



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

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

BY

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ATTACHÉ

TO THE

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ON THE

**COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN
REALIZING THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT ON HIV/AIDS AND
THE POLITICAL DECLARATION ON HIV/AIDS**

10 JUNE 2011

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

MR. PRESIDENT,
EXCELLENCIES,
ESTEEMED DELEGATES,

Thank you, Mr. President, for the privilege of speaking at this special High-Level Meeting to review the progress achieved in realizing the declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS and the political declaration on HIV/AIDS.

In only the past five years, efforts from all sides of the fight against HIV/AIDS has resulted in the reduction by more than 20 percent of the number of AIDS-related deaths. But this falls far short of our target. Member states have recognized HIV as a global emergency challenging human rights and dignity, threatening development, political stability, food security and life expectancy; it requires an exceptional global response. Let us unequivocally renew our vow to fulfill these goals of the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

Erasing this 30-year scourge is of utmost importance to our 900- year- old humanitarian Order of Malta. From our earliest focus on sick pilgrims and travelers in the 11th Century, the care of the sick and the poor has been the primary *raison d'être* in all our work. I will share some current highlights of our HIV/AIDS outreach in different parts of the world.

Mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS accounts for 90% of new infections in children under 15 years-old. Working in partnership with Americares, the Order's *Save a Child from HIV/AIDS* program in Mexico acts through a grassroots network of hospitals, clinics and health care providers to identify mothers with HIV and oversee all medical care in an effort to prevent transmission. In the program's first two years, more than 600 HIV-positive mothers delivered healthy babies. This program is part of a larger one; *Help Me Grow*, which has provided essential nutrition for more than 4,000 Mexican children over the past four years. The Order works towards ending vertical transmission through similar projects in Argentina, the Philippines, and many other Latin American, Asian and African countries. These programs lead to the delivery of thousands upon thousands of healthy babies who would have otherwise been born with the disease.

The international community has acknowledged that weak, fragmented and inefficient health systems are among the biggest barriers to access to HIV/AIDS related services, which is especially evident in sub-Saharan Africa. A primary component in the work of the Sovereign Order of Malta is creating structures and mechanisms that sustainably blend into the

communities, because the HIV/AIDS response must be part of a comprehensive strategy that addresses basic healthcare needs.

In the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, the lack of these basic health services, poor living conditions, extreme poverty and lack of education lead to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. The Order of Malta has been working with local government and NGOs for more than ten years to reverse this trend. Eight laboratories and health centers in these most disadvantaged areas care for the general health of more than 600,000 people in eight of Nairobi's slums, including HIV/AIDS patients. The centers also focus on combating tuberculosis, which is a leading cause of death among people with HIV. Diagnosis and treatment of the diseases, training of local staff in health centers, the establishment and maintenance of laboratories, and the education of slum residents are essential parts of the program.

In Myanmar, the Order of Malta addresses some causes of the HIV/AIDS epidemic through a health education/information program for at-risk groups by means of comprehensive treatment, advocacy and training basic health staff.

The Order of Malta campaign against HIV/AIDS in southern India (the state of Tamil Nadu ranks second in the prevalence of the disease in India) focuses on the young men who migrate to the cities for work and are unaware of sexually transmitted diseases. Many return home infected with the HIV/AIDS virus.

In the Republic of South Africa, the Order of Malta works in a joint treatment program with the Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Relief Services, which is funded by US AIDS Relief. Cooperative and coordinated structures like this are a most positive development in meeting the targets and goals of the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

The Order of Malta has new and long-established programs of medical and palliative care operational in Argentina, Mexico, Kenya, the Cameroon, Angola, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Sudan, to name only some. The projects are examples of the holistic approach called for the Zero Document, encompassing interventions for co-occurring conditions, and physical, psychological, socio-economic, legal and nutritional and palliative care services for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Here as in all the areas in which the Order of Malta works world-wide, the dignity of each person is at the heart of the work undertaken. Long-time relationships in Nairobi with the

Order of Malta have earned the very necessary trust of the people served by the health professionals.

At this review juncture, there is a gap of \$7.7 billion between the estimated global AIDS resources available and those needed for developing countries.

All of us working towards these goals of zero tolerance of infection and eradication of the HIV/AIDS virus are heartened by recent research breakthroughs showing that treating HIV patients with AIDS drugs makes them strikingly less infectious.

We at the Order of Malta were also encouraged by the May symposium of HIV/AIDS global experts convened by Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican.

Five years ago I stood here and delivered an address on the progress we had achieved at our mid-point. I echo today what we all expressed then; we now have the means to reverse the global epidemic and stop millions of needless HIV infections and deaths, and we must act decisively to do so. Current advances in awareness, education and treatment of the HIV/AIDS virus and its victims only underscore the urgency of our commitment at this High-level meeting to review our progress and set new benchmarks in our work to stem the pandemic of HIV/AIDS.

The dignity of each person in “The Family of Man’ demands us all to unite in our efforts to conquer this disease worldwide.

THANK YOU.