

“Religions Together for Humanitarian Action” Symposium Report

Prepared by Julian Theseira, Intern, Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva

Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann, Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva

Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann of the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva made some welcome remarks. Her Excellency (H.E.) noted that Order of Malta cabinet members were represented at the symposium and that some Order of Malta members had travelled from around the world to attend the symposium. H.E. expressed thanks to the UN Office Geneva (UNOG) for hosting the symposium. H.E. also expressed thanks to the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat. H.E. noted that Dr. Mahmood had encouraged the Order of Malta to take the initiative to organize the symposium as Dr. Mahmood was interested in seeing more faith based organizations (FBOs) involved in the WHS summit process. H.E. stated the need for new bold ideas and creative initiatives in humanitarian action. H.E. noted the potential that Faith Based Organizations offer. H.E. stated that the symposium report would be submitted to the WHS secretariat. H.E. then invited UNOG Director-General (D-G) Michael Moller to open the symposium.

Michael Moller, Director-General, United Nations Office Geneva (UNOG D-G)

The UNOG D-G Michael Moller highlighted that humanitarianism struggles today. He also noted that religious beliefs are often challenged. He pointed out that the two aforementioned challenges often happen together. The D-G expressed thanks to the organizers and extended a welcome to all to the Palais des Nations.

The D-G noted that the WHS is only a year away and that so far 6 regional WHS consultations have been held with 2 more to be held. This process would build up to the global consultations in Geneva in October. The D-G stated the need for an inclusive approach as humanitarian challenges are reaching an apocalyptic scale. The D-G highlighted that the world is now witnessing the largest number of displaced persons since World War II. The D-G stated the need to put all resources at the disposal of humanitarian action but noted that inclusiveness brings the challenge of coordination hence the need for thorough preparation for the WHS.

The D-G stated that the role of FBOs is important in humanitarian action. FBOs bring financial resources. The D-G however stated that money was not the most valuable contribution of FBOs. The D-G highlighted that in many places humanitarians risk their lives to help others, and their faith was an impetus to help others. The D-G noted that faith need not be religious but it often is. The D-G also noted that humanitarian aid based on religious beliefs could generate ties and trust with host communities. The D-G highlighted that FBOs often stay longer in areas where humanitarian action is needed therefore the work of FBOs in building resilience is essential.

The D-G stated that beliefs are a powerful tool and that religion can be used to mobilize people. The D-G highlighted that humanitarian principles are of the utmost importance in humanitarian action. The D-G stated that FBOs needed to ensure they provide aid to all regardless of background and without the desire to influence beliefs. The D-G noted that the role of FBOs would be discussed during the symposium. He also stated the need to create platforms for interactions with FBOs

The D-G stated that there have been UN initiatives over the past few years, such as those advancing new partnership initiatives, and those talking frankly about cross cultural concerns. The D-G welcomed all to the symposium in an affirmation of common humanity and wished all a fruitful discussion.

Ambassador Stefano Ronca, Diplomatic Adviser of the Grand Chancellor of the Sovereign Order of Malta

H.E Ambassador Stefano Ronca made some introductory remarks. H.E began by noting that the symposium was set inside a much larger exercise, the WHS, which will conclude a global consultation process started by the UN Secretary-General in 2012. The aim of the WHS is to reshape the humanitarian system to meet growing humanitarian needs. These needs are growing in amplitude in a fast-changing environment. H.E noted that the WHS in Istanbul would be focused on 4 themes: 1) Humanitarian Effectiveness 2) Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk 3) Transformation through Innovation and 4) Serving the Needs of People in Conflict. H.E. Ronca noted that serving the needs of people in conflict is the issue that interests the symposium the most.

H.E. reiterated that millions today are fleeing violence and war and that 90% of victims of war today are civilians. Many victims are women and children. The number of refugees is increasing.

H.E. Ronca introduced the topics of the 2 high level panels during the symposium:
1st panel topic: “Present Challenges for faith-based institutions: Religions and Humanity in times of Conflict and Crisis, ” 2nd panel topic: “Preparing for the future. How can faith-based institutions better assist and protect civilian populations in times of conflict.”

H.E. Ronca stated that the central questions of the symposium were: Do FBOs have an added value? Who else thinks they do apart from the Order of Malta? Does the idea that FBOS have added value only come from religious institutions?

H.E. stated that UNHCR has always found work carried out by FBOs invaluable. As active members of civil society, FBOs can liberate significant physical and social assets for those in need. H.E stated that following a 2-day meeting with FBOs 2 years ago, UNHCR emphasized the value of the contribution of FBOs in protecting refugees and displaced.

H.E. Ronca stated that FBOs are widely present in every country and areas of conflict due to their vast network. H.E. stated that the presence of FBOs does not necessarily depend on

international funding and their presence remains long after international interest and funding has declined. H.E noted that the good work of religious actors is well known around the world. Religious actors engage in reconciliation and peace-building activities, improve conditions of prisoners, and support refugees.

H.E however noted religion could also be a source of conflict. This happens when antagonism and exclusion are expressed towards others of different faiths, or when people witness practices that are harmful. H.E stated the importance of not ignoring perversions of religion. The values of religion are too often manipulated for the pursuit of power, profit, and violence. Religious texts are also manipulated today and extremists claim to find justification in them for criminal behavior.

H.E. Ronca reiterated that religion today is an important issue. This was reflected for example by the fact that the US Department of State recently established an office of Religion and International Affairs because it recognized the intersection of religion, foreign policy and international affairs. H.E also noted that the majority of the world population identifies with a faith. H.E stated that government attention towards religion moreover is warranted not just because of demographics but also because of the increasing dynamics between religion, humanitarian action and conflict.

Keynote Address

Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager, Grand Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sovereign Order of Malta

H.E. Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager extended a welcome to the symposium. H.E expressed thanks to the D-G Michael Moller and to Dr. Jemilah Mahmood. H.E. stated that it was encouraging to see many representatives from the religious and humanitarian worlds. He noted that many had travelled a long way to be present at the symposium.

H.E noted that 180 million people are affected by conflict worldwide today, the highest since World War II and that the world often does not understand the complex causes of conflict. The proliferation of crises today is extraordinary, creating unique demands on humanitarian actors. H.E also noted that 80 million people depend on humanitarian assistance for mere survival and that many are living in conflict areas. H.E. noted that conflict will continue to be part of the world and that conflict will continue to affect humanitarian action. There was hence a need to find new tools and instruments.

H.E. highlighted that the Order of Malta has a special concern for those in conflict. It was founded in the Holy Land to care for pilgrims but the mission soon expanded to help those in need. The mission of the Order of Malta is now carried out in over 120 countries today.

H.E. also highlighted that the Order of Malta had retained its identity as a sovereign body despite the loss of the territory of Malta. H.E. stated that the Order of Malta today has relations with 145 countries, many of which are non-Catholic, and that the Order of Malta was granted permanent observer status at the UN in 1994.

H.E. stated that humanitarian work had become a major part of the Order of Malta over time. H.E. highlighted that the Order was not aligned with any political program and its humanitarian programs were administered regardless of religion or race. Malteser International for example was ensuring the health of millions around the world, in over a 100 projects. The Order of Malta was also increasing the regard for humanitarian principles.

H.E. noted that the achievement after World War II of codifying humanitarian principles is in danger of becoming mere papers and that the world must not accept this development. H.E. also noted that in working with the poor and the sick humanitarians have become the victims of conflict worldwide.

H.E. welcomed the initiative of the UN S-G to convene the WHS because the requirement to find better ways to meet humanitarian needs is mandatory. H.E. noted that all those at the symposium had gathered to explore how FBOs and humanitarian actors can better assist and protect civilians. The question of what can be the distinguishing help of FBOs would also be explored. H.E. stated the need to combine dimensions of religion, conflict, and humanitarian aid, and to make objective assessments. H.E. also stated that in order to get a better grasp of how the relationship between religion and humanitarian action can improve, there was a need to be honest about the role of FBOs in conflict, in the provision of aid, and in conflicts on humanitarian aid.

H.E. noted that wars had been fought in the name of gods since ancient times hence there is an argument that religion is at the core of conflicts. H.E. stated that barbaric acts committed in the name of religion are prompting many to ask if religion is a source of conflict in the world. H.E. stated it is too simplistic to say so. H.E. pointed out that 20th century wars and mass killings were not caused by religion and that religion is often misused to pursue secular interests of power. H.E. stated that conflicts may contain religious elements, but they are driven by cultural, ethnic and territorial factors and factors such as external powers. H.E. stated that the answer to conflict might be more religion, namely more of religious non-violence, social tolerance, humanitarian commitment and peace-building.

H.E. noted that humanitarian aid itself is contested in the same way as religion. The question of whether humanitarian aid prolongs conflict is sometimes raised. There are also questions about the negative effects of humanitarian aid, such as when parties manipulate aid, aid dependency, aid in place of political reforms, and aid giving power to belligerents. H.E. stated that humanitarians are doing their best to mitigate the consequences of challenges and that humanitarians are rarely most responsible for failings. Humanitarians choose to save lives where they can but helping people has never been easy. H.E. stated that the world should work to improve the humanitarian system in all its facets and that the approach to humanitarian aid should be similar to religion in conflict. It should be coupled with an acute awareness of the positive and negative effects of humanitarian aid and the role of FBOs in humanitarian aid.

On the issue of humanitarianism and conflict, H.E. stated that the symposium would reflect on the following questions, what makes religious based actors distinct from secular actors,

are religious based actors a crucial part of international humanitarian activity and are religious based actors professionalized to have no difference with secular actors?

H.E. stated that religious actors have a special power through religious convictions above and beyond secular motivations and that their strength does not stop at the operational level because they provide for the spiritual dimension of those in need. Religious actors combine care with ethical and spiritual dimensions.

H.E. stated that faith based action is rightly challenged when it excludes those who are different, puts pressure for conversion, or when it stigmatizes against others. H.E. stated that religious actors must do everything possible to lead by example and ensure that faith based action does not undermine spirituality and impartiality. H.E. stated that religious actors are well positioned to develop their approach and adapt to a changing world. H.E. noted that steps forward needed to include the positive role of reconciliation, and the shared conviction that religion is a source of value. H.E. highlighted the importance of inter-religious dialogue to improve shared understanding.

H.E. also highlighted that FBOs are well placed to interact with religious based infrastructure, which is crucial to promote peace and humanitarian action. H.E. gave the example of Aceh in which a mullah told His Excellency that he was pleased to be helped by those honoring god. H.E. shared that he was invited to pray together with the people of Aceh in mosques. H.E. also cited the example of Lebanon where the Order of Malta runs 10 hospitals. H.E. stated that the contribution of FBOs plants seeds of peace to build mutual trust. H.E. encouraged a frank and open discussion during the symposium.

H.E. Ambassador Pictet-Althann then introduced the moderator Oliver McTernan, Co-founder and Director of Forward Thinking.

1st panel topic: “Present Challenges for faith-based institutions: Religions and Humanity in times of Conflict and Crisis”

Panel Moderator Oliver McTernan, Co-founder and Director of Forward Thinking

Mr. Oliver McTernan expressed his gratitude to the Order of Malta for organizing the symposium. Mr. McTernan stated that the session itself is an event full of hope but that hope would only be realized if dialogue is translated into concrete actions. He stated that the aim of the symposium was to go beyond the sharing of information but to capture insights from diverse sectors such as government, the private sector etc., and to capture learning. Mr. McTernan also stated that there was desire to have concrete proposals that can be taken forward next year to the Istanbul summit. The symposium would also see how FBOs could work closely with each other and with secular agencies to promote a more humane world. He then stated that each speaker would give a briefing for 3 minutes, and then he the moderator would tease out questions for 2 minutes.

Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, Chief of WHS Secretariat

Dr. Jemilah Mahmood thanked the Order of Malta for organizing the symposium. Dr. Mahmood stated that there were 11 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in 2014 with 1 person displaced every 3 seconds. This was a 15% increase from the previous year. Dr. Mahmood stated that many communities rally around faith in disasters and conflicts and that FBOs are already part of the international architecture in the humanitarian system. Dr. Mahmood however noted that the humanitarian system still fails to fully leverage the potential of FBOs at local and national level. She outlined the following challenges for FBOs with regards to humanitarian action: 1) The need of evidence of the impact of FBOs on resilience. There is a lack of data to support anecdotal evidence. 2) The need to promote trust with many faith based communities divided among themselves. Dr. Mahmood stated that dialogue is the foundation of trust and that exchanges are important. Dr. Mahmood also stated that it is important to find common ground, for example by linking humanitarian principles to faith values. 3) The need to change mindsets, namely the operation of aid as charity needs to change. Dr. Mahmood stated that humanitarian action should be about solidarity grounded on humanitarian principles. 4) Dr. Mahmood stated the need for clear implementation to improve partnerships because no one can operate alone today. There was hence a need to build partnerships and Dr. Mahmood cited the example of Islamic relief.

Oliver McTernan asked regarding the perception of bias toward FBOs, is this because aid has been used to proselytize? If so how can this bias be overcome?

Dr. Mahmood replied that bias is inherent to human nature and noted that bias is also a part of secular organizations. Dr. Mahmood stated the need for transparency and dialogue to overcome bias. Dr. Mahmood stated the need to find new ways to overcome bias.

Oliver McTernan asked where does bias rest?

Dr. Mahmood stated that bias exists at all levels, national, local and community levels. There was however a lack evidence to support allegations of bias.

Franco Frattini, President of the Italian Society for International Organization & Former Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Frattini stated that the spiritual dimension is important today in the context of diplomacy and international relations because it is needed to bring back human beings as the center of today's world. He stated that this was not the case in many areas unfortunately. Mr. Frattini highlighted the need to counteract the instrumentalization of religion. He also noted that spirituality in foreign relations is necessary to condemn killings in the name of God. He mentioned the need for cooperation of religious leaders and the need to address issues of poverty. Mr. Frattini noted that FBOs are motivated by the sociality of every human being not other motivations. Mr. Frattini mentioned the risks of old models being repeated: namely that of poor recipients, and rich donors. He stated that this was a heritage of post-colonial approach, which

was linked with expanding democracy and tying rules with aid. Mr. Frattini stated that these paradigms needed to be dismantled. He also noted the added value of FBOs.

Oliver McTernan asked if religion could be used to mobilize for conflict, how could FBOs counteract this through humanitarian aid?

Mr. Frattini replied that it was necessary to multiply efforts to make this doable. He stated that if religion is mobilized, it has to be concrete enough to ensure that it acts for the good of victims for example for victims of poverty and not for other interests. Mr. Frattini mentioned the example of Syrian refugees. He asked how to address the issue if the European Union (EU) decided to distribute 24000 refugees in 2 years? He stated that this is a bad example that should not be repeated. Mr. Frattini stated that with small concrete local action, FBOs could reach the hearts and minds of people and they could go straight to the root causes of issues.

Oliver McTernan asked if Mr. Frattini ever had misgivings about working with FBOs when he was Foreign Minister of Italy?

Mr. Frattini replied no. He then gave the example of how he launched a project to build houses for poor Christians in Nineveh. This project got support from local Muslim leaders in Nineveh. He stated that he had no problems at all in cooperation with Muslim FBOs building houses for Christians.

Dr. Hani El-Banna, Co-founder of Islamic Relief & of Muslim Charities Forum (MCF)

Dr. Hani stated that religion is the lifeline of life of every living human on Earth and that it can be used as a tool to serve community as well as a tool to please God. Dr. Hani stated that FBOs should create their own values after working together. Dr. Hani mentioned the challenge of working in an atmosphere of xenophobia and Islamophobia. Dr. Hani asked how to partner with FBOs who do good work? Dr. Hani also mentioned the challenge for FBOs in undertaking humanitarian action in the field, especially in areas controlled by proscribed groups. Dr. Hani asked how could FBOs help vulnerable people without being called a terrorist organization, for example in places like Somalia and Nigeria? He noted that these big questions often come from governments and regulators. He stated that more than 180 million were affected by this challenge. Dr. Hani stated his belief in the WHS, which is the first such summit in the history of the UN. He also mentioned the need to look beyond the summit and the need to build community at the local level. Dr. Hani noted that the renewal of religion is another challenge. Dr. Hani stated that in building institutions to protect the community, there is a need to work hard to build local civil society and to build community. Dr. Hani also mentioned the challenge of changing religious texts to have community value in order to produce serving projects to the community.

Oliver McTernan asked how important is it for the agency distributing aid to be of the same religion as the people they are helping?

Dr. Hani replied that it matters in some areas, for example in Afghanistan. But Dr. Hani highlighted that a lot of non-Muslim organizations can also do the same if they observe local values and cultures.

Oliver McTernan noted that if aid is carried out in a sensitive way then it could help promote the acceptance of others and of pluralism.

Gianpaolo Cantini, Director General of the Directorate for Development Cooperation (Italian MFA)

Mr. Gianpaolo Cantini stated that FBOs have an added value in humanitarian action. He noted that most religions share some basic common values and that FBOs should build upon these values. Mr. Cantini noted that most FBOs have the advantage of proximity to local community. In the community of humanitarian assistance, FBOs involvement in local communities is noteworthy. Mr. Cantini stated that FBOs must be protagonists of humanitarian aid because they are a powerful resource. He also noted that in many cases of humanitarian action, a vacuum is left in terms of social services and that FBOs may play an active role. In emergencies FBOs should focus their attention on the protection of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, and disabled people.

Mr. Cantini stated that the Italian presidency of the EU devoted special attention to disabled people in humanitarian emergencies. Mr. Cantini mentioned the need for sharing from organizations of values and principles. Mr. Cantini highlighted that in the Spirit of Solferino, humanitarian principles are basic to humanitarian operations.

Oliver McTernan asked in a climate of counter-terrorism, how could FBOs deal with groups that have been proscribed by the EU? He mentioned the example of aid agencies in Gaza being fearful of finding themselves on the wrong side of the law in their own country.

Mr. Cantini replied that there are several humanitarian organizations in Gaza such as UNRWA. There is also a community of NGOs. There are however tragedies in many situations in Gaza such as the problem of humanitarian access. The issue of humanitarian access would be one of the cornerstones of the WHS. He stated that a code of conduct of humanitarian organizations would be made operational. Mr. Cantini however noted that there were not enough financial resources to cope with such emergency needs. To meet humanitarian needs, there is a need for cooperation from the private sector, a broad coalition of FBOs, and secular organizations.

Oliver McTernan asked how to protect humanitarian organizations when they work in sensitive areas?

Rabbi Marc Raphaël Guedj, Director of Racines et Sources Foundation (Notes taken From English Interpretation)

Rabbi Guedj thanked the Order of Malta for organizing the symposium. Rabbi Guedj stated he would give an overview and pick up on issues raised by the previous speakers.

Rabbi Guedj raised the issues of the value added of FBOs and the issue of dangers of FBOs as sources of proselytism. Rabbi Guedj stated that the two issues are strongly linked. He stated that if FBOs are only on the ground on behalf of their religion then there could be a danger of proselytism. Rabbi Guedj pointed out that if however they used religion to find spirituality, FBOs have a universal wisdom that links us to others that enables us to find in each human being a unique dimension. Rabbi Guedj stated that we are all unique, but also united. Rabbi Guedj stated that if wisdoms and different spiritualities respect others then FBOs will not act out of proselytism, FBOs will add value, and FBOs will also transmit spirits.

Rabbi Guedj stated that within FBOs they should offer training sessions for stakeholders, and actors so that the religious dimension they are passing on can be first spiritually linked to wisdom and humanity. Rabbi Guedj noted that if FBOs take this path then they might be able to tackle the issues aforementioned regarding FBOs and humanitarian action.

Oliver McTernan asked how do faith leaders ensure that dialogue is focused on realities and the context of realities of the world in which we live?

During lull in Sri Lanka civil war talked to doctor asked if there is interfaith dialogue

Rabbi Guedj shared that in Israel there was an organization called Rabbis in Favor of Human Rights. This was an organization that deals with real practical problems for minorities, such as Palestinians in Israel and the colonies. He shared that these rabbis support interreligious dialogue and that they get down to the ground. Rabbi Guedj also stated that religious actors have to carry on dialogue in daily life. He shared the example of how he had discussions with Palestinian taxi drivers. Rabbi Guedj concluded that in each moment of life, dialogue must take place, and dialogue must not happen only in academic talks.

Questions and Comments

Egypt

The representative of Egypt thanked the Order of Malta for organizing the symposium and noted that the remarks have been enlightening. Egypt thanked H.E. Boeselager for the keynote address. Egypt noted that one of the main basic principles of humanitarian action is universality and neutrality, not related to geographical location, race, or religion. Egypt was perplexed by the narrative of applying a religious approach to humanitarian action. Egypt remarked that in many conflicts today, there is a religionization of political aspirations. Egypt how to solve the problems of such conflict by further religionization rather than

dereligionization? Egypt stated that humanitarian actors should maintain a universal approach to humanitarian action without re-religionization.

Arab Commission for Human Rights

The Arab Commission for Human Rights raised the issue of NGOs and human rights. In particular, the Arab Commission for Human Rights asked how to find synergies between humanitarian and human rights actors around universal values? Was it by trying to have meetings? The Arab Commission for Human Rights also asked about development issues. The Arab Commission for Human Rights mentioned that too often, humanitarian actors do not talk about development issues whereas NGOs work in development. ? The Arab Commission for Human Rights asked about the possibility to promote synergies with actors working in development?

Responses from Panelists

Dr. Hani replied that religion is core cross-cutting in many societies and that religious leaders control many societies. Dr. Hani stated that in all religions there are good humanitarian principles that need to be applied, as well as commonly shared humanitarian values. Dr. Hani stated that certain areas are controlled by religious groups. Dr. Hani asked how to deal with this issue that is a reality of life.

Franco Frattini

Mr. Frattini stated that spiritual values are at the basis of religions. These values are what symposium panelists were talking about. Mr. Frattini stated that these values lead to the centrality of human beings. Mr. Frattini called for a values-based approach rather than a clerical approach. Mr. Frattini stated that this approach could be pursued by FBOs. He emphasized the centrality of human beings and their rights as well as certain spiritual values.

Questions and Comments

Lebanon

The representative of Lebanon thanked the panelists for the information. Lebanon thanked the Order of Malta for organizing the symposium. Lebanon noted the reflection of H.E. Boeselager. Lebanon shared that in Lebanon cooperation between FBOs is a seed that leads to peace. Lebanon cited the example of a Shia woman helping the Order of Malta and wearing a cross of the Order of Malta. Lebanon paid tribute to the action of the Order of Malta in Lebanon. Lebanon shared that it is a country of 19 religious communities who have been living together for centuries. Lebanon mentioned that each religious community manages organizations but these organizations have been facing challenges especially since the Syrian crisis. The influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon has been a significant challenge. FBOs in Lebanon have mobilized to face the challenges. Hundreds of FBOs belonging to all religions are active. These organizations work with the spirit of neutrality and impartiality as the basis of their action. They

are raising awareness of the needs of refugees. They are also creating a safe and peaceful context in which to defuse tensions. Lebanon paid tribute to the role of FBOs in protecting and assisting vulnerable populations.

Oliver McTernan stated that Lebanon's experience was very relevant.

Poland

The representative of Poland stated that Poland is closely committed to humanitarian cooperation with the Order of Malta. Poland celebrated the 25th anniversary of the restoration of relations between Poland and the Sovereign Order of Malta. Poland hoped the joint projects with the Order of Malta including in Ukraine would strengthen relations. Poland recognized the role of FBOs in international humanitarian response. Poland stated that FBOs might deter violence through their presence and by engaging in reconciliation and peace building. Poland stated that FBOs mobilize and channel financing. Poland reiterated the importance of maintaining and development of partnerships between humanitarian agencies and FBOs based on humanitarian principles. Poland noted that the main advantage and challenge of the preparation process for the World Humanitarian Summit is its multi-stakeholder character. Poland stated that FBOs should be actively involved in the WHS preparatory process. Poland also stated that there was room for FBOs elsewhere for example in the new Disaster Risk Reduction framework.

Romania

The representative of Romania expressed thanks to the Order of Malta for the organization of the event, thanks to the UNOG, and thanks to the panelists. Romania stated that FBOs play an important role in conflict and post-conflict environments. Romania asked how FBOs might act in areas where religious values are not shared by the population and if there are examples of good practices?

Austria

The representative of Austria stated that the value added of FBOs was in the late stage of the conflict cycle from the cessation of hostilities to stability and reconciliation. This was because FBOs can deliver the strength to forgive, show mercy, and embrace former adversaries. Austria stated that on the issue of the possible bias of FBOs, a strict application of the principle of neutrality was necessary in order to counter this potential problem. Austria highlighted that the Order of Malta is a shining example of the strict application of the principle of neutrality. Austria raised the issue of shared values and asked how to get to the stage of unpacking shared values to bring organizations together?

Member of the Hungarian Association of the Order of Malta

The member of the Hungarian Association of the Order of Malta stated that she was currently on a mission with the UN to Syria. She stated that at grassroots level, an enormous amount of good work has been done by FBOs, with a lot of cooperation among FBOs on the frontlines. She stated that the problem was to give visibility to the role and work of FBOs at the

global policy level and the dialogue level. She stated that more visibility is given to secular organizations, and to the shadow side of religious organizations and religion. She noted that this impinges on the funding of FBOs, and their implementation of projects. This also creates a vicious circle whereby both secular and religious organizations see each other more on the shadow side. She asked how to better implement and show the work of FBOs at the policy level to develop the light side of FBOs?

Responses from the Panelists

Rabbi Guedj

Rabbi Guedj asked if lay organizations want to marginalize FBOs how to counter that? He stated that atheism came to purify faith and washed it away from superstition. He therefore stated his need for atheists to look at him in order to deepen his faith. Rabbi Guedj stated that there was a need for faith to be visible even to those who do not believe. He mentioned the example that when Abbe Pierre was acting for the poor in France, no atheist said it was not his job because his spirit and humanity were clear to all. Rabbi Guedj stated that instead of defending themselves, FBOs needed to grow. Rabbi Guedj also stated that for FBOs growing means suggesting wisdom, a deeper humanity, and to see on everyone's face a part of the divine.

Dr. Hani El-Banna

Dr. Hani stated that there is a need for FBOs to consult both sides when different religions are involved, for example in the North and South Sudan conflict zones. Dr. Hani also mentioned the examples of the Xian flooding, and during the Iranian earthquake in 1991. Dr. Hani noted that many Muslim organizations are helping effectively in various areas. Dr. Hani highlighted the role of mosques and temples in humanitarian responses. He noted that there are many humanitarian organizations, but there are more mosques and churches. He asked how to humanize the role of mosques? Dr. Hani mentioned the example of the Pakistan earthquake when the first responders were religious institutions.

Oliver McTernan asked how can religious institutions be mobilized?

Dr. Hani responded that there was a need for the outside world to look at FBOs as civil society organizations.

Oliver McTernan also mentioned the need to analyze issues deeper to get synergies.

Questions and Comments

EU Core Network

The EU Core Network, a network of Christian relief organizations shared its experience of building the capacity of churches to respond in disaster.

Cornelio Sommaruga, Former President of the ICRC

Cornelio Sommaruga stated that on the subject of religions together for humanitarian action, action was not simply humanitarian assistance but also included the protection of victims. Mr. Sommaruga also stated that religions together meant a coordinated approach where religions are able through different FBOs to achieve the same goal of humanitarian action. He noted that a preliminary aspect of a coordinated approach is that religions need to agree to certain fundamental parameters. Mr. Sommaruga emphasized that convergence between religions and FBOs is necessary for success in humanitarian action.

Order of Malta Poland

The representative of the Order of Malta Poland stated that religious beliefs should be considered as a part of identity and that human beings should be respected.

Responses from the Panelists

Franco Frattini

Mr. Frattini emphasized the importance of communication from the ground, and noted that communication should not be under-evaluated.

Permanent Representative of the Anglican Communion to the UN

The Permanent Representative of the Anglican Communion to the UN stated that communities of faith could be partners to humanitarian actors. The Anglican Communion emphasized that investment in local religious communities is priceless. The Anglican Communion stated that the international humanitarian community should work to ensure that everyone feels content. The international humanitarian community should also work to enable joint enterprise. The Anglican Communion emphasized that the international humanitarian community bears responsibility to local religious communities, and noted that local communities are sometimes undermined by the presence of large organisations.

Julian Theseira, Intern, Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta

Mr. Theseira asked what is the role of FBOs in theological dialogue and conversations? He asked how to deal with those of repulsive values who believe that their religion truly condones extreme practices?

Rabbi Guedj

Rabbi Guedj responded that each of our religions is responsible for our extremists. He noted that very often we denounce the manipulation of religion by politics and thus we feel innocent of the acts of extremists. He also noted that we are often happy to be manipulated. Rabbi Guedj stated that the perverse alliance of religion and politics is actually often for the interest of both religion and politics. He stated that a critical approach in each religion is therefore necessary. Rabbi Guedj shared that when Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, he wrote an

article on the false religion of some rabbis in Israel that had killed Rabin, who had wanted to give territories back to the Palestinians. These rabbis thought that Rabin was keeping the messiah away by giving away territories. Rabbi Guedj also shared that Mrs. Rabin told him religious men killed her husband. He responded to her that it was religious men who had a false religion who killed her husband. Rabbi Guedj reiterated that in each religion there are extremists. Rabbi Guedj concluded that we cannot change religious texts but we can see that these texts are interpreted in a humane way.

Dr. Hani El-Banna

Dr. Hani responded that it was the politicization of state religious institutions that led people to give fatwas out to youngsters. He said issues like the level of unemployment for young people are important factors in their response to such fatwas. Dr. Hani concluded that the politicization of state religious institutions is problematic.

Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta Experience Sharing

Oliver McTernan then raised the issue of potential difficulties faced in Lebanon with its diversity of beliefs and invited someone from the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta to share experiences from Lebanon.

Ms. Oumayma Farah, a representative of the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta took the floor to share experiences. She shared that the Order of Malta in Lebanon is fighting with faith and conviction to express the hopes of this symposium. These actions are expressions of humanitarian action and love. In order to understand the scope of work of the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta, there is a need to understand the complexity of Lebanon.

Ms. Farah shared that Lebanon is a mosaic of 19 different religious communities and it represents a message to the world. She noted that most Lebanese identify themselves by religion first. She also noted that Lebanon recently commemorated the 40th anniversary of civil and sectarian conflict.

Ms. Farah shared that the Order of Malta's 28 operations in Lebanon reach both Muslims and Christians and that they target the most underprivileged. She stated that the presence of the Order of Malta gave strength and confidence to people to stay in their villages. The Order of Malta's activities have created trust and respect for the Order among all in Lebanon. The Order of Malta's drive is still the same today after 30 years.

Ms. Farah mentioned the example of 1985, when a Dutch Jesuit was kidnapped and tortured in Lebanon. Fear and resentment filled the Lebanese village from where he was kidnapped. The Order of Malta responded and expanded its centers operations. The Order of Malta reached out to all including the Shia community. A sense of trust was regained between the two communities of Christians and Shia. The presence of the Order of Malta brought confidence and promoted reconciliation.

Ms. Farah shared that the Order of Malta has launched a mobile unit in Lebanon. This was achieved partly in collaboration with the Imam Sadr foundation. She also shared that the Order signed agreements with the supreme Shia Council of Lebanon. The Order of Malta also collaborates with the Druze in Lebanon and the Order has a special relationship with the highest Sunni authority. She reiterated that the key to success of interfaith collaboration in Lebanon is that the Order of Malta is open to all.

Ms. Farah mentioned that the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta was able to launch a recent project on the border. This project reaches out to Syrian refugees and the local population. Ms. Farah noted that when working at the local level, nothing is impossible. Even enemies can sit side by side. Ms. Farah stated that the long-term collaboration of the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta with all communities proves that when religions work together they can promote social justice and break down walls.

Ms. Farah reiterated that fear was not because of faith. Rather man used religion to achieve conflict. But it is also through religion that peace can be achieved. Ms. Farah expressed thanks on behalf of the Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta for the symposium.

Oliver McTernan then concluded that the Order of Malta is rooted in action; hence it spurred the initiative for the symposium.

Oliver McTernan then wrapped up the first panel. He noted that there were a lot of good suggestions in terms of ideas, but not necessarily many concrete proposals. He mentioned the importance of communication, because FBOs have a duty to explain themselves as to why they do what they do. FBOs live with an inherited bias against religion based humanitarian action because humanitarian aid was used for proselytizing. The idea of creating a network of good practice for FBOs is therefore a practical and central thing.

Mr. McTernan also raised the need to develop a code of practice for example in mediation and the conflict resolution fields, as the main organizations have realized that there are no standards. Organizations are beginning to come together now to share how to develop standards and these need to be communicated to religious responses. He noted that mutual engagement leads to enrichment.

Mr. McTernan also reiterated the importance of investing in local capacity. Local religious institutes have knowledge and capacity and they should be invested in.

Mr. McTernan also reiterated the importance of religious literacy because religion can be used as an instrument of conflict and an instrument of conflict resolution. He also mentioned the need to develop a deeper understanding of our own religious traditions.

Video Interview with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Peter Maurer

Professor Michel Veuthey, Deputy Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN in Geneva interviewed Mr. Peter Maurer.

Professor Veuthey asked what role is there for FBOs in humanitarian action?

Mr. Peter Maurer responded that the ICRC sees FBOs as responding to the basic needs of people. This is a core that drives humanitarian organizations. Mr. Maurer noted that the founder of the ICRC was a man of faith. He understood that neutrality and impartiality was needed for humanitarian action. Mr. Maurer reiterated that it is important that FBOs respect the principles of neutrality and impartiality. Mr. Maurer also noted that faith is a big source of humanitarian action.

Professor Veuthey raised a question about International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and FBOs. He asked how do FBOs promote better respect for IHL?

Mr. Maurer responded that FBOs are important and a commitment to a rules based society is important. Mr. Maurer stated that the commitment of FBOs to IHL is critical to ensure respect for laws in practical life. He also noted that FBOs can open doors for actors like the ICRC, and that they can ensure the ideals enshrined in the Geneva Conventions are respected and taken seriously by armed groups in conflict. This would ensure that civilians are protected, that distinctions are made between civilian and health facilities, and that humanitarian actors have the ability to access populations. Mr. Maurer reiterated that everything enshrined in the Geneva Conventions as law has a role.

Prof. Veuthey then asked how to improve cooperation between the ICRC and FBOs?

Mr. Maurer responded that it is important for the ICRC to have partners in the field with whom it shares values. Mr. Maurer reiterated that the ICRC and its partners could only respond adequately if they have a close understanding. Mr. Maurer stated that it is dangerous when faith and religion become elements of identitarian exclusion, such as when FBOs organized activities according to brethren in faith rather than according to human needs. Mr. Maurer expressed hope that FBOs are solid partners of the ICRC.

Professor Veuthey asked for examples of cooperation between the ICRC and FBOs?

Mr. Maurer responded that the ICRC has worked with FBOs in the Islamic world. He cited the particular engagement of the ICRC with Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf as an example of such cooperation. Mr. Maurer reiterated that it was critical for the ICRC to have context and input to improve respect for IHL.

2nd panel topic: “Preparing for the future. How can faith-based institutions better assist and protect civilian populations in times of conflict”

H.E. Ambassador Pictet-Althann shared that one of the panelists, H.E. Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Syria was not present because he was involved in delicate negotiations. H.E then introduced the panel moderator Alberto Negri.

Alberto Negri, Journalist with Il Sole 24 Ore, Special Correspondent in the Middle East

Mr. Alberto Negri shared that he had covered many wars, and knew the situation on the ground. He stated that today the world is in a nightmare and everyday in the Middle East there is bad news. He asked how can FBOs better assist and protect civilians in times of conflict? He stated that humanitarian organizations including FBOs are preparing for the future but the future is now. He then introduced the panelists.

Professor Alexander Aleinikoff, UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner

Professor Alexander Aleinikoff raised the issue of prevention. He stated that it would be wonderful if there were no displaced people in the world. He mentioned the need to build tolerance and noted that the role of FBOs is important with regards to this issue.

Professor Aleinikoff noted that after a crisis happens, people flee across borders and homes. He also noted that FBOs have worked closely with UNHCR to provide relief to these people and that FBOs provided important services.

Professor Aleinikoff shared that at Notre Dame University where he used to work, the university stated that it helped people in need because it was Catholic. Professor Aleinikoff also stated that FBOs have advantages beyond many NGOs. For instance, FBOs have deep links on the ground and they are trusted to meet the needs of people. FBOs can help return people to normal lives. Professor Aleinikoff emphasized the need to help people recover to normal lives after they are displaced. Since religion is a part of many people's lives, FBOs can help restore this part of life. Professor Aleinikoff also stated that FBOs can combat xenophobia and reiterated that FBOs have an important role in the transition to normal life for displaced people.

Professor Aleinikoff shared that High Commissioner for Refugees Guterres had stated that for the vast majority of uprooted, there are few things as powerful as faith as a source of hope. Faith is a key to help rebuild lives. This is a particular role for FBOs beyond what other NGOs can do and FBOs can play a stronger role in helping people return to normal lives.

Professor Aleinikoff cited the US Resettlement model as an example that illustrated the role of FBOs in helping displaced people. The US resettles refugees with the help of FBOs. The program allocates refugees around the USA. Professor Aleinikoff suggested that this model can be adopted elsewhere such as in Europe, and provide a role for FBOs. Professor Aleinikoff stated that he was not suggesting proselytization by FBOs. Professor Aleinikoff also stated that the sometimes assumed secularism of humanitarianism needed to be recognized and that FBOs affirm an important element of human existence.

H.E. Ambassador Slimane Chikh, Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the UNOG

H.E. Ambassador Slimane Chikh stated that the OIC is completely committed to the preparations of the WHS. H.E. stated that the OIC and its member states manage crises and the OIC is sought after to provide humanitarian response in many locations. Since no adequate

response can be provided in so many conflict areas without collaboration, the OIC tries to join efforts with the international community. The OIC tries to pool resources in humanitarian responses.

H.E. Chikh stated that the OIC is a political organization not an FBO. He emphasized that humanitarian action has to be combined with political action, as well as combined with peaceful conflict resolution and development aid. H.E. also stated that the OIC is based on 2 essential values: respect for human life and dignity. H.E. noted that these values are shared by monotheist religions and other organizations such as the ICRC. H.E. remarked that through collective engagement and humanitarian action, intercultural dialogue and dialogue between civilizations will be reached.

H.E. Chikh emphasized that in terms of inclusion the OIC does not limit its action to Muslim victims. H.E. provided some examples, namely that the OIC is building 2 hospitals in Myanmar, that in the Central African Republic, the OIC works with all religions, and that in Iraq, the OIC is working to protect the Christian minority. H.E. shared how the OIC Secretary-General has gone to Iraq and contacted Christian religious leaders to ensure OIC solidarity with them. H.E. also mentioned OIC coordination with humanitarian organizations, for example for the vaccination of children with polio in Nigeria and Pakistan. H.E. noted that humanitarian action with several facets has helped ease suffering. H.E. also shared that the OIC has established good relations with the Order of Malta and Caritas. H.E. noted that the reference referring to religion has enabled the solution of some conflicts and has enabled FBOs to give humanitarian action something different. H.E. emphasized that humanitarian actors are brothers to victims.

Alberto Negri concluded that the OIC has given a picture of collaboration between Islamic entities and those of other faiths.

H.E. Archbishop Mons. Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN in Geneva

H.E. Archbishop Mons. Silvano Tomasi raised the question of why in the Catholic Christian tradition there is outreach to people in need. He noted that there are two tracks on which to move forward on assistance in emergencies. The first is the track of inspiration, or motivation that comes from religious belief. The second is the track of actual delivery of service. H.E. noted the presence of communities that embody a culture of service. H.E. stated that the inspiration for these communities comes from the Gospel, particularly the commandment to love God and neighbor. The love of neighbor pushes people to be in solidarity with others. H.E. noted that the argument comes from religious belief, but is based on the fact of the common origin of human beings. The inspiration is given both by religious motivation and also comes from solidarity that is generated by the common human nature and being equal human beings. H.E. remarked that the common origin, nature, and destiny of humanity bound the human family together.

H.E. Tomasi reiterated the importance of common solidarity with others as articulated in the writings of the Bible. H.E. stated that there was a constant example of Christians in history demonstrating common solidarity with others. For example, the Benedictines developed

agriculture because it was necessary. H.E. mentioned the need of FBOs to respond to new situations in the world. The root of inspiration for FBOs comes from religious motivation. The practice of FBOs responding to new needs is well documented.

H.E. Tomasi stated that the role of Christian communities in responding to needs today is very concrete. H.E. provided statistics for the educational, health and social services that the Catholic Church provides around the world. H.E. also provided examples of Christian FBOs responses to need. Caritas Germany for instance does relief and rehabilitation work after disasters. It has many employees and reaches people around the world. Catholic Relief Service, the Caritas of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops meanwhile assists the poor and vulnerable overseas and also fights disease and poverty, and their work also reaches people around the world. Caritas Italy meanwhile provides services to migrants, the poor and homeless. There was also the Jesuit Refugee Services who operate in over 45 countries. The Catholic Migration Commission meanwhile provides assistance to migrants and refugees. Lutheran World Relief is an example of an important non-Catholic Christian FBO. World Vision is another such organization and it touched the lives of millions by providing a wide variety of social and humanitarian services. H.E. Tomasi provided statistics about the budgets and the number of countries and people touched by the work of various Christian FBOs.

H.E. Tomasi reiterated that Christian inspired NGOs deliver very concrete and practical services. H.E. concluded that there is a very serious and articulate Christian commitment in responding to emergencies.

Professor Michel Veuthey, Deputy Permanent Observer of the Order of Malta at the UN in Geneva, Vice President of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law

Professor Michel Veuthey stated that dialogue between humanitarians and FBOs is essential to put an end to violations in too many conflicts. Professor Veuthey expressed the hope to find a strengthened notion of the dignity of human beings in all circumstances in the not too far future.

Professor Veuthey emphasized that the foundation of IHL can be found in all civilizations. The goal is to ensure the survival of IHL in all civilizations. Professor Veuthey noted that in history and today, humanitarian and religious personnel are often taken as victims. Professor Veuthey also noted that religious values act by way of references. Moreover they serve as unique references in some civilizations to defend human life and dignity.

Professor Veuthey raised the issue of when norms of law are questioned by governments for example the norms of law in defining torture, which was modified by the US government. Professor Veuthey noted that Christian, Muslim, and Hindu heads of religions said that torture is wrong in response to the US government's modifications.

Professor Veuthey emphasized that the most universal of humanitarian principles is the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is the most universal definition of what human dignity is. Professor Veuthey highlighted the importance of understanding what interpretation of the Golden Rule is used, whether it is understood as applying to all human beings, or only to those

who share the same religion. Professor Veuthey stressed the need to have an open interpretation of the Golden Rule and not restrict it.

Professor Veuthey mentioned the need to have dialogue between religious people and humanitarians. He cited the First and Third Articles of the 1949 Geneva Conventions that outlined collective and individual humanitarian responsibilities. Professor Veuthey emphasized that humanitarian aspects have to be kept in mind. He stated that when these standards are respected, they contribute to the security of states. He also mentioned the importance of having good practices, for example having Commissions of Reconciliation. Professor Veuthey highlighted that justice was not enough after conflict and there was a need for reconciliation as well. Professor Veuthey noted that Commissions of Reconciliation include the work of different religions.

Professor Veuthey stated that on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the UN charter, there is a need for both words and actions that show common humanity. Professor Veuthey noted that Pope Francis had remarked that international right was for a long time a right of war and peace but it should be a right of peace exclusively. In that context morality must lead to law, and it could even anticipate the law where it indicates the right path of what is good.

Swami Amarananda, Director of the Vedantic Centre in Geneva

Swami Amarananda thank the Order of Malta for the organization of the symposium. He stated that he represented the Order of Ramakrishna. The Swami stated that the Order of Ramakrishna is dedicated to helping all. He mentioned the response to the January 1964 massacre of Hindus in Bangladesh and the massacre of Muslims in Kolkata in retaliation as an example. The Order of Ramakrishna went to Kolkata, where Muslims accepted its help. The Swami stated that the Order of Ramakrishna strived to maintain equidistance from politics everywhere. The Order of Ramakrishna also believed that the education of girls is important and also advocates for reconciliation makers especially in the 205 native districts of India hit by terrorist activities.

The Swami stated that for the future of humanitarian action, actors in the name of religion should be conversant with the major themes of other religions otherwise they could not act properly. The Swami also stated that religious actors should accept different religions and raised the question of how to do so. The Swami noted that mystics across religions have access to eternal bliss and peace. The Swami mentioned the need to not just give emphasis to dogmas.

The Swami raised the question of whether some religious ideas are based on truth, with regards to the conception of truth as discussed by Mill. The Swami stated that both science and religion should make efforts to validate beliefs. Swami Amarananda mentioned that Swami Vivekananda, one of the founding figures of the Ramakrishna Order had said that if we treat religions like science, many truths will be shattered but other jewels of truth will shine brighter.

Swami Amarananda stated that faith is something that is accepted but there is doubt. Swami Amarananda stated that true faith must come with tremendous conviction, and this comes with the experience of mystics. Swami Amarananda mentioned the example of Henry Dunant

whose life is a parallel with the life of Ashoka as both were transformed by experiences on the battlefield. Swami Amarananda concluded that organizations that have faith should do much better.

Antonio Negri then commented in response to the panelists' statements. He noted that the spiritual and mystical aspects of religions were highlighted. Mr. Negri emphasized that Muslims were also persecuted in the Middle East. He noted that tombs of Muslim saints had been destroyed in North Africa and Egypt and this was a destruction of the same culture and tradition of the Muslim world. Mr. Negri also noted that more than 18 entities were involved in Syria, and emphasized that it was difficult to put them all together. He stressed that under religion, there were many different political agendas. He also highlighted that religion in this moment is submitted by politics. Religion is not driving the situation but rather political gains drive the situation.

Questions and Comments

Voice International

The President of Voice International took the floor. Voice International introduced itself as a network of FBOs. Voice International stated that the central topic was the WHS that was called by the UN Secretary-General because of some systemic problems in humanitarian action and which was meant to pave the way for a later conference that will take intergovernmental decisions. Voice International was expecting to hear from representatives of different religions in view of the WHS of what needs to be upheld. Voice International noted that everyone in the room was in favor of upholding fundamental humanitarian principles, but highlighted that some are against these principles. Voice International stated that if these values should be upheld then it should be said loudly. Voice International also stated that if there were some things religions believe needed to be changed then so be it. Voice International stated that one thing that needed to be changed was the sense of relative danger and menace on some aspects of humanitarian action behind the scenes.

Finland

The representative of Finland thanked the Order of Malta for the organization of the symposium. Finland stated that it was committed to the WHS and had hosted the European consultation for the WHS. Finland reiterated that humanity, saving peoples lives, and protecting human dignity are universal principles. Finland noted that religious leaders and FBOs are often first responders and are also important actors in resilience and peacebuilding. Finland shared that Finn Church Aid is active in different parts of the world, for example in Somalia.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The representative of the IOM thanked the organizers of the symposium. IOM appreciated the longstanding relationship between itself and the Order of Malta. IOM was pleased to hear that everyone agrees FBOs can make a contribution to humanitarian action. IOM noted that people affected by crises often experience loss of their material means of survival and

are affected in spirit as well. IOM asked whether FBOs are better placed than other actors to respond to ailments of the spirit in the broadest sense of the term?

Responses from the Panelists

Professor Aleinikoff

Professor Aleinikoff stated that FBOs should continue to adhere to humanitarian principles and reiterated that FBOs are better placed to meet spiritual needs.

H.E. Amb. Chikh

H.E. Chikh stated that the last stage of crisis resolution is conflict resolution. H.E. stressed that all psychological issues must be addressed in this stage. H.E. emphasized that psychological issues were a dimension that should not be neglected.

Professor Veuthey

Professor Veuthey stated that if the main humanitarian principles of the ICRC are seen as elements of secular western humanitarian religion, then they are doomed. Professor Veuthey stressed that if however it can be explained that they are fundamental principles for all humanity then they will be saved.

Swami Amarananda

Swami Amarananda concurred with other panelists regarding the first question. The Swami raised the issue of how to address damage to the spirit. He noted that those who espouse religion do a lot of meditation and become leaders. They are specialists in that domain. The Swami emphasized that all human minds are of the same nature.

Antonio Negri then concluded that there is a need for good values and good practice for humanitarian action. Mr. Negri noted that when humanitarian organizations deliver international aid, they deliver not only aid, but they also deliver a culture. Mr. Negri also concluded that humanitarian action should be more than material and it should include a spiritual mystic sensitivity.

Conclusion

H.E. Dominique, Prince de la Rochefoucauld-Montbel, Grand Hospitaller and Minister of Health and International Cooperation of the Order of Malta

H.E. Dominique, Prince de la Rochefoucauld-Montbel noted that in the two years since the launch of the WHS process by the UN Secretary-General, the world has seen a continued development of conflicts. There was a need for partnerships to bring aid to populations in distress. H.E. stated that the Order of Malta organized the symposium with the theme of “Religions Together for Humanitarian Action” because the contributions of FBOs are vital. H.E. stated that FBOs together could give voice to the most important concerns affecting mankind

today. FBOs can raise the issue that rights are not available to all. FBOs can create the possibility of alleviating suffering by demonstrating the force of faith and respect for the dignity of man.

H.E. noted the agreement of panelists to pursue goals together. The panelists have a wide range of expertise in IHL, and represented an impressive lineup of voices and experiences. The panelists made essential points that characterize FBOs and these provide a framework for working together effectively.

H.E. reiterated that FBOs are present in the field of humanitarian actions worldwide because of their duty of care to fellowmen. FBOs have developed networks of solidarity, and constructed liaisons between diasporas. FBOs are also organizations that are often trusted. FBOs also work in collaboration with the UN.

H.E. stated that following the discussions of the symposium there should be proposals to put to the WHS. H.E. reiterated the need for understanding and respect for human rights and IHL especially as applicable in armed conflicts. H.E. emphasized insisting on the rights of refugees because the world is experiencing the greatest displacement of people since 1945.

H.E. also mentioned the need to bring awareness of fundamental shared values, and for humanitarian organizations to agree on the importance of respecting local traditions and cultures. H.E. raised the questions of how to bring the best of agreements forward, and how to build trust and real and trustworthy partnerships, in which affected people have the strongest voice.

H.E. raised the matter of signposts and of finding new ways to unpack values. H.E. emphasized the need for FBOs to demonstrate a credible and honest understanding of humanitarian principles, which is crucial for achieving a coordinated approach of all FBOs. H.E. also stressed the need for better recognition of the capacities of local communities to ensure that the international humanitarian system does not ruin their communities when they leave. H.E. emphasized the need to establish better inter-religious links such as liaison points in crises. H.E. stated that the Order of Malta would continue to seek alliances to turn ideas into concrete actions. H.E. also stated that the Order of Malta would do what it could to foster humanitarian values.

H.E. stated that a draft report on the contribution of FBOs to protect those in armed conflicts would be prepared. H.E. also stated that practical steps would be taken in two areas, namely working together to pool resources to help those affected, and creating the strongest possible awareness of the human rights of those affected by conflict. H.E. stated that at the end of July, the Order of Malta would submit a synthesis of the symposium to the WHS. H.E. expressed the desire that the Geneva meeting is the beginning of improving engagement between FBOs, governments and other humanitarian actors. H.E. concluded by reiterating the need to try to meet the challenges that good Samaritans of the 21st century would face.