



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

International Day of Human Fraternity: Dialogue, Culture, and Shared Humanity

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

Geneva, 10th February 2026

Excellencies,
Distinguished panellists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this celebration of the International Day of Human Fraternity, we gather to reaffirm our shared belonging to one human family and our responsibility to build a future rooted in the diversity of cultures and faiths, in accordance with the document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together signed in Abu Dhabi 2019 by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tyyeb.

Religious traditions play a significant role in foreign affairs, especially in contexts of conflict and peace. This is why fostering interfaith dialogue and mutual respect is essential to strengthening multilateral cooperation. Faith-based actors can bring unique and valuable perspectives to diplomacy by drawing on spiritual and ethical principles such as compassion, love, generosity, hospitality, forgiveness, and thoughtful deliberation, rather than purely political or legal frameworks. Therefore, policymakers should consistently integrate these perspectives into conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding. In crises, faith-based actors often serve as trusted first responders and long-term partners in recovery, fostering social cohesion and durable trust.

Faith is not merely a set of beliefs or rituals; it is a call to action. It compels us to recognize the inherent dignity of every person. For centuries, faith traditions have taught compassion, fraternity, justice, and solidarity, values that must guide us, even as we confront to-day's challenges.

In my work, I have witnessed firsthand how faith can unite communities. Grounded in a 900-year tradition of service, the Sovereign Order of Malta embodies a deep commitment to faith-inspired humanitarian action across more than 120 countries, caring for the most vulnerable, such as refugees, migrants internally displaced persons or marginalized communities. Let me share one example. In Lebanon, hospitals and clinics bring Christian,



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

Muslim, and Druze patients together, cared for by doctors, nurses, and volunteers of every faith. A Maronite nurse comforts a Sunni mother, a Shiite doctor works with a Greek Orthodox surgeon, and a Druze social worker supports the elderly. This is not just aid—it is fraternity in action.

Yet, we must also acknowledge that faith can be misused. History and current events show us how religious differences can be exploited to fuel conflict, exclusion, and fear. However, when we embrace the core teachings of our traditions such as love of neighbour, justice for all, and care for the vulnerable, we find common ground. We discover that our differences, rather than dividing us, can be the very source of our strength and deepen our commitment to the common good.

Identity is another dimension of fraternity that we must address. Our identities, whether shaped by religion, culture, or nationality, evolve through our interactions with others. In a world where identities are often politicized or weaponized, we must ask ourselves: How can we celebrate diversity while affirming shared responsibility to one another? The answer lies in dialogue. True dialogue isn't about convincing others but about listening deeply, with an open heart and mind. Therefore, we must invest in education that teaches young people not only the values of their own traditions but also faith literacy and the art of listening and collaborating across differences.

As a representative of the Order of Malta, I recognize parliaments as key spaces for fostering fraternity, where citizens' voices become law and trust in public life is shaped. Cooperation between parliamentarians and religious actors can help prevent violence, strengthen social cohesion, protect freedom of religion or belief, promote inclusive representation, counter hate and misinformation, and encourage cross-border cooperation. Interfaith parliamentary committees play an important role in building trust, dialogue, and resilience within and across communities.

In this context, the Order of Malta as a Permanent Observer at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), works closely with parliamentarians on interfaith issues. We were actively engaged in the preparatory processes and contributed to the first and second Parliamentary Conferences on Intercultural Dialogue, respectively in Marrakesh in 2023 and in Rome in 2025, supporting the outcome documents (Communiqués).



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

The Rome Communiqué *“acknowledge[d] the indispensable role of faith communities in supporting people in vulnerable situations. [...] support[ing] partnerships between parliamentarians and religious or belief communities to uphold the human rights and dignity of all on an equal basis, including those belonging to marginalized groups.”*

We welcome the efforts undertaken by many Parliaments towards the prevention of human rights violations relating to culture and religion. We recognize their crucial role in the building of social dialogue for multicultural, inclusive and peaceful societies.

Most recently, HMEH the Prince and Grand Master of the Sovereign Order of Malta, Fra’ John Dunlap, was received by the Grand Imam of Al-Azar, Ahmed al Tayeb, during a visit to Egypt. The promotion of interreligious dialogue and prayer as a privileged way to foster paths for peace and the defence of human dignity was the subject of the conversation.

The words of the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, where Pope Francis recalls his fraternal meeting with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, resonate deeply: *“In the name of God and of everything stated thus far, we declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.”* These words are not just inspiring; they are an urgent call to action. A call to move beyond rhetoric and live the values of fraternity in our policies, partnerships, and daily lives.

Thank you.