



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

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur of Religion or Belief in the Human Rights Council 61st session

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

3rd of march 2026

Mr. President, Madam Special Rapporteur, Distinguished Delegates,

The Sovereign Order of Malta welcomes the Special Rapporteur's report, which reminds us of the importance of human sensitivity and the equal respect owed to all in the practice of mourning and grief.

We must all recognize that in these poignant moments of life, religion, traditions, and sacred sites play a crucial role. Places of worship are vital to communal life and foster greater inclusion and acceptance of different communities that make a society. No religious practice or tradition should be disregarded during such critical moments.

The conversion of individuals should not be prohibited by law. Likewise, access to cemeteries and the provision of specific religious accommodations must be guaranteed. Acts of vandalism against religious sites should be unequivocally condemned by States and effectively prevented and prosecuted.

The Order of Malta reaffirms its strong commitment to respect and promote freedom of religion or belief. Through our worldwide humanitarian efforts, we ensure that the basic needs of persons of all faiths are met. Safeguarding access to sacred sites, the free exercise of the right to practice one's own religion are essential to foster a peaceful society.

My question to the Special Rapporteur (SR): In humanitarian crises and conflicts, how can freedom of religion or belief be protected in the dignified treatment and honouring the deceased?

My thank you.