



ORDER OF MALTA

SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER
ORDER OF ST JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF
RHODES AND OF MALTA

NEWS

Address of the Grand Master Fra' John Dunlap to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Order of Malta



10/01/2025

The Grand Master Fra' John Dunlap today held the Audience of the beginning of the year with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The Audience took place in the Magistral Villa in Rome.

After the speech of the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, the ambassador of Cameroon Antoine Zanga, the Grand Master gave the following address.

M. le Doyen, Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

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. M. Antoine Zanga, pour ses paroles inspirantes et encourageantes.

"The Exchange of Good Wishes", a long-standing tradition, is one of my favourite duties of the year. Not only do I see friends and collaborators under the most pleasant of circumstances, but I am also reminded by your presence of the importance of our work together for peace and justice around the world. Thus, it is both an honour and a pleasure for me to be with you today.

Another year, 2025, is upon us. His Holiness, Pope Francis, has declared it a Jubilee Year. Will it bring us the peace that so many people of the world long for? Or — despite our best diplomatic efforts — will 2025 be a continuation of the violence, injustice, and displacement with which we, unfortunately, have become accustomed to living? Of course, our efforts alone cannot transform the world in one fell swoop. But, make no mistake, when we work together for peace and justice, we can make a tremendous difference in the lives of the poor, the forgotten, and the marginalised.

And making that difference is — in the end — the purpose and goal of the Order's diplomacy. Our unique position, both as a religious order and as a sovereign entity under International Law, enables us to work with other countries to provide humanitarian relief, medical assistance, and refugee care in every corner of the globe. This is particularly true when we are collaborating with nations, like yours. In short, our diplomacy is not focused on advancing the interests of the Order. Rather, our diplomacy is placed at the service of the Sick and Poor — regardless of religion, race, or ethnicity — in fulfilment of our charism: *Tuitio Fidei, Obsequium Pauperum* (Defence of the Faith Through Service to the Poor).

This year, also, marks a deeper collaboration with the Holy See with a broader plan of activities that the Sovereign Order of Malta has set in motion for the Jubilee Year. More than 2,000 volunteers – from some 20 countries worldwide – will serve in the First-Aid posts run by the Order of Malta in the four papal basilicas.

The Office of our Grand Hospitaller is organising the work of the volunteers, who will be present in two shifts per day in each basilica. A doctor, a nurse and two first-aiders will be present for every shift, totaling 32 volunteers per week for 55 weeks.

This is an enormous effort on our part, but that is part of our original mission: assistance to pilgrims.

If the Order's diplomacy is going to effectively support our global activities on behalf of the Poor, then we must make a major strategic investment in our diplomatic infrastructure. My government is committed to increasing the number of Countries with which we have diplomatic relations. This requires a significant effort to sustain a growing efficient Diplomatic Corps, as well as a commitment of my time and that of the Grand Chancellor. Since the Order is a rather unusual Sovereign Entity, the advantages of diplomatic ties with it are not always self-evident. For example, it is important that nations and international organisations recognise the value of the strict neutrality of the Order and how this neutrality allows the Order to bring relief and humanitarian aid where others cannot go. And it is important that our diplomatic partners know that they can rely upon the Order to support their own efforts to provide humanitarian aid. At the same time, our formal relations with so many countries enable the Order to move rapidly with minimal interference to deliver humanitarian aid in war zones, across closed borders, and to remote corners of the world.

In 2023, when I was elected Grand Master, I made it a point to meet early on with the leadership of three nations that have consistently supported the Order's global relief activities and its sovereign rights under international law. Previous governments of these nations also demonstrated their support for the Order in the early 19th century, as it undertook the difficult task of re-organisation of its activities and the establishment of new ways to articulate its core commitment to serve the Poor and Sick. Thus, I was pleased to make formal visits to the Holy Father, the President of the Republic of Malta, and to the President of the Republic of Italy. The Republic of Malta has demonstrated its co-operative spirit repeatedly, especially since its independence in 1964, and it has increasingly embraced its 268 years of shared history with the Order. Italy has been a fast friend of the Order for centuries, as has the papacy, which first signalled its support for the Order and its autonomy over 900 years ago. I must say that it gave me great pleasure to inaugurate my government with visits to such great moral authorities, as well as great friends of the Order.

After my first visits to the Holy See, the Republic of Malta, and Italy, I devoted special attention to a number of countries that are particularly relevant to the Order's history: Poland, Hungary, and Greece. The Order has long-standing, deeply rooted involvement with these three countries.

I wish to personally thank the ambassadors from these countries for their help in organising these Official Visits.

With respect to Greece, our connection with this nation largely revolves around the Order's 212-year rule of the island of Rhodes. I had the great honour of officially inaugurating a virtual museum on the history of the Order in Rhodes from 1310 to 1522. Although our years on Rhodes are in the distant past, in some ways, the past provides the building blocks for current relationships. At the same time that we acknowledged our shared past in Rhodes, we initiated discussions aimed at entering into a co-operation agreement with the Hellenic Republic.

We entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Kingdom in the past year. This arrangement is based on an innovative model which includes the exchange of official representatives, as well as a mechanism for joint-consultation and potential co-operation between the signatories regarding third party situations. I should like to express my deep appreciation to the British authorities, and in particular to the British Ambassador to the Holy See, for their openness to innovation and displays of creativity, as we crafted the details of our new relationship. I, for one, am hopeful that we can see this through to full diplomatic relations when the time is right.

Several other European nations made formal visits to the Grand Magistry, I welcomed the Heads of State of Hungary, Albania, Latvia, and Slovenia. At separate meetings, the Grand Chancellor and Grand Hospitaller received a number of European dignitaries, including prime ministers, foreign ministers and other cabinet ministers. Apart from European figures, the Grand Chancellor also received His Majesty the King of Lesotho. We are hopeful that meetings, such as that with His Majesty, will help us to grow in the Sub-Saharan region. In fact, we opened Diplomatic Relations with Burundi and then The Gambia in the last two years, as we continue to increase the number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with which we have diplomatic relations.

Consistent with our strategic objective to increase the number of nations with which we have diplomatic relations, I undertook several trips to various parts of the world.

In Panama, where the Order and its activities on behalf of the poor continue to grow, I participated in the Latin America Regional Conference of the Order. I also paid an official visit to the President of the Republic, who warmly welcomed me and our delegation. Panama was the first of a number of visits to Latin American countries that I intend to make over the next few years. At the Magistral Palace, the Grand Chancellor received the First Lady of Ecuador, a meeting which we hope will result in furthering the already close relationship with that country and help to spur further activity in Latin America. These visits will not only mark our growing relationships in the region but also assist in strengthening existing ties and developing new activities and initiatives.

Within this strategic framework, I travelled to Australia to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of our local Association. I visited many of our projects carried out in Melbourne, Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Sydney. I noted with satisfaction the significant activities undertaken by the Order on behalf of the Poor and Sick. In Canberra, I also met with the Governor-General. I had met a few days earlier the Governors of both

Queensland and New South Wales. I was very pleased that each representative of the King displayed a remarkable level of knowledge about the Order and its work in their country.

During those days in Australia, I noticed two basic reactions to the Order and its representatives. First, local authorities and everyday people uniformly voiced appreciation for the hands-on work of its Association and its Volunteers. Second, our delegation, although without diplomatic status, was given every possible courtesy by Australian public officials. The warm welcome and outstretched hands were, I believe, the result of a certain level of knowledge about the Order and its work. Once people understand the goal of the Order and the ultimate purpose of its diplomacy, when they see Knights and Dames at work in soup kitchens, relief camps, and hospitals, they can fully grasp the extent of our work, our commitment and the many benefits of a diplomatic relationship with the Order of Malta.

We also demonstrated our support and confidence in international agencies by joining “The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty”. The Alliance has been endorsed by the G-20 and was initially launched by President Lula of Brazil. Its mission is to support and accelerate global efforts to eradicate poverty in part through the implementation of evidence-based solutions. We understand the ambitious goals set by the Alliance, and we are proud to be part of this effort. I thank the Ambassador of Brazil for his invaluable assistance in this regard.

2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the Order receiving from the United Nations the status of Permanent Observer. The Order celebrated this important anniversary with events in New York, Geneva and Vienna. In September, I was invited to visit the United Nations in New York. This was another important step in our effort to improve and grow our diplomatic status. The Order attaches a special importance to the United Nations as the centrepiece of a system of multilateral co-operation based on the principles and norms of International Law. We believe in a rule-based international system. It is the only way to guarantee the fundamental values of the protection of human life and of social solidarity. At the same time, a rule-based system is also the most effective way to meet the many challenges facing us today: the impact of climate change, the long-term efforts to transition to a carbon-neutral economy; the many sources of instability that feed violence; abuse of human rights; flows of refugees, asylum-seekers, and displaced people, to name a few.

At the UN, I was warmly received by the Secretary General, HE António Guterres. This was the first time in history that a Grand Master was formally received by a UN Secretary General. I was also invited to speak at “The Summit of the Future” at the United Nations, another “first” for a Grand Master. The Grand Chancellor also raised the Malta Cross at the UN when he was invited by the Security Council to speak at the open debate, “Leadership for Peace”.

To further strengthen our close bond with the UN I then travelled to Geneva where, at the Palais des Nations, I opened the Exhibition “The Sovereign Order of Malta today” presenting the publication “30 years of the Sovereign Order of Malta at the United Nations” and most importantly addressed the Human Rights Council, after meeting the Director General of UNOG Ms. Tatiana Valóvaya.

Chief among our diplomatic priorities are:

— Our advocacy for the importance of the International Humanitarian Law;

— The protection of civilian populations and relief workers in situations of war and conflict; and

— Upholding the value of religious freedom.

In 2024, we arranged several public events which included experts from the Order, as well as prominent personalities from international agencies, universities and Think Tanks. For example: the session on humanitarian assistance at the Ambassadors' Conference, the event at the Munich Security Conference, and the workshop at the Magistral Villa on religious freedom.

Our advocacy on these particular themes is all the more relevant today. Nowadays, human rights are being ignored and degraded with dire consequences for civilians trapped in war zones in many areas of the world. Indeed, humanitarian crises have erupted in many parts of the world. Events in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Ukraine have shocked us with their cruelty and total disregard for the rules of engagement. Civilians are routinely targeted, their homes destroyed, and their cities deliberately reduced to rubble.

The images of suffering, death, and devastation haunt us. The rising number of children, who are victims of military operations, shocks us. The hard-hearted response of the political leadership to this civilian carnage reduces us to a stunned silence. But these are not acceptable responses to this expanding human tragedy. We must remind ourselves and others that we have a moral obligation to stand against the degradation of the international system. We must speak out, when the opportunity presents itself, against violations of human rights. We must not be hesitant to use the legal instruments, which the international community has given us, to prevent and contain the effects of war and conflicts.

But advocacy for our diplomatic priorities alone is not enough. For while we argue in the courts in The Hague and on the floor of the General Assembly in New York, civilian populations are being killed by the thousands and displaced by the hundreds of thousands. They need — but do not have — food, water, medical treatment, physical rehabilitation and psychological support. Children must be allowed to continue their education. Lack of nutrition and of medical assistance; discontinuation of education and social activities; threats and attacks on relief operators, and destruction of civilian infrastructure are not admissible in any manner or under any circumstance.

Recognising the dire situations that have trapped civilians in cycles of violence, the Order of Malta has not limited itself to advocacy. It has acted "on the ground", consistent with its historical mission and its long-standing tradition of humanitarian aid.

Our hearts go to those Israelis taken hostage. May God protect them and their families. We hope for an immediate release.

In Gaza, the Order has been able to deliver food and other relief goods to Gaza City and the northern part of the Strip. We have done so through a unique combination of energies and resources with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Catholic Parish in Gaza City and Caritas. Our aid is all the more critical, since many humanitarian organisations face insurmountable difficulties in delivering food assistance to Gaza, especially in the North. Most of our aid is made up of fresh fruits and vegetables, products that have become extremely rare and expensive in

Gaza. We shall continue to provide such assistance on a regular basis, as long as it is necessary. In short, we shall remain in solidarity with the people of Gaza for as long as they suffer conditions of extreme hardship.

Our position is the same with respect to the people of the West Bank, where the living conditions and the humanitarian situation have continued to erode at a frightening pace. On the ground, extreme levels of violence impede the implementation of relief operations and often prevent the deployment of our mobile clinics, cutting off, for example, much needed medical assistance to the Bedouin villages. We are equally concerned with the situation in Bethlehem, a city of obvious importance for the whole of Christianity. The disruption in the Middle East has virtually ended non-critical travel to several countries in the area. The dramatic drop in the flow of visitors and pilgrims to Bethlehem, for example, has aggravated the economic and social conditions of the population and created financial difficulties for the Order's projects. The Order, nevertheless, continues its presence in this area, largely through the Holy Family Hospital, a unique model of humanitarian service and social cohesion. In spite of many difficulties, the flag of the Order continues to fly atop the hospital complex—a testimony to our commitment to supporting the Palestinian people.

In Lebanon, yet another theatre of conflict and humanitarian crisis, the Order has been playing a crucial role, by providing assistance in many areas through its extensive network of more than sixty centres. The Order's presence is felt throughout the country through its national association whose members have displayed extraordinary dedication and commitment. The emergency operations of the last few months are the most recent examples of the Order successfully mobilising in time of crisis. In war-torn Lebanon, the Order has been active in the health sector, in agriculture, in education and vocational training.

The Order's commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples is based not only upon the legitimate needs of these suffering peoples, but also upon the Order's special attachment to the Holy Land. This is the region where the Order was born almost 1,000 years ago and first developed its activities. This is the land where the first hospital run by the Order was established in Jerusalem. Our history is so closely intertwined with this land, upon which our Saviour once walked, that we cannot, and will not, abandon its peoples, who plead for a just and durable peace for this tumultuous region. Likewise, we intend to stand firm in our support for the Lebanese people and to do our level best to bring about the re-establishment of a functioning economy, society, and public sector.

Of course, crucial to our carrying out these commitments are the over 100,000 Volunteers and 50,000 Employees, who demonstrate their unflagging courage, dedication, and competence on a daily basis. The Order's organisations — such as Malteser International, l'Ordre de Malte France, CISOM, and several of our larger National Associations — provide its diplomacy with the wherewithal to get things done. In a certain way, they might be considered the "teeth" of the Order's diplomacy. Rather than the armies of yesteryear, today we field relief corps, medical stations, food centres, migrant shelters, and so on. And our standing orders are to bring the love and care of Christ to the forgotten and marginalised — regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity.

As part and parcel of our investment in our diplomatic infrastructure, we are aware of the need to communicate clearly, frequently, and accurately with respect to the nature and activities of the Order. In the past year, we have made meaningful strides in that direction. Within the development of an annual strategic communications plan

for 2025, we have centralised appropriate elements of communications to ensure accuracy. We have developed robust pro-active media relations plans and overhauled our social media activities.

We have also established a new fund, administered by the Grand Magistry, aimed at supporting initiatives and activities promoted by our national associations and by our embassies. We have already approved and co-funded eight small and medium-sized projects.

Additionally, we are strong supporters of the notion that our diplomatic positions and our on-ground activities must be based on incisive, cutting-edge thinking and analysis. For this reason, we are in the process of establishing a body that will bring together highly regarded experts in a variety of fields who can enrich the debates on, for example, the causes and eradication of global poverty, migration, peace and justice, climate change, religion and diplomacy, the containment and eradication of institutional violence, and so on.

It is both comforting and helpful to recognise that in the conduct of our diplomacy, we are sustained by the traditional charisma of the Order, “Defence of the Faith Through Service to the Poor”, and by the teaching of the Holy Father. We also know well that the world is in need for actors capable of providing unconditional humanitarian assistance and opening dialogues with all the parties. In January 2024 at the Conference of the Order’s Ambassadors, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi said:

“The Order of Malta — a so-called “third” institution, duly armed with courage and hope — raises its head and becomes a herald of “Utopia”, proposing great visions, envisioning massive projects, looking to the future beyond without dwelling on the ordinary details of day-to-day management, living the conviction that man does not live on bread alone.”

I wish to express to you my heartfelt gratitude for all your work and dedication, and, above all, I thank you for the professionalism and care that you bring to your partnership with the Order of Malta. Our doors are always open to listen carefully to your requests and suggestions and to any advice aimed at improving relations between our governments.

I take this opportunity to express to you, to your families and to all the staff of your Embassies, a happy and blessed New Year. God bless your nations and their people.

Thank You.

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