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STATEMENT

BY

THE PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION

**of the
Sovereign Military Order of Malta
to the
United Nations**

TO THE

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

New York, 30 June - 2 July, 1999

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,

Thank you very much for having given me the floor.

I am speaking on behalf of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta as the oldest institution in the world whose mission is to provide humanitarian assistance. Ever since its foundation in Jerusalem almost nine centuries ago, the Order has been persevering in its dedication to alleviating human suffering in war and peace, including misery and poverty. Over the centuries this vocation has earned it universal respect in the world and obtained the recognition of its full sovereignty by the international community, by 83 Member States of the United Nations.

Consistent with its long tradition, the Order operates through nine Pories and Sub-pories and 42 national Knights Associations in all the continents. The Order's primary objective is to alleviate suffering and bring comfort to the afflicted and to provide assistance to the needy. The Order achieves this goal wherever it can through health facilities and also through individual services at homes, in shelters and in the poor dwellings of the disinherited. Its commitment is not towards the sick alone, but also to the marginalized, the persecuted and the displaced, thereby safeguarding human rights and the dignity of man.

Today the Order provides assistance at a **level** that far exceeds anything it was traditionally able to offer. The octagonal cross has become the emblem of hospitals, some with a high degree of specialization, clinics, first-aid stations and dispensaries, with a broadened network of structures and specialized assistance for the needy.

The Order of Malta cannot remain passive before the problem of more than 800 million people all around the world who are living in conditions of abject poverty. Its quality as a subject of international law allows it to work with independence and **efficacy**

in accordance with its commitment to the *obsequium pauperum*. **The** presence today of the Order's humanitarian action in over 100 countries is a proof of its concern. Many parts of **Africa**, Asia and Latin America can testify to the Order's capacity and humanitarian work. Its presence is of particular relevance in Europe, the Middle East, North America and Australia. These are our credentials.

Poverty is implicitly included in many articles of the Declaration of Human Rights of December 10, 1948. Immersed in poverty, no one can claim the exercise of all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration. The right to protection, freedom from slavery and degrading treatment, freedom of residence and the right to own property, to have access to public service, the right to social security, to obtain a just and equitable remuneration for work ensuring for himself and for his family an existence worthy of human dignity. The right to rest and leisure are violated when poverty is a condition of life.

Article 25 of the Declaration of Human Rights says (quotation) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social **services...**(**end** of quotation).

In addition, Article 26 says (quotation) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the **elementary** and fundamental stages (end of quotation). The Sovereign Military Order of Malta considers that the above-mentioned text presses for a coordinated action to fight poverty not only in the previously mentioned continents but also in the pockets of poverty that can be found in the main cities of Europe and North America.

Mr. President,

The Sovereign Order of Malta considers the adoption, among others, of the following measures to be very urgent :

- the coordination of efforts and possibilities as an urgent need including the participation of States, humanitarian entities and the private sector.
- the investment in culture, education, and sanitary problems are also and equally urgent.
- The right of birth, the capacity to obtain elementary education and the possibility to accede to professional education must be urgently put into practice.
- Hospital treatment, motherhood and childhood must be entitled to special care and action.

Every right corresponds to a duty and the Sovereign Order of Malta is conscious of what its duties are. In the Roman Catholic tradition, we **affirm** that human rights come **from** creation at God's hand, anteceding any human convention. Dedication and organization is needed.

To end, let me remind you that reality tells us how distant from the appointed objectives we still are. To find a remedy to the actual situation and of its consequences of political, economical and social instability, the Order of Malta is proud to offer its support to the United Nations, ready to cooperate in the heavy burden of alleviating mankind's suffering.

Mr. President, thank you very much for your attention.