity, to go to extraordinary lengths to care for the most vulnerable in our societies.