



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

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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 - 25 June 2025**

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

Welcome to our celebration of the feast day of St. John the Baptist, Patron Saint of the Order of Malta. Many of you already joined us yesterday for the traditional annual Mass at the Field Cathedral of the Polish Army, which was presided over by His Most Reverend Excellency Archbishop Antonio Filipazzi, Apostolic Nuncio in Poland and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps. Thank you, Your Excellency for your close friendship and for always being there for us.

My wife Eva and I would also like to extend our warm greetings to H.E. Pawel Kowal, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Sejm and Chairman of the Council for Cooperation with Ukraine (who will say a few words after me); 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. We are honoured by your presence.

This year, 2025, marks the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Order of Malta and the Republic of Poland.

The close ties of the Order of Malta with the Polish territories began almost 900 years ago when Polish Knights of St. John returning from the Holy Land established commanderies in Gdansk, Szczecin, Poznan and Silesia.

Today, the Polish Association of the Order of Malta, founded following the independence of Poland and re-established in 1992, is a thriving organisation managing many medical and social aid programmes across the country. It is also an essential pillar of the Order's activities in Ukraine, and the main conduit through which we have been able to develop a growing and fruitful partnership with the Polish government since 2015, on key projects including emergency relief to Ukraine and the training of first aid responders in Ukraine and Moldova.

Last month, we brought this partnership a step further, by putting our existing and future joint initiatives in Ukraine under an umbrella agreement with the Council for Cooperation with Ukraine, a body of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. This framework agreement covers emergency relief, medical and social care, and development aid, and will enable us to better coordinate and expand our efforts in those areas. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Kowal for his vision and leadership in making this happen.

Earlier this year, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, the close bonds between the Order of Malta and Poland were once again reaffirmed at the highest level by the successful state visit of President Duda and the First



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Lady to our Grand Master Fra' John Dunlap in Rome, following the Grand Master's official visit to Poland a year earlier.

This emblematic visit was further proof:

- that the Order's humanitarian diplomacy is working;
- that our mission to care for the most vulnerable, and the universal principles that we stand for, are more relevant now than ever before: fraternity, solidarity, protection of human life, respect for human rights, and adherence to the provisions of the UN Charter;
- that our work on the ground, in the more than 1,500 medical and other facilities, and the thousands of projects (big and small) that the Order of Malta manages in over 120 countries, is making a real difference for those in need; and lastly,
- that our neutrality, combined with our unique status, both as a religious order and as a sovereign entity, makes us a trusted and reliable partner for governments, international organisations and NGOs around the world, to help deliver an effective impartial humanitarian agenda.

We live in unsettling times, in what often may even seem a dystopian reality. The horrors of war, the indiscriminate bombings, the killings of civilians (close to 15,000 in Ukraine so far, and 55,000 in Gaza, including more than 14,000 children), the forced displacements and mass deportations, the destruction of hospitals and other vital infrastructure, the weaponisation of food, the blatant war crimes are nothing else but an abomination. Some of the daily images remind us of the worst atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and will come to haunt not only the perpetrators but all those that stood by and let it happen.

Over the past twelve months, the Order of Malta's long-standing commitment to peace and care continued amidst such unimaginable suffering.

In Ukraine, we have extended our operations from emergency relief to long-term rehabilitation, including first aid and rescue training, prosthetics, and psychological trauma support for adults and children. Since the first day of the war, our relief efforts have reached over 4 million people across 64 municipalities, from frontline cities such as Kharkiv to the borders with Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.

In Gaza, through a partnership with Caritas and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Order has so far been able to deliver 140 tons of food, hygiene products and other relief goods to over 40,000 people in northern Gaza (about 10% of the remaining population there). As soon as the situation allows, we will be setting up a field hospital to address the urgent healthcare needs.

As a further testimony to our commitment to supporting the Palestinian people, and in spite of the violence and the appalling living conditions, the Order continues to operate the largest maternity hospital in the West Bank and to serve the rural communities with our mobile clinics.



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Same in Lebanon, where the Order, in collaboration with the Italian Air Force, delivered four tons of humanitarian aid to IDPs at the high of the recent escalations last October, and continues to provide medical care, sanitation, psycho-social support and education through its extensive network of more than 60 centres across the country.

And the list goes on: recent fighting in Syria's coastal region, refugees fleeing the war in South Sudan, natural disasters in Romania, Nigeria, Myanmar, Thailand and places as remote as Mayotte in the Indian Ocean. In 2024 alone, the Order of Malta's main emergency relief organisation supported 152 humanitarian aid projects in 36 countries, reaching almost 7.2 million people.

And yet, amidst all this suffering, we must not lose hope. Hope is the source of strength and resilience. Hope shapes the future.

But hope requires courage. The courage to take the higher ground, to stand up to injustice, to choose diplomacy over war, compassion over indifference, to protect life, forge peace and build bridges.

As the international order that has underpinned peace and prosperity for the past 80 years is being challenged, we must reaffirm our shared commitment to human values and to the rule of law, and work together, united, towards a renewed spirit of multilateral cooperation - one that safeguards the essence of our shared humanity, protects the vulnerable, and ensures that justice, dignity, and compassion remain at the heart of global governance.

As Franklin Roosevelt famously wrote: "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

On that note, and before handing over to Chairman Kowal, I raise my glass to our host country Poland and to all of you, wishing you courage, good health and prosperity.

Dziękuję i na zdrowie.