



SOVRANO MILITARE ORDINE OSPEDALIERO
DI SAN GIOVANNI DI GERUSALEMME DI RODI E DI MALTA

SPEECH
OF H.M.E.H THE PRINCE AND GRAND MASTER
OF THE SOVEREIGN ORDER OF MALTA
FRA' GIACOMO DALLA TORRE DEL TEMPIO DI SANGUINETTO
TO THE 40th SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE
UNESCO
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Mr/Ms President of the General Conference, Madame Audrey Azoulay,
Director General of UNESCO, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this distinguished Assembly, one hundred years after the foundation of UNESCO ancestor: International Union of Academies.

UNESCO's untiring commitment to support these aims of education, science and culture is a most valuable contribution to peace and to dialogue between peoples, for the progress of humanity and respect for human dignity.

Most especially, education is a fundamental right – as you, Director General, noted in your speech at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, and it is the essential instrument for reducing gender inequality and making our societies more just and more prosperous.

It deserves our appreciation, our gratitude and our encouragement in a time of conflicts and crises which seem unable to find resolution. And we add, too, the concerns of global warming, of the migration of millions fleeing persecution, or poverty, or racial and religious hatred, or those in search of a better life.

In this dramatic humanitarian situation, the Order of Malta remains true to our vocation and our mission to care for the poor and the sick; it is a mission we have followed since our foundation in Jerusalem in the eleventh century.

Our humanitarian action in the poorest countries is made more difficult because of the drought which robs humanity of the most indispensable good: water. A recent United Nations report speaks of two hundred million people at risk.



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Following the increase in natural disasters of every kind, we have carried out many emergency interventions. The Order of Malta has also participated in United Nations peace keeping operations, providing medical assistance in many countries.

The Sovereign Order of Malta is a neutral institution with no political or economic interest. It is a subject of international law, has diplomatic relations with 109 States and with the European Union, and has permanent observer status at the United Nations and its specialised agencies. Its ambassadorial network is constantly engaged in humanitarian action to help the needy and the poor.

The Order of Malta is present on the international stage with our 13,000 members, 80,000 permanent volunteers and the commitment of 40,000 medical and paramedical staff. It is through them that the Order is able to carry out its medical, social and humanitarian projects in 120 countries, in regions of crisis, of natural catastrophes, in dangerous situations and those of social marginalisation, without distinction of origin or religion.

The Order of Malta is alert to new forms of humanitarian emergency, such as the welcome and integration of refugees and migrants, the fight against human trafficking, especially of women and children, and the shameful trafficking of organs.

In this regard, I mention the conference organised by the Order of Malta on 8 October at IFRI (The Institut français des relations internationales) here in Paris, on the theme of preventing trafficking in women. We also presented our project in Nigeria which supports women who have been trafficking victims.

The new forms of exclusion, in particular disability, marginalisation, loneliness, rare diseases and the 'digital divide', are typical humanitarian emergencies in modern society. Because of our experience and resources, the Order of Malta has launched a programme to confront these grave problems.

The Order of Malta is committed to strengthening intercultural and interreligious dialogue, based on its values of solidarity, listening to those in



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need, mutual enrichment and compassion - values which are shared with all religions.

The humanitarian role that faith-based institutions can carry out in support of civil populations and the interaction of religion with diplomacy and foreign affairs, has promoted a growing interest among the international community. This is not surprising when we consider that 84% of the world's population belong to a religious denomination.

Recently I discussed this issue with President Steinmeier when I made an Official Visit to Germany. The President spoke at length of the interaction between religion and international affairs, which had been discussed in great detail at the Lindau "Religions for Peace" Conference the German authorities held in August.

I wish now to mention some of the important occasions of collaboration between the Order of Malta and UNESCO:

- the most important was the conference on 'Humanitarian diplomacy and the management of international crises', held at UNESCO in 2011, which brought together over 200 representatives from States, international organisations and experts in the field;
- in 2012, a seminar organised by the European Union, UNESCO and the Order of Malta on 'Protection of the holy places in the Mediterranean', held at Palais Berlaymont, Brussels;
- then, still in close collaboration with UNESCO, a forum we organised in Cyprus on the 'Protection and conservation of the cultural patrimony of the Mediterranean';
- and just this year, the Order held a scientific conference with UNESCO in Naples, on the occasion of the World Day for Water.

Mr President, I wish to confirm the wish of the Sovereign Order of Malta to further develop the fruitful collaboration with your organisation.

We have identified three areas of interest for which contacts are already underway in the appropriate sections of UNESCO:



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- Among the Order's ongoing humanitarian projects, some are dedicated to improving access to drinking water for people in need. That is why we are ready to share our experience and collaborate with UNESCO;
- The Order also hopes that its archives will be included in the programme 'Memory of the world'. They are an essential component of the history of the Mediterranean from the XI to the XVIII centuries;
- We are ready to continue the action aimed at the protection of and access to historical and religious sites, in particular those of the three monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean.

Before concluding, may I offer a final reflection.

In the field of science, man has reached unimaginable heights. Artificial intelligence will constitute a cultural and historic journey which will revolutionize life, the world of work and all of society.

I express the hope that scientific progress will keep pace with a new humanism in which man, with his intelligence and wisdom, will make the right decisions in confronting the new challenges, and that he will continue to reflect on the great themes of existence.

Thank you.