



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 –61<sup>st</sup> session  
General Segment**

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

*25 February 2026*

Mr President,  
Mr. High Commissioner,  
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

For over nine centuries, the Sovereign Order of Malta has stood at the crossroads of faith and service, guided by its motto: *Protection of the faith and Service to the poor*. Today, the Order remains steadfast in its commitment to the respect and promotion of human rights through concrete humanitarian action in some 130 countries.

At the heart of our global engagement lies the defence of human dignity. Every hospital we support, every refugee we assist, every community we accompany in times of disaster reflects our conviction that human rights are not abstract principles, but lived realities rooted in the inherent worth of every person. In times of crisis, suffering is both material and spiritual; ensuring access to freely chosen spiritual support is essential to resilience, healing, and the full respect of human dignity.

In this regard, freedom of religion or belief stands as a cornerstone of human dignity. Across many regions of the world, we witness with deep concern an alarming rise in religious persecution, discrimination, and violence targeting individuals and communities because of their faith or beliefs. Such violations fracture societies, fuel instability, and undermine peace. The Order of Malta reaffirms that freedom of religion or belief is universal, indivisible, and interdependent with all other human rights. Through interreligious dialogue and cooperation, we actively foster mutual understanding and solidarity among faith communities. In contexts of conflict and fragility, our humanitarian actors work impartially, serving people of all religions and none, thereby demonstrating that faith-inspired action can be a powerful force for coexistence, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

We call upon all people of good will to strengthen efforts to prevent religious persecution, to protect vulnerable communities, implement international humanitarian law (IHL), and promote education and dialogue as tools to counter hatred and intolerance.

Human dignity must remain at the centre of our shared endeavour. Thank you.