



SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALER ORDER
OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE
AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA

2019 Global Refugee Forum
Geneva, 17-18 December 2019

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann,
Permanent Observer**

Mr. High-Commissioner,
Ministers, Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

The Sovereign Order of Malta welcomes this ***first Global Refugee Forum***, marking a year since the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees by the General Assembly. It is a great opportunity for us all to reflect on the importance of the Compact, exchange on the current challenges faced by refugees and promote its implementation worldwide at all levels of society.

The Order of Malta actively participated in the preparatory process and is proud to have supported and advocated for the adoption of the Compact. Our international humanitarian relief agency, Malteser International, and our National Associations are responding to many of the major displacement crises in the world.

In the ***Middle East***, the Order has been assisting Syrian refugees since the start of the conflict, providing medico-social aid in camps and to the local population, with a special focus on persons with disabilities, women and children. In ***Iraq***, voluntary repatriation is supported, with the reconstruction of villages and projects promoting the reintegration of returnees into the labour market, including medical and professional training.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR in ***Colombia***, programs are in place for Venezuelan refugees, as well as for the host community, creating livelihood perspectives. Cash assistance is also part of projects for those who wish to return to Venezuela.

Our National Association in ***Germany***, facilitates resettlement and durable local integration for refugees under its "***Pilot Integration Plan***", helping them become familiar with the German culture and language, fully integrating them into society and providing legal and administrative assistance to asylum seekers, so that they can enjoy all the rights relating to their legal status.

Refugees should not be considered as a burden for host communities but rather as “agents of development”, bringing their experience in order to better assist other refugees, reduce tensions and be part of the solution in solving the crisis that forced them to flee. The Order of Malta is committed to upholding the inalienable rights of refugees under international law, so as to ensure that their dignity is preserved.

We are pleased that the role of *faith-based institutions and religious communities* is highlighted in the Compact. They are trusted first responders and long-term community partners, providing refugees with the material, psychological and spiritual assistance they might require after facing the traumas of forced displacement. They also play an important role to the process of resilience by welcoming and helping refugees integrate in host countries and by fostering encounters with the local population. Through interreligious dialogue and the promotion of faith-literacy we can build a culture of tolerance and respect that is essential to the reduction of ethnic and religious tensions, thereby contributing to the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

Mr. High-Commissioner,

In conclusion, allow me to thank UNHCR and all the stakeholders working on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. The Order will formally submit to UNHCR its pledges and contributions , reaffirming its commitments. It is our common responsibility to help refugees and address the root causes of their displacement. The Sovereign Order of Malta has a historical vocation, dating back to the 11th century, in serving those in need and alleviating their suffering.

I thank you.