



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

**U.N. World Interfaith Harmony Week 2026**

**The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Geneva Interfaith Dialogue**  
**“Strengthening multilateralism in times of global challenges”**

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

*Palais des Nations, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2026*

Excellencies,  
Madam Assistant Secretary-General  
Distinguished panellists,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to express my sincere gratitude to U.N. Assistant Secretary-General Michelle Gyles-McDonough and H.E. Ambassador Akram Harahsheh, for their kind invitation to participate in the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Geneva Interfaith Dialogue, co-organised by UNITAR and the Permanent Mission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in the framework of the World Interfaith Harmony Week, an initiative of His Majesty King Abudullah II of Jordan, reflected in UNGA resolution 65/5.

It is a privilege to address this gathering at the intersection of faith and global cooperation, for the 11<sup>th</sup> time in a row. As you well know, the Sovereign Order of Malta has participated in all of the Geneva Interfaith Dialogues and considers them to be an important event for multilateral diplomacy.

Today’s theme—*Strengthening multilateralism in times of global challenges*—recognizes what we all witness in our work, that no single entity can confront humanitarian crises alone, and that faith communities and multilateral frameworks are essential partners in upholding human dignity.

On that note, allow me to quote former UNOG Director-General Mr. Michael Møller: “Governments cannot do this alone. Nor can International Organisations. They need support—from parliaments, from cities, from science, from business, and from citizens.” (*Hearing of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Danish Parliament, Copenhagen, 22 Jan. 2026*)

From the perspective of the Sovereign Order of Malta, grounded in a 900-year tradition of service to the sick and the most vulnerable, multilateralism is not an abstract ideal—it is a lived reality.



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We are at a moment of profound uncertainty for the multilateral system. Armed conflicts persist or re-emerge, humanitarian needs are rising, climate change is accelerating displacement, and social cohesion is increasingly fragile. At the same time, trust in international institutions is under pressure, and humanitarian principles are too often challenged and violated.

However, we believe these difficulties do not diminish the relevance of multilateralism. On the contrary, they underscore its indispensability.

Multilateralism must therefore be strengthened—not only structurally, but ethically—by reaffirming its human-centred foundations. Interfaith dialogue plays a pivotal role in strengthening this shared purpose. By building trust across communities, it fosters environments in which multilateral action can be more inclusive, more resilient and more legitimate.

Interfaith dialogue is not merely a moral aspiration; it is a practical resource for multilateral cooperation.

Global challenges increasingly intersect with questions of identity, belonging and values—not merely policy. Violence and displacement affect people of every religion. When religious leaders and institutions engage in respectful, structured dialogue, they do more than exchange words: they model cooperation, inform humanitarian priorities and help bridge gaps between communities and institutions.

In practice, interfaith dialogue:

- bolsters **humanitarian access**
- strengthens **local networks of care**
- offers **spiritual support**,
- and fosters **shared narratives of solidarity**

Faith-based actors are deeply embedded in local communities. They often possess long-standing relationships, cultural understanding, and social legitimacy that are essential for effective humanitarian action. When these actors work together across religious boundaries, they reinforce trust and social cohesion, especially in fragile settings.

This is not theoretical. It is visible in how the Order of Malta operates on the ground. In Lebanon, we provide longstanding healthcare and food security support through health centres, mobile units, and agricultural programs that unite government, religious, local and international partners. In Palestine the Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem offers essential maternal and neonatal care to all communities, serving as a symbol of shared human values. In Gaza,



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partnerships with the Latin Patriarchate and Malteser International have enabled the delivery of critical aid in highly constrained settings, demonstrating how interfaith and inter-institutional collaboration can expand humanitarian reach and multilateral efforts where it is most needed.

These examples point to a deeper lesson: interfaith dialogue is not separate from multilateral action—it amplifies it.

It does so by:

- creating **shared agendas**
- deepening **local ownership**
- and enhancing **mutual trust**

In many countries the communities we serve do not neatly divide along religious boundaries; they are interconnected networks of families, friends, neighbours. Our programmes are successful precisely because they respect this reality and because they are informed by dialogue that crosses boundaries of confession and culture.

Multilateralism is strengthened when it includes those who live and breathe its values at the grassroots—faith-inspired responders who often are first on the ground and last to leave. When interfaith dialogue informs and accompanies humanitarian and development action, multilateral frameworks become more responsive, legitimate and rooted in people’s lives.

This is the kind of multilateralism the Order of Malta seeks to advance: one that unites actors of conscience across faiths and institutions to respond to suffering with both compassion and coordination.

Mr. Moderator,

In closing, let us reaffirm that multilateral action and interfaith dialogue are complementary pathways toward peace, resilience and shared human dignity. However, to be effective, multilateralism must be renewed so as to address the present massive existential risks we are experiencing.