

Sovereign Order of Malta – Message from Grand Hospitaller (Minister of Health) to the Second International Conference on Nutrition

TO BE DELIVERED BY DEPUTY OBSERVER, CLAUDE FORTHOMME

Mr. President,

Allow me to thank you for giving me the floor on this most important occasion and through you to express the Order of Malta's appreciation for the tireless efforts of the FAO and the World Health Organization for organizing this key conference in the process of putting nutrition at the center on the world stage.

Excellencies... Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honored to convey to this Conference the message from the Grand Hospitaller, Mr. de La Rochefoucauld – Montbel, our Minister of Health, who is not able to be with us today. He is in Bethlehem where the Order runs one of its many hospitals – this is a special place, symbolic of the Order's humanitarian work, as it is the only maternity ward in the area caring for mothers and babies of all religions.

For those not familiar with the Order of Malta's activities, we operate in over 120 countries in the pursuit of our mandate to assist the poor, the hungry and the sick around the world. We do this in two ways, through our permanent institutions – such as hospitals, dispensaries and old people's homes – and through Malteser International, providing emergency assistance in all the hot spots of the world, like in Syria, assisting refugees. This is a mission we have relentlessly pursued for over 900 years, since our founder, the Blessed Gerard, opened a hospital in Jerusalem for the sick of all creeds. Today, over one hundred thousand persons work for the Order, including 80,000 trained volunteers and 25,000 medical personnel.

For the Order of Malta, nutrition is at the heart of our concerns and we warmly welcome this Conference and the adoption of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the related Framework for Action. The international community has signed

up to a clear strategy to eliminate hunger and malnutrition that are still affecting millions of people worldwide. We have heard here the highest instances in the world committed to fighting hunger and malnutrition, and they have forcefully raised their voice, in particular the Pope who has powerfully reminded us that this is an issue we can no longer ignore.

For us, a global commitment to nutrition as part of the post-2015 development agenda is vital.

The Order of Malta has repeatedly shown its own commitment. We work to improve health care for people in need – especially mothers and infants – and to build up strong, sustainable public health care systems. Since a population's health is also closely connected with its diet, we incorporate nutrition in our health programs, working to prevent and treat malnutrition and increase food security. In 2013, the emergency agency of the Order, Malteser International, spent some 16 million Euros, that's nearly 40 per cent of the total budget – for programmes in the field of health and nutrition.

We are aware that hunger and malnutrition cannot be addressed in isolation. Our long experience in the field has taught us that actions are required in many sectors including health, water and sanitation, social protection, livelihood, agriculture, education, and empowering women.

Therefore, Malteser International with its programs does not only concentrate on nutrition and food distribution, but also on food security and livelihood.

Our projects are wide-ranging and we are present on the ground in many countries. To give you an idea of our recent activities: In 2013, we were in South Sudan distributing food and seeds to 7,500 displaced people; in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we provided food aid and built roads through two projects; in Uganda, we fought the malnutrition of children in Maracha; in Haiti and Cambodia, we looked after the health and nutrition of women and children; in Vietnam, we turned to protecting forests to ensure their sustainable use through the traditional knowledge of the Ca Tu. In Togo and Benin, we set vegetable gardens around our hospitals, not only to improve nutrition of the hospital patients, but to teach their families about the basics of good nutrition, the

importance of fruits and vegetables in the diet and stimulate them to set up their own vegetable gardens around their homes.

These are just a few examples of what we try to do. And we are well aware that more needs to be done.

In the medium to long-term, it will be necessary to step up investment in programs that enable the production of diverse crops and ensure the availability of nutrient-rich foods, including fruits and vegetables.

We need to do this, not only to save lives in the current generation but to make an investment for future generations. And we need to do this across sectors, disciplines and with the collaboration of a range of humanitarian and development aid agents, calling on everyone to help, because nutrition for all is a complex cause that requires help from every quarter.