

SOVEREIGN ORDER OF MALTA

**SPEECH OF H.E. THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

Mr. President,

Allow me to thank you for giving me the floor on this most important occasion, and, through you, to express my appreciation for the tireless efforts of the FAO, together with the World Food Programme, IFAD and Bioversity International, for organizing this timely conference to address one of the most dramatic problems of our times.

Your Excellency, Honourable Ministers,

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour of addressing this assembly today on behalf of the Sovereign Order of Malta, of whom I am the Grand Hospitaller, in charge of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and international cooperation. My Office is confronted daily with the issues discussed here, in particular rising food prices, which are putting at risk the poor and causing an alarming expansion in the number of the hungry.

Assistance to the poor, the hungry and the sick, regardless of race, origin or religion, has been at the very heart of the Order of Malta's mission for over 900 years. Today, the Order continues to operate with this impartial perspective, caring for the elderly, the handicapped, children, refugees and internally displaced persons in more than 120 countries. It carries out its work through its permanent institutions - such as hospitals, outpatient medical centres and old peoples' homes - and its socio-medical and

humanitarian programmes, thereby relying on its 12,500 members, some 80,000 trained volunteers and 15,000 employees, mostly medical personnel. The Order's worldwide relief service, Malteser International, provides relief to major emergencies. Recently, Malteser International was among the first to deliver aid in Myanmar (Burma), providing basic health care and safe drinking water for more than 60,000 people.

About 12,000 internally displaced people in three camps installing an emergency health station in Labutta in the Irrawaddy Delta and for more than 40,000 victims of Cyclone Nargis in Yangon.

The Order was present in all major emergencies over the past 50 years, from the refugee aid at the Austro-Hungarian border (1956), in Vietnam (1966 – 1975) and in Thailand (1979 – 1993) to the drought relief in Somalia (1980), from the humanitarian aid for the victims of the war in former Yugoslavia to the reconstruction aid in Kosovo and in the Balkans region. Malteser International provided emergency relief for the victims of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras (1998 – 2000), for the victims of the earthquake in Turkey (1999) as well as for the flood victims in Ethiopia and Mozambique (2000). The most important emergency relief missions in the last years were the refugee relief in Darfur, the earthquake aid in Bam/Iran, Pakistan, Java and Peru, support for the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, flood relief in Serbia, Romania, Hungary, Mexico and in Budalangi/Kenya up to the Tsunami relief in South and South-East Asia.

Mr. President,

As a member of the international community, the Order of Malta is fully committed to the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly on 8 September 2000. The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is the first and most challenging of these goals to be achieved by the target date of 2015. The rise in

fuel and food prices is being felt most strongly by the poorest whose anxiety we witness first hand. Furthermore, rising food prices unfortunately do not translate into instant benefits for small farmers, as their costs also increase.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We strongly support the coordinated approach adopted by the international community in this Conference and welcome strong practical measures to address the challenge of helping the poor immediately and subsequently improving agricultural production by refocusing politics on agricultural development and a decisive up scaling of funding for these purposes and also channelling the advantage of higher prices only to stimulate food-production. In particular, we believe there is an urgent need to help farmers in developing countries and especially women in rural areas. We are convinced that promoting domestic agricultural production is the best way to achieve food security over the medium and long term.

It is, however, at the same time also necessary to address the problem of malnutrition by training and educating people towards better nutrition, so that the nutritional value of the food actually produced is not wasted and results in improved health. The Order of Malta would therefore welcome the addition of the nutrition dimension to the High Level Conference.

In this context I would like to underline that the Order of Malta is open to collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Order's diplomatic relations with 101 states are the basis for establishing bilateral cooperation programmes, whenever circumstances require it.

We also fully believe in the usefulness of combining our efforts with those of multilateral organizations. We have operated joint emergency and development projects with United Nations agencies, in particular with UNHCR, WHO, WFP, UNICEF, UNDP and others. The Order recently signed with FAO a letter of Understanding to cooperate in certain areas of mutual interest, starting in particular with the establishment of market gardens in combination with our medical institutions and programs, with the objective of training rural families in horticulture and improved nutrition.

Mr President,

I wish all the conference participants very fruitful deliberations and look forward to a unanimous adoption of the Declaration of the High Level Conference on World Food Security for the benefit of the poor and the hungry on this Earth.

Thank you.