



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

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

World Refugee Day. The Sovereign Order of Malta launches international campaign: No! to the construction of walls

Saturday 20 June 2015

National Associations, rescue corps and volunteers unite to highlight the worldwide drama

Rome, 16 June 2015 – The number of refugees and displaced persons worldwide has reached levels not recorded since the end of World War II. In Syria, over four years of conflict now mean that a family is forced to leave home every 60 seconds. It is calculated that every 3 seconds a person becomes displaced in some part of the world. 52 million people are in flight from disasters, wars and famine. Half of them are children. Some 17 million are refugees, over 33 million are internally displaced - that is, forced to leave their homes although staying in their country - and about 1.5 million are asylum seekers. In 2014, 866,000 there were new asylum applications in the industrialised countries - the majority were Syrians followed by Iraqis. Numbers that reflect a world in flames with burgeoning new crises and old trouble spots flaring up.

World Refugee Day, established ten years ago by the UN General Assembly, will be celebrated on Saturday 20 June 2015. This year, the Sovereign Order of Malta is launching a campaign in the countries where it is present, to raise public awareness of this worldwide drama. All the Order of Malta's organisations will draw attention to the world refugee problem through social media and information channels.

“The drama of refugees will not cease over the coming decade. It is no use erecting walls and barriers. Faced with this drama and the desperation of millions of people, we now have to find new humanitarian assistance schemes, new forms of cooperation with the countries of origin and which also take into account the asymmetric wars currently being fought by forces that do not represent states,” the Grand Chancellor of the Sovereign Order of Malta, Albrecht Boeselager, has declared.

Present in 120 countries with 80,000 volunteers, 33 Rescue Corps, a worldwide relief agency - Malteser International, 57 Pories and national Associations and an established diplomatic network with over 100 countries, the Sovereign Order of Malta is on the front line offering assistance to refugees and displaced people, both in the countries involved in the conflicts and in the final destinations of asylum seekers.

Order of Malta projects which are centred on the drama of refugees and asylum seekers



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In **Syria**, through a network of local humanitarian partners, the Order of Malta distributes medicines and basic necessities from mobile clinics in the refugee camps around Damascus and Aleppo. In Kilis, on the **Turkish-Syrian** border, it runs a field hospital for the war wounded. In **Lebanon**, the Order of Malta manages four medical centres offering free healthcare to Syrian refugees, and has recently inaugurated a mobile medical centre in the north of the country on the border with Syria. In Erbil, northern **Iraq**, medical teams of the Order of Malta's worldwide relief agency, Malteser International, run a mobile surgery and two medical centres to assist displaced people – often Christian and Yazidi religious minorities – fleeing from the violence of the so-called Islamic State.

In **Africa**, the Order of Malta has for decades been managing numerous medical and social assistance programmes. Following the worsening of the humanitarian emergency in **South Sudan** it has increased its commitment to help the displaced and during 2014 it aided some 10,000 people. It has also stepped up efforts in neighbouring **Uganda**, where many refugees fleeing from South Sudan have ended up.

The Order of Malta is also present in **Asia** where for many years - far from the media spotlight - the drama of the **Rohingya** Muslim minority has played out. In the first five months of 2015 alone it is estimated that at least 25,000 Rohingya, subject to discrimination in Myanmar, have attempted to reach other countries in south-east Asia, such as Thailand and Malaysia. Since 2003, the Order of Malta has been distributing medicines, hygiene kits, mosquito nets and food in the refugee camps here. After the earthquake in **Nepal** on 25 April, Malteser International immediately sent rescue teams to help tens of thousands of homeless people.

For seven years, teams of doctors, nurses and rescuers have been active on board Italian naval vessels helping to save the migrants attempting to cross the **Strait of Sicily** on ramshackle boats - a humanitarian crisis fed by the Middle East conflicts, by dictatorial regimes, by the failure of States and by the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. In the first five months of 2015 alone, almost 40,000 people have attempted to reach the Italian coast.

The Order of Malta's commitment does not end with its emergency and first-aid services but continues in the everyday life of individuals, helping them to integrate and to regain their human dignity. In **France** and in **Germany** the Order of Malta runs social assistance programmes for undocumented migrants and support for political asylum applicants. In Germany there are 20 assistance centres for immigrants which it is estimated will provide 300,000 overnight stays in 2015. In addition, the facilities in Italy, Spain, Belgium and Great Britain distributing hot meals to the homeless - many of whom are immigrants - are stepping up their commitment.

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The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta, founded in Jerusalem around the year 1048, is a primary subject of international law and a Catholic religious and lay order. The Order's mission is summed up in its motto Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum: witnessing the faith and giving assistance to the poor and the sick. Today the Order of Malta is mainly active in health and social care and humanitarian aid, operating in 120 countries. Its 13,500 members are supported by 80,000 volunteers, with another 25,000 doctors, nurses and paramedics. The Order manages hospitals, health centres, out-patient units, institutes for the elderly and disabled, terminal patient and palliative care centres and volunteer corps. Malteser International, the Order of Malta's special relief agency, is on the front line in natural disasters and in alleviating the consequences of armed conflicts. Over recent years, the Order's most significant interventions have provided aid in five continents: in Europe - Georgia, Kosovo and Macedonia, Ukraine; in Africa - Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan; in the Americas: Haiti, Mexico; in Asia - Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, South East Asia (after the tsunami); and the Middle East – Lebanon and Syria. In addition, the Order is currently engaged in the countries bordering Syria and Iraq to provide aid for the population fleeing from the conflict. The Order of Malta's Italian Rescue Corps participates in the first-aid operations for the boats filled with migrants in the Strait of Sicily, alongside the Italian units. The head of the Order is the 79th Grand Master Fra' Matthew Festing, who is assisted by the members of the Sovereign Council. The Order of Malta is neutral, impartial and apolitical. It has bilateral diplomatic relations with 105 States, official relations with another 6 States, and relations at ambassadorial level with the European Union. It is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and its specialised agencies and has representatives to the main international organisations. Since 1834 the Order of Malta's seat of government has been located in Rome, where it is guaranteed extraterritorial rights.

For more information: www.orderofmalta.int.