

GRAND MASTER'S ADDRESS TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

Rome, 11 January 2011

Monsieur le Doyen, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm welcome to all of you here today, members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Sovereign Order of Malta, at this traditional occasion of exchange of greetings at the start of the year. I would like to thank the Doyen of our Diplomatic Corps, H.E. Ambassador Valladares Lanza, for his kind words; and I particularly wish to greet the Ambassadors of Bolivia, the Philippines, Cuba, Latvia, Lebanon, Panama, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Georgia, and Portugal, who are participating in this Ceremony for the first time; and to welcome the Ambassador of Monaco, following the recent upgrading of both our diplomatic missions.

2010 was an extremely eventful year, with official visits, visits abroad, private meetings, as well as the many urgent humanitarian actions and the ongoing programmes we continue to carry out in over a hundred countries, on all continents. I will briefly outline the most important areas.

Relations with the Holy See

First of all, I would like to share with you the very special joy of the members of our Order around the world – now 13,000 – when **Archbishop Paolo Sardi** was created Cardinal by His Holiness Benedict XVI, at the Consistory on 20th November 2010, and confirmed in his charge as Cardinal Patronus of the Order – in French, Cardinal Protecteur de l'Ordre.

We were also grateful to Their Eminences the Cardinal Secretary of State and the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, for having appointed an observer of the Order of Malta to the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East, which took place in Rome in October.

Interreligious dialogue is an area traditionally linked to our history. Thus, the visits of the **Greek-Melchite Patriarch, Gregory III Laham** of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, and the **Metropolitan Hilarion**, Head of the Department for External Affairs of the Patriarchate of Moscow, provided fruitful discussions to work together, not only against the secularisation of Europe, but also to promote the defence of human life, from birth to death, and to collaborate to help the poor and needy.

And in the field of intercultural dialogue, I would like to mention a project we have recently initiated, called 'Caravan'. This is a seven-month programme designed for young people in their twenties, from all countries. It takes place in Lebanon and combines service to severely handicapped children with studies in the history of the Middle East, and Christian and Islamic religions as well as courses in Arabic. This unique experience provides an enhanced understanding of the care of the handicapped and of the multi-cultural heritage of the region.

Hospitallers and humanitarian activities

A year ago, almost to the day, the world awoke to the news of a devastating earthquake in **Haiti**. The destruction was terrible, widespread, and the humanitarian fallout extraordinary. Thanks to the immediate mobilisation of our Embassy to the Dominican Republic, and members of our U.S. and Cuban Associations, who were immediately joined by our German, French, Italian and Polish Associations and our international relief service, Malteser International, the Order of Malta was able to establish two bases from which it provided medical support. We set up a field hospital in Leogane, where over 2,000 patients were treated during the first two weeks after the earthquake, and a clinic in nearby Darbonne, which has become the centre for outreach mobile clinics in the area. At the Sacre Coeur hospital at Milot, in the north of the country, which the Order has been supporting for over 15 years, 400 people were operated on within three weeks of the disaster. Our assistance, which began as emergency first aid and urgent surgical interventions, has developed into programmes of reconstruction, and, right now, campaigns for hygiene training to combat the spread of cholera.

Last July, heavy monsoon rains flooded a fifth of **Pakistan**, with official figures reporting over 17 million victims directly affected by destruction of property, livelihood and infrastructure. As the Order has been developing projects for over 20 years in the country, its medical teams, already specialised in the diagnosis of flood-related diseases and early treatments, moved swiftly into action in the Swat Valley, in Kohistan and in the Punjab. With the first urgent phase over, our focus now is on rebuilding lives by creating special emergency shelters for the use in high mountains while building water treatment plants and hygiene education campaigns to avoid the spread of disease.

During the year, I had the opportunity of paying official visits to the **African continent**, where we are active in 35 countries with a wide range of medical and humanitarian services. I had highly interesting conversations with H.E. the President and members of the government in **Kenya**, where we have been active since 2001 through Malteser International, with programmes including the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, and training of local staff in eight shanty towns in Nairobi, where some 600,000 people live in poor sanitary and hygiene conditions.

I also paid an official visit to **the Democratic Republic of Congo**, where the Order supports some 350 health centres, thanks to our very active Embassy located in Kinshasa, together with the Order's organisations from Germany, France and Belgium, and our international relief service, Malteser International. Over two and a half million people now have access to healthcare, including vaccination campaigns, and treatment for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. In the Eastern Congo in particular, over the last 6 years we have provided psychological and medical treatment for about 49,000 women and children who have been innocent victims of assault, rape, and mutilation in the conflict-ridden province of South Kivu. In order to help prevent future humanitarian disasters and to reduce casualties and economic damage, we will stay there for the long term.

Here in **Italy**, our Hospital San Giovanni Battista, near the airport of Fiumicino, continues to carry out its vital work despite the extremely difficult economic environment. Its particular focus is the nationally recognised Reanimation Unit, one of the few Italian healthcare structures dedicated to providing specialised therapy for patients recovering from comas. In 2010, a total of 65,000 patients were cared for in Italy, including those treated at the 12 diabetic centres we run across the country.

Our relationship with the **Italian** Coast Guard in assisting refugees at sea continues to develop, when we confirmed for a further three years the Agreement signed in 2007. We also signed a Protocol with the Italian Guardia di Finanza, which aims to safeguard human rights through first-aid medical teams. 300 doctors and volunteers from the Order of Malta's Italian Emergency Corps now work beside the Guardia di Finanza and the Coast Guard to provide a first-aid service directly on board their air and naval units.

More generally, I would like to recall that the Order, throughout its history, has always been innovative in its care for those in need. In that respect, new ways of caring for dementia sufferers have been developed by our care centres in Germany, leading to a complete reorganisation of the patients' living quarters and activities, and an understanding of the progression of the disease and the steps needed to help them at each stage. These developments have been highly effective in treating dementia, and our counterparts in France and Great Britain are also using innovative treatment techniques with notable success.

State and official visits

Our humanitarian diplomatic network provides assistance with total impartiality and neutrality, and it is in this spirit that I met heads of States and of Governments in 2010.

We had the pleasure of receiving the Presidents of the Dominican Republic, Croatia and the Seychelles, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Paraguay and Latvia, the French Minister of Health, the President of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, the Director General of UNESCO, and the Speaker of the Senate of Canada, whom I wish to thank for the invitation of the Canadian Senate, to participate in the Centennial Celebration of the Canadian Navy in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

We were particularly honoured to receive the visit of the **President of the European Commission, H.E. José Manuel Barroso**, an occasion which many of you attended. The European Commission and the Order of Malta have joint humanitarian projects already in place in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar/Burma. We are also working on new programmes in the Middle East, where the preservation of its cultural and religious diversity is at stake, to help the population to remain in its place of origin, and further strengthen the stability in the region.

I also wish to mention the recent most successful State visit to **Portugal**, where our long-established ties were further enhanced during the very interesting meetings with H.E. President Aníbal Cavaco Silva and the nation's highest political and religious authorities. I also enjoyed meeting the Ambassadors representing the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, with which we have signed the Cooperation Agreement.

I would not like to forget the very pleasant private meeting I had before Christmas with the President of **Austria**, H.E. Dr. Heinz Fischer, and his counsellors, at the Hofburg in Vienna.

Cooperation agreements

We have signed various cooperation agreements with a view to strengthening the mutual aid activities in the respective countries. We are particularly pleased with the Cooperation Agreement, signed by the Government of the Republic of **Hungary** and ratified by the Hungarian Parliament last November, which aims to further develop the vital services that the Order's national organisation has provided to the Hungarian people over the past two decades.

The agreement signed between the Order of Malta's Italian Relief Corps (CISOM) and the **Russian Federation's** Ministry of Emergency Situations (EMERCOM) includes the development of cooperation programmes, the coordination of emergency situations, the organisation and management of civil defence volunteers, and bilateral training seminars.

Cooperation agreements were also signed with the **Czech Republic** and with the Community of **Portuguese-Language Countries**, which includes Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and East Timor. I would like to express my **full support** of the declaration made by the Holy Father, and by the entire international community, concerning **the new wave of violence against Christians** in Pakistan, in Indonesia, the Sudan, Nigeria and the Philippines.



The Holy Father strongly condemns violence.

The Maronites, the Chaldeans, the Melchites and the Copts – are they all condemned to disappear? Do they have no choices other than exile, silence or death?

We clearly see that the phenomenon of violence is expanding dangerously throughout the world; it is no longer confined to situations of armed conflicts, but more and more, in forms of protest, by groups for whom violence, the act of destruction, is a way of calling the world's attention to their existence – an existence which they themselves are incapable of constructing. This question – violence – could well be the great challenge of our century.

In conflict areas, where humanitarian organisations notably intervene, more than ever it is the civilian populations who are the targets of terrorists, of criminal organisations.

In this context, the international humanitarian organisations have become the unquestioned operational representatives, alongside States, the United Nations, the European Union and international organisations.

It is in this spirit that the Order of Malta in France decided to organise an international conference on 'Humanitarian diplomacy and management of international crises'. The conference will take place at the end of this month, at UNESCO in Paris, bringing together international representatives of the main

military and civil institutions who are engaged in humanitarian action. They will consider the principles of action which must be put in place by the different actors on the ground, and aim to define the ethics of these kinds of engagements in crisis zones. You are cordially invited to this conference.

Dear Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic missions, we are proud to maintain such close and confident relations with your countries, and we greatly appreciate your personal availability and collaboration that you so kindly give to the Grand Magistry in its mission to provide assistance to those in need.

My best wishes to you and to your families, and for the prosperity and harmony of the Nations that you so worthily represent.