



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

EMBASSY IN THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Speech by Ambassador Niels Carl A. Lorijn on the occasion of the feast day of St. John the Baptist - 24 June 2024

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My wife Eva and I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to His Most Reverend Excellency Archbishop Antonio Filipazzi, Apostolic Nuncio in Poland and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, for having celebrated Holy Mass with us earlier today, on this the feast day of St John the Baptist, patron Saint of the Order of Malta.

We would also like to express our greetings and warm wishes to H.E. Prof. Duszczuk, Vice Minister of the Interior and Administration, for honouring us with his presence, to the representatives of the Chancellery of the President, the Government, and the Sejm of the Republic of Poland; to Your Excellencies Ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic Corps and international organisations accredited to Poland, and to all of you here with us today.

Dear Friends,

Since its establishment almost a thousand years ago, the Order of Malta has dedicated itself to the health and wellbeing of people in need with a network that today has 13,500 members, 100,000 volunteers and over 50,000 doctors, nurses and paramedics. As a lay religious order of the Catholic Church, we do this in adherence to the Gospel message which, as H.E. the Nuncio reminded us this morning, is the fuel for our engine and our most important source of inspiration.

We pursue our mission on two levels:

1. In the field: in about 120 countries, where we manage over 1,500 hospitals, clinics, and socio-medical facilities, provide emergency relief during wars and natural disasters, support local communities by building schools and water systems, treat neglected diseases, and distribute food, medical supplies and other necessities. We focus on the poor, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the homeless, victims of abuse, refugees and migrants, vulnerable men, women and children, in almost every corner of the world, without distinction of race, gender, religion or belief.
2. We also do this on the international stage: by leveraging our unique status as a sovereign subject of international law to drive one agenda, and one agenda only, to uphold human dignity. But what does that mean? It means caring for those in need; helping alleviate poverty and inequality; it means standing up against injustice, intolerance, racism and discrimination; it means fighting social exclusion, abuse and persecution; it is helping to ensure access to basic healthcare and education for everyone, everywhere; it means respecting International Law and adhering to the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it means everything that makes us human. We call that Humanitarian Diplomacy.



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But to do this effectively, and to tackle the pressing challenges of our time (migration, global health, climate change, sustainable development, energy transition), requires a system that respects these universal principles of human fraternity and solidarity, of mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. A system of effective international cooperation that recognises itself in the Charter of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, the world appears to be moving in the opposite direction, with more polarisation, more violence, and a general contempt for human life and international humanitarian law. A world where the indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets (hospitals, schools, apartment blocks, energy infrastructure) is excusable; where humanitarian aid is purposely being obstructed; where aid workers are killed; and where migrants are used as political weapons.

A world where everything is a zero-sum game. Where for every winner there must be a loser.

Nowhere is that more obvious as in Gaza. Since the barbaric attacks and unlawful kidnappings by Hamas on October 7th, the people of Gaza have been living what cannot be described as anything else but hell. More than 120,000 people killed or wounded according to the UN, most of them women and children; 70% percent of all housing destroyed; almost a million Palestinians uprooted again.

The war is also having a devastating effect on the population of the West Bank, where the Order of Malta runs the Holy Family Hospital, and of Lebanon, where we manage more than 60 projects and programmes, including 33 healthcare centres, and where war seems to come closer every day.

On the 16th of May last, upon the invitation of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Order of Malta's Minister of Health and International Cooperation, Fra' Alessandro de Francis, was able to visit Gaza and witness the horror first hand. At last, we are now able to launch a major emergency relief program focused firstly on the provision of food and on the establishment of a field hospital in Gaza.

Unfortunately, the Holy Land is not an isolated case of human suffering. The Order is currently engaged in more humanitarian crises that ever before: Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, the list keeps on growing. The vast majority of these crises involve people forcibly fleeing armed conflict, violence and persecution. This has brought the number of refugees and displaced people to a staggering 120 million globally, making forced migration the biggest humanitarian challenge of the 21st century.

The Order of Malta is present along this journey, assisting refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants in approximately 30 countries. In the countries of origin, at the borders, on vessels on the Mediterranean Sea, in refugee camps, in host countries and at final destinations. The needs are



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enormous, and so is the range of care we try to provide, from basic and specialised healthcare, to combatting malnutrition, ensuring access to clean drinking water and building emergency shelters.

Closer to home, as the war in Ukraine rages on for a third consecutive year, the Order of Malta continues to expand its humanitarian aid efforts across the country. As one of the first aid agencies on the ground when the war broke out, we have so far delivered, and continue to deliver, close to 7,000 tons of food and emergency supplies to over 70 towns in Ukraine, reaching over half a million people in need, including 300,000 persons in the eastern and southern regions, despite challenges posed by intensified bombardments.

In the first months of the war, we assisted 300,000 refugees at the borders and provided 700,000 hot meals to internally displaced persons in Ukraine itself.

While the shipments of humanitarian aid continue to this day, the type of assistance is gradually shifting from immediate relief to medium- and long-term development, including the training of Ukrainian medics and para-medics; the production of orthopaedic prostheses; the rehabilitation of amputation patients; and, last but not least, the provision of much needed psychological counselling and psycho-social support, which is currently reaching over 60,000 adults and children in c. 50 locations across the country.

We are particularly grateful for the close collaboration and significant financial support that we have received from the Polish government towards our efforts in Moldova and Ukraine over the past decade, which underscores the close bonds that we have developed during the almost 35 years of diplomatic relations.

These bonds were again reaffirmed during the official visit of the Grand Master of the Order of Malta to President Duda last March. During the meeting, both heads of state renewed their appeal for enhanced diplomatic action and multilateral cooperation in the pursuit of peace, and the assistance to those in need.

We value our ties with Poland very much and look forward to continuing working together with the Polish Government, both in Poland and abroad, in key areas such as health- and social care, emergency relief, civil protection and migration.

On that note, I would like to raise my glass to our host country, and to Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen present with us here today, to thank you once again and to wish you good health and prosperity.

Thank you.