

Rome, 11 November 2015

***People fleeing wars:***

***Relief, assistance, integration.***

***Towards the World Humanitarian Summit, Istanbul 2016***

Introductory remarks by H.E. the Grand Chancellor

Ladies and Gentleman, good morning.

Thank you for participating in this conference today which focuses on the great humanitarian challenge we are facing globally: the desperate plight of refugees from war-ridden countries and their perilous journey which too often ends as a deadly odyssey.

As doors close and walls are erected, fear and desperation mount in the millions of children, women, men fleeing wars, persecution, poverty. An estimated 700,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe this year along unofficial and dangerous land and sea routes, from Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iraq, North Africa and beyond.

The situation is getting desperate by the hour. The onset of winter is worsening the dire journey of the hundreds of thousands and is exposing many refugees, especially the children and the elderly, to dangerous and potentially life threatening diseases, such as pneumonia

International Agency funding has been cut and distribution of first aid and basic necessities is insufficient to meet the mounting demand.

Unaccompanied children –one out of four refugees is a child - and women are at risk of being abducted by criminal gangs and forced into prostitution and slave labor.

**There are 60 million displaced in the world, 20 million of them on the move – if they were all together in one spot that would make the 25th largest nation.**

Only last month, over 218,000 migrants and refugees reached Europe by sea. A figure that equals the arrivals reported in the whole of 2014! As humanitarian actors, we as the Order of Malta, question ourselves: what can we do to help these people? Can faith based institutions bring an added value when rescuing and assisting people fleeing wars? What kind of support do these people need?

Asymmetrical wars, fast-changing alliances, failing states, non-conventional weapons, disregard for humanitarian laws, difficulty in accessing conflict areas, proxy wars. These and many more are factors dramatically impacting the effectiveness of aid institutions and agencies. The Order of Malta is participating in the World Humanitarian Summit, the process launched by UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon with the aim of reshaping humanitarian aid, in the wake of the enormous changes taking place.

- **We must face the fact that this dire situation is not going to stop and will continue for many years to come.** The escalating conflicts in many regions, the world economic situation, the effects of climate change and global warming, the rising demographics and an uncontrolled urban development in some areas of the world, are all factors leading the mass movements of people.
- **Building walls and sealing borders will not halt the movement of people** and as Pope Francis recently stated it will probably just fuel hate. It is precisely the absence of political long -terms solutions that is leading to more protracted crises and unprecedented levels of displacement.

- **People fleeing war and persecution must be entitled to protection and deserve to see their human rights and dignity respected**, regardless of their legal status. Europe was built on the principles of freedom, dignity and solidarity. Many people in Europe fear that the influx of such a high number of people of Islamic belief will endanger the Christian civilisation of Europe. The Order of Malta challenges this: will we not risk our identity even more if we put our values of human rights aside?
- **As migration will continue in the coming years we should look at the opportunities**, and not forget that a considerable number of refugees are skilled and can integrate into the labour market. In Italy, for example, migrants contribute to over 8% of the GDP. In Great Britain, foreign-born entrepreneurs are behind the creation of one in seven firms.
- We must increase help and aid provided to countries neighboring Syria that are hosting millions of refugees, in order to improve their living standards. Lebanon has the highest number of refugees of any nation in the world, followed by Jordan where approximately one in ten people is a refugee. These countries are under immense strain both economically and socially.
- We should be developing resettlement and relocation opportunities, building on our reception capacities and opening up safe avenues to Europe. At the same time we must collectively combat and crack down criminal gangs profiting from human smuggling and prioritize development projects for the countries where many economic migrants come from. Diplomacy plays an important role in trying to keep current crises under control and encourage transitions to peace and reconciliation.

- As we speak here today, leaders of the origin and transit countries mostly affected by migration, regional organizations and international humanitarian agencies are gathering in **Malta within the framework of the European Council** to address the tragedy unfolding in the Mediterranean. The Order of Malta, a lay, religious Order of the Catholic Church - subject of international law that exercises functions of sovereignty, recognised as such by more than 100 States and by the European Union,- has been invited to participate as an Observer. Protecting people in need and tackling the causes of migration will lead the discussions, which we all hope, will create the basis of a new concerted and long term approach.

Thank you.