



ORDRE SOUVERAIN MILITAIRE ET HOSPITALIER
DE SAINT-JEAN DE JERUSALEM DE RHODES ET DE MALTE

MISSION PERMANENTE D'OBSERVATION AUPRES DE L'OFFICE DES NATIONS UNIES
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Sovereign Military Order of Malta

World Health Organization

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General Debate

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Statement by:

H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann

Permanent Observer

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Mr President,
Director General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the Sovereign Order of Malta I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the 62nd WHA and wish you, as well as the members of the bureau, much success in your task.

During 2008 and 2009, the Order of Malta has continued to expand its health activities around the world. Although small in territorial surface, the Order has provided healthcare, shelter and assistance to populations in need of all religions and races, which are equivalent in number to medium sized states. Indeed, we are present with programs in 120 countries and recognized as sovereign by more than half of the states represented at this Assembly. This recognition is important, as it facilitates our mission in support of the sick, the poor and the refugees in your countries. Since the last WHA, diplomatic relations have been established with four new states: Ukraine, Sierra Leone, The Bahamas and Canada.

Obviously, the Order of Malta is present in the hot spots of humanitarian and health disasters. In Sri Lanka its **emergency aid** for internally displaced civilians focuses on improving sanitary conditions in the camps by distributing hygiene kits accompanied by counseling. In Pakistan we are also assisting, with medical teams, persons displaced by recent events in the Swat area. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Order supports more than 350 health centers, carries out vaccination campaigns, and offers medical and psychosocial care for abused women and assistance for trauma patients. Programs in Darfur include similar healthcare and rehabilitation activities. Following the outbreak of the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe, the Order supported an immediate relief program by providing medical supplies and equipment. Furthermore, the Order also has ongoing activities in less visible regions or in areas in which a follow up of reconstruction was and is still needed, such as in Indonesia, Pakistan and Haiti.

The Order of Malta provides assistance both upstream and downstream through **disaster preparedness**, as for example by rising homes above flood water levels in India or ensuring drinking water and reconstruction after earthquakes. Its presence, since several years, in vulnerable regions

through a local infrastructure enabled the Order of Malta to assist immediately those in need following recent natural disasters as in Myanmar and Italy. One year after cyclone Nargis the Order continues its **relief program** in the Irrawaddy Delta. Focus areas of work are health care, water, sanitation and hygiene. In central Italy last month, we saved lives by intervening on the very first day of the earthquake with trained sniffer dogs, thus ensuring the rescue of survivors. Medical personnel, rescue workers and specialized nurses are presently continuing the Order's assistance to displaced persons in the camps' medical centers.

The **illnesses** treated by the Orders' hospitaller services and by its worldwide relief organization vary from communicable diseases, mainly tropical ones, to psychological consulting for victims of violence and non transmissible diseases such as Alzheimer.

Mr. President,

The Order of Malta has also initiated care for **forgotten victims** such as albinos in Africa, who suffer not only of stigma, but also of discrimination and persecution. This is due to ancient beliefs, very difficult to overcome in a few generations. Hundreds of thousands of African albinos live in fear for their physical integrity and deserve psychological and medical attention in order to avoid premature blindness and deadly skin cancers.

In recent months, the Order of Malta has also supported the Japanese Delegation's efforts at the Human Rights Council in introducing a resolution calling for the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by **leprosy** and their family members. In Sudan, for instance, the Order's worldwide relief agency, Malteser International, not only supported leprosy screening programs, but also organized community events to discuss the dignity of leprosy patients. Our new clinical research programs to improve detection and treatment of leprosy are progressing and new findings could be discussed at a medical symposium gathering of interested parties in 2010.

In summary, Mr. President, the Sovereign Order of Malta is increasing its health related actions at all levels: prevention, treatment, recovery and follow up on all continents, not only for visible patients, but also for forgotten ones and we thank the World Health Organization's members for their support in its mission.

Thank you, Mr. President.