

Speech of the Lieutenant of the Grand Master
H.E. Fra' John T. Dunlap to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the
Sovereign Order of Malta
Magistral Villa, 10 January 2023

Mr. Doyen, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Je suis très heureux de vous accueillir aujourd'hui pour la traditionnelle audience du Nouvel An au Corps diplomatique accrédité auprès de l'Ordre Souverain de Malte.

Je remercie sincèrement l'ambassadeur du Cameroun, S.E. Antoine Zanga, pour ses paroles inspirantes et encourageantes. I should also like to extend a warm greeting to the new ambassadors of Serbia, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Philippines, Italy, Egypt, Spain, Dominican Republic, Peru, Greece, Bolivia, Poland, Chile, Thailand, Ukraine, Portugal, Austria, Ecuador and North Macedonia who presented their credentials and began their valuable mission with us during 2022.

We are in the midst of multiple crises.

Covid-19 has severely impacted our lives: the World Bank estimates that the pandemic has triggered one of the worst economic crises since 1870, pushing to the margins millions of people. The war in Ukraine has further exacerbated the situation, first and foremost for the Ukrainian people with far reaching consequences. Soaring commodity and energy costs are driving many economies into recession.

Nearly 8 million Ukrainians have fled the bombings and devastation and the majority have sought refuge within the European Union. Many European countries have shown great generosity in welcoming them, under the temporary Protection scheme for Ukrainians, but are now facing extreme challenges in the wake of the economic and energy crises. Winter has worsened the conditions of the displaced, posing greater health hazards.

We join the continuous appeals delivered in recent months by His Holiness Pope Francis strongly calling for peace in the Ukraine. I struggle to accept further death, injury, sufferings and destruction. We strongly encourage dialogue and diplomacy as opposed to the use of arms.

As a hospitaller order with a mission of care to help those in need, this double crisis we now face is testing our capacity to respond to growing needs around the world. In this challenging time, our duty is to shed light also on the many forgotten wars that are being fought in different corners of the world.

In Yemen, the ongoing famine caused by the 8-year long civil war is killing thousands of people; the ongoing 11-year war in Syria has displaced more than half of its population; in Ethiopia, the civil war has claimed almost 800,000 lives and has displaced 2.5 million people in two years. Despite the ceasefire signed at the beginning of November, the massacres and violence do not stop. After over a decade of instability, Libya's political stalemate is festering, and the prospect of a new war is looming, while the humanitarian situation in Myanmar has worsened after the 2021 military coup.

We are deeply concerned also about the humanitarian situation in Nagorno Karabakh and should do our best to safeguard freedom and security of movement between Armenia and the Nagorno Karabakh. The Order of Malta encourages Armenia and Azerbaijan to work for a peaceful solution of their disputes.

I cannot refrain from mentioning other conflicts and tensions in the Caucasus, particularly in Georgia.

I express my grave concern about acute human rights violations perpetrated in some countries against defenceless civilians through discrimination, violence, torture and death sentences. I hope that the international community will step up its action to stop these terrible violations and violations of fundamental human rights.

War is the number one enemy of development and prosperity. As conflicts linger on, poverty increases, violence and abuse spiral, violations of human rights multiply. Wars and climate change increase inequality, poverty, and fragmentation of the world into geopolitical blocs. For the first time in many years, inflation is putting countries under strain.

We currently are witnessing a rise in diseases we once thought defeated. While Tuberculosis has increased by nearly 5% over the past year, antibiotic resistance is rising to dangerously high levels in all parts of the world posing a threat to global health, food security, and development.

This is a dire scenario, but also a wake-up call for all of us. It is a time to unite and join forces to assist and help the most vulnerable, with concrete actions but also by giving hope. As Pope Francis recently stated: “It is time we light candles of hope in the midst of darkness and seize opportunities to bear witness to the Gospel of joy and build a more fraternal world”.

This desire for peace clearly indicates the path we must take and the goal we must strive for. Today’s audience offers me the opportunity to illustrate our worldwide efforts with the thousands of medical and social initiatives that we have developed, as well as to look back at a full and demanding year for the Sovereign Order of Malta.

I clearly want to emphasise that all of these initiatives are made possible thanks to the cooperation of the countries you represent and thanks to your commitment and support. If we are able to alleviate suffering and improve the living conditions of so many people around the world, it is thanks to our dedicated members, employees, volunteers and donors, but also thanks to our diplomatic relations with the countries in which we operate.

This is a moment of great sorrow for the entire Church and for all those who have had the grace to know His Holiness Benedict XVI, but it is also an occasion of spiritual joy for the completion of the earthly journey and of the mission entrusted to him as a faithful servant of the Lord and of the Church.

The Order of Malta was honoured to have for many years the then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger among its most illustrious members.

The sudden death of my predecessor Fra' Marco Luzzago last June came as a great shock to us all. He was a peaceful man who dedicated an important part of his life to the works of our Order with discipline, humility, and benevolence.

The Order has survived many storms during its many centuries of existence and has always emerged stronger with a constant expansion throughout the years.

Today the Order operates in war theatres as well as in the city's suburbs. It fights poverty, marginalisation, and human trafficking; treats neglected diseases and combats climate change. Its mission evolves and adapts to the current challenges.

1. Aid for refugees and victims of conflict and warfare

Currently many of our efforts are aimed at helping the people of Ukraine. Since the first day of the full-scale war in Ukraine, our relief service in the country has been providing humanitarian aid, taking care of shelters for displaced persons, distributing hot meals for refugees – at train stations and at border crossing points - implementing a winter programme to restore destroyed buildings, and organising camps for displaced children. Psychosocial support has been provided since 2014 and now 38 points of psychological assistance are actively operating in different regions of the Ukraine. Recently, an additional project on the creation of prostheses was started in Lviv and many new special projects to help people in the frontline regions – such as Odessa, Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, and Kharkiv - have been also launched.

Our Associations in the neighboring countries have also been working round the clock to provide assistance and protection to the many refugees crossing the borders. The Order of Malta in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania have rescued thousands of people and offered them medical aid, food, shelter, logistic and legal assistance. Other Order of Malta's European entities – from Germany to France - have organised shifts of volunteers, shipments of basic goods and the transport of sick and injured people to safe places.

These efforts have been coordinated by Malteser International, the worldwide relief agency of the Order of Malta, and by our network of Associations which acted swiftly to implement a coordinated and efficient response, placing resources and know-how in the front line. A pivotal role in ensuring that humanitarian goods are delivered into hands of the needy and that staff in the field are protected under the international safeguarding laws was played by the diplomatic network of the Order of Malta. Countless appeals have also been made by our permanent observers at the UN in New York and Geneva, to end hostilities and protect civilians. The Order of Malta has also put on the radar the risk of human trafficking, a scourge that only worsens in war theaters. To this end, campaigns have been initiated to protect especially women and children - who form the majority of the refugee crisis - from being abducted by criminal gangs.

This coordinated response which binds together “hands-on projects” - implemented by skilled professionals - supported by the global diplomatic and institutional network has been essential in delivering timely relief. It is the Order of Malta's modus operandi to ensure that all efforts are aimed to helping the needy in the best possible way.

The same is applied to other crisis areas. Since 2011, medical teams from Malteser International have been providing aid and assistance to Syrian refugees fleeing the war. Mobile medical units and field camps have been set up to rescue the injured and sick and many programmes have been implemented in the surrounding regions to provide healthcare and support to the refugees. In Turkey, the Order of Malta runs educational programmes for Syrian children and offers integration projects to families. In Iraq, we have been caring for refugees and displaced persons for nearly ten years with a permanent presence on the ground. We are involved in a comprehensive programme of reconstruction to help displaced minorities in particular to return to their homes in Ninewa in the North of the country, helping small and medium-sized businesses to restart, creating jobs and training positions, promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence among the various ethno-religious groups, and improving access to healthcare.

We provide ongoing support to many other communities forced to flee their countries, for example Venezuelan refugees in Colombia and Rohingya refugees in Thailand.

2. Supporting local communities, protecting the vulnerable and improving livelihood

The Order of Malta continues to play an important role in the Holy Land. In Bethlehem we manage a maternity hospital where every year over 4,600 babies are born. As a matter of fact this week we celebrated the birth of the 100.000 baby at the Hospital. The poor conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank - with the pandemic crisis that has hit hard the community and the economic and social

problems the area faces - have increased the number of premature births, and many mothers are suffering from malnutrition and other poverty related diseases. The Holy Family Hospital takes care of vulnerable mothers and babies: it's neonatal intensive care unit - the only one in the region - treats many newborns with congenital diseases, some being born at only 25 weeks. The mobile medical clinic which the Hospital runs assists the many women who live in the desert area. For most of them this is the only opportunity of access to healthcare and to undergo prenatal scans and blood tests.

In Lebanon - where the political and economic situation is of great concern - the Order of Malta manages a dozen medical centres around the country and runs a number of projects in cooperation with the Sunni and Shia communities. These deeply rooted collaborations with the different communities clearly showcase that when religions join forces for humanitarian actions, they not only promote social justice and peace and defend human rights and values of life, but most importantly build bridges and bring down walls.

As far as the Levant is concerned, the continuous loss of Christians, a traditional element of dialogue and stability in the region, is an ongoing cause of apprehension to us.

The Order of Malta's projects aimed at climate change adaptation are constantly on the rise, as our recent meeting with the Order of Malta's associations of the Asia Pacific area held last October pointed out. Four months after the devastating floods in Pakistan, the country is still wrestling with the violent aftermath. To support the people in the particularly affected and densely populated southern province of Sindh, Malteser International is expanding its aid. In addition to mobile medical teams that continue to provide free treatment

to around 200 patients daily, local partner organizations are distributing cash, tents, water containers, water purification tablets, and food packages to the people. As millions of inhabitants have lost their homes, we are there to support communities in rebuilding their houses.

Likewise, we are widening the scope of action in Africa, where civil wars, poverty and droughts continue to drive people away from their homes. In September 2021, the Kenyan government declared the drought in the northern parts of the country a national disaster. The situation is dramatic: about 36 million people in the Horn of Africa are dependent on external aid and in Kenya some 4-5 million people depend on humanitarian aid to survive. Together with our local partner, the Order of Malta provides emergency aid in the affected area. In South Sudan, we have recently opened a new health centre in Yei River County, in the very south of the country, a region where access to health care has been heavily limited due to the ongoing civil war that has caused the destruction of much infrastructure.

With the support of the Ordre de Malte France, a maternity ward was inaugurated only a few months ago in northern Cameroon, a region that has the highest birth rate in the country, while the Order of Malta's Hospital in Djougou, in the north of Benin, continues to act as a regional reference centre for new mothers and babies in the country.

In the Americas, the Sovereign Order of Malta continues its commitment to provide support to the populations in Central America that are repeatedly hit by natural catastrophes. Food, supplies, and health projects are implemented in collaboration with local communities.

Our plea to help the neediest communities is expanding: in several Eastern European countries we support the Roma community and home developed projects to enhance their integration into society, and in South Africa we provide medical assistance to patients with HIV-AIDS and take care of many children who have been orphaned by the disease.

3. Helping the poor, disabled and marginalised

Each year we renew our commitment to help the poor. Our canteens, soup kitchens and our distribution meal programmes help millions of people across the world. Over 5,5 million meals are distributed each year and with a global food crisis of enormous proportions looming we are trying our best to increase the scope of our action both in busy towns and in remote areas.

We also continue to take care of the elderly both with domestic assistance projects and with our residential care homes, especially in Europe where we run many facilities with advanced programmes for people suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's disease. The latest facility was inaugurated only a few months ago in Vienna, Austria.

In the United States, we lead the prison ministry project, giving support to the incarcerated population, to their families, and to life after incarceration, providing social and psychological support and helping them resume their lives in society. The programme, currently up and running in 36 US States.

Supporting the disabled is a core activity of the Order of Malta's work and please allow me to mention the incredible work our volunteers do each year to prepare

the International Summer Camp for young disabled. A project that has been running for about 40 years and that each year, in a different European country, gathers hundreds of young volunteers and disabled from over 20 countries to spend a week together enjoying outdoor activities, tourist sightseeing, social interaction and spiritual support. I can assure you that the joy and gratitude I have always caught in the eyes of our young guests is touching and overwhelming and I am pleased that this year we were able to resume the camps after the two-year interruption caused by the pandemic. The international camp is complemented by numerous camps held at national level throughout the world.

4. Main institutional visits and events and diplomatic engagements

Year 2022 saw a gradual increase in the institutional events for the Grand Magistry. First and foremost, I had the honour to visit the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella with whom I exchanged a meaningful and fruitful conversation. At the end of this audience, I will receive the Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani. During the year I also had the pleasure of meeting with the President of Albania.

Moreover, Foreign Authorities from Panama, El Salvador, Argentina, Taiwan, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Romania were also welcomed at the Order's headquarters.

Among the highlights of the year in terms of diplomatic engagements let me mention the participation of the Order of Malta in the Munich Security Conference in February where we organised a side event on migration and security. Our Foreign Affairs Department is preparing our contribution also to

this year's meeting which represents one of the finest international fora on the key foreign and security policy challenges of our time.

We remain furthermore committed to enhancing the role of faith-based institutions in the international scene and to this end we organised last June here in Rome a meeting of the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy, a forum of diplomats from Europe and North America that meets regularly to promote collaboration on the geopolitics of religion and to advance religious awareness.

Statistics show that 85% of the world's population profess a religion or faith sharing principles such as brotherhood, respect and mercy, compassion. There is a growing responsibility for religious leaders and faith-based institutions to jointly witness and profess the values of solidarity, generosity, tolerance, hospitality and respect for human dignity that should guide the harmonious development of societies and international relations.

We cannot help but note the increasing role that religion is taking in international relations and the importance that the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief is taking on at both bilateral and multilateral levels. The Order of Malta is present, as a member or as an observer, in international fora - in particular at the UN in New York, Geneva and Vienna - contributing its values, experience, ideas and proposals.

We attended the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief held in July in London which reaffirmed its constant commitment to promoting interreligious dialogue and the role of faith-based institutions.

The Order actively participated as an Observer, in the most recent International Parliamentary Union (IPU) General Assembly which was held last October in Kigali.

The international scenario is evolving rapidly and even diplomacy is no longer the traditional diplomacy of the last century but the Order of Malta with all its various components is well-equipped to face the new challenges.

As we brace for an unprecedented global food crisis, and as climate change and wars continue to have domino and far-reaching effects, the Order of Malta renews its commitment to help those in need. We lack the numbers of the big international agencies, but as the painter Vincent Van Gogh said: “Great things are done by a series of small things brought together”. And this is what we do: we mend and sew, we nurture and feed, we accompany and listen.

Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen please accept my best wishes for a happy and peaceful 2023 with all the blessings from our Lord. Thank you.

Happy New Year, Buon anno, Bonne et heureuse année , próspero año nuevo!