

**H.E. Grand Hospitaller of the Sovereign Order of Malta
Dominique de La Rochefoucauld-Montbel**
Closing speech, Symposium: 'Religions together for humanitarian action',
Geneva, 27 May 2015

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends

In the two years since the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, launched the concept of a World Humanitarian Summit with the focus '*Partnerships in a changing humanitarian landscape*' the world has seen the continued development of man-made conflicts, bringing deep human suffering. The need for partnerships to bring effective aid to populations in distress has never been more pressing.

In response, the Order of Malta has organised today's Symposium, taking as its motivation the theme: '*Religions Together for Humanitarian Action - Reaching out to victims of armed conflicts: the special role of faith-based actors.*'

I would like to thank most whole-heartedly all of our distinguished panellists for your vital contributions to the Symposium and to the thinking around these humanitarian calamities.

Why are your contributions vital? Because together we can give voice to the most important concerns affecting mankind today: freedom to live in peace, freedom of worship, freedom to pursue a healthy life. These are rights enshrined in the international law of human rights. But we are all well aware that these rights are not available to all. By working together we can create the possibility of alleviating suffering, in the provision of relief, in working for post-resolution of conflicts and, very importantly, by demonstrating the force of faith and respect for the dignity of man. Your presence here today, and your contributions, attest to your agreement to pursue these goals together.

Our panellists here today represent a wide range of faiths: Muslim, Vedanta, Judaism, and the Christian faiths, as well as a wide range of expertise in international humanitarian law, foreign aid, diplomacy and conflict resolution. An impressive line-up of effective voices and extensive experience!

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You – we - have, together, made essential points which characterise faith-based organisations and which provide the framework for working together effectively.

We have noted and concurred that

- we are present in the field of humanitarian actions worldwide;
- that our work has common fundamental elements in respecting human dignity, the value of the family and the duty of care for our fellow man;
- we have developed networks of support and solidarity;
- we can be, and have often been, the liaison between diasporas and affected populations;
- we note that our organisations are often trusted by afflicted populations to assist and protect them, which is advantageous when collaborating with governments and with United Nations organisations, as well as other humanitarian organisations.

With this basis, and following our discussions today, we have strong proposals to put forward to the World Humanitarian Summit. They are sensible, realistic and practical. In establishing the World Summit, the Secretary General has asked all actors to propose real action.

We therefore together recognise and propose:

- that we strongly promote respect for the standards and principles of human rights and international humanitarian law applicable in the case of armed conflicts. This means promoting - indeed, insisting upon - the rights of refugees. We have seen the greatest displacement of peoples since 1945. This has implications for all target countries and society as a whole;
- we agree that we need to bring awareness of the fundamental shared values of the instruments of international law and their religious values to all nations and peoples;

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- While promoting practical solutions in situations of conflict, we agree the importance of respecting local traditions and cultures;
- we must consistently try to prevent conflicts, and appeal to the parties involved to respect the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, while remaining outside the political arena;
- we must redouble our efforts to effect dialogue between religious communities which can aid rehabilitation and reconstruction and promote sustainable development, based on these values and on religious tolerance;
- we recognise that greater use of modern technology can help alerting to problems, the possible prevention of crisis situations and eventually, effective needs assessments and delivery of aid.

We accept that we need to examine all opportunities for strengthening our collaboration and partnerships with the relevant authorities and civil society, including the private sector; and we all agree that we will continue our exchanges of thought, ideas, experience and feedback concerning humanitarian action in general, and those of faith-based organisations in particular. We wish to keep up a constant effort to improve our dialogue, our cooperation, and therefore our effectiveness, so that we can better assist and protect populations who are affected by armed conflicts.

How can we best bring these agreements forward? As a result of this very successful day, we will draft a position paper on the contribution of faith-based organisations to aid and protect those affected by armed conflicts. It will emphasise the concerns we have expressed here today and elaborate practical steps in two main areas: 1) to work together and pool our resources and experience to help those suffering from armed conflict situations and 2) to create the strongest possible public awareness of the human rights due to these affected peoples.

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At the end of July the Order of Malta will submit the position paper, including a synthesis of this Symposium, to the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat. It will then be published, in preparation for the World Consultations, which will take place in Geneva in October.

Therefore, may I take this opportunity to express the desire that this Geneva meeting is just the start of a dialogue between faith-based organisations together with governments, international organisations and humanitarian organisations.

It is indeed only by a constant effort of attention to the evolution of the needs of assistance and protection and the means of addressing them, and by listening to affected populations, governments, the parties in conflict and the other humanitarian organisations, that we can try to meet the challenges of the Good Samaritan in the 21st century.

Thank you.