

Speaking Notes
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Speaker of the Senate of Canada

Canada and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta
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Honourable Knights,
Distinguished guests,

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a great pleasure to join you on the occasion of the annual general meeting of the Johanniter Aid Association and to discuss Canada and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. On a personal note, I have been a Member of the Order of Malta since 1984 and now serve as a Knight of both the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta – to give it its official title; and The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem. For these reasons alone, I am particularly delighted to have this opportunity to speak before you.

Annual gatherings represent an important reference point within any organisation or institution, allowing it to reflect upon its values and traditions and to evaluate how best to fulfil them in an ever-changing world. As Speaker of the Senate of Canada, I have a duty to uphold the traditions of that institution. Indeed, I believe none can escape the debate that has surrounded the Senate since its inception in 1867; a debate that has in fact become a tradition of sorts. And though this may be challenging at times, it is nonetheless essential in a world marked by rapid change and

uncertainty. Yet, it is also because the world is constantly changing that traditions are important, as they can provide us with a sense of stability and purpose. Moreover, rather than representing archaic curiosities, traditions can in fact maintain values that we share in common. The values of service, dedication and loyalty have been in evidence in the Order of Malta and its affiliate Orders since their earliest days. The Order of Malta is therefore an inspiration to us all for its remarkable ability to embrace modernization while at the same time nobly adhering to the traditions upon which it was founded.

The different orders of chivalry that exist: the Bailiwick of Brandenburg of St. John and Jerusalem; the respective Order's of St. John of The Netherlands and of Sweden; the Venerable Order of St. John; and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, have commonalities and similarities that reach back to the days and circumstances in which they were established. And although the Sovereign Military Order of Malta is recognized as the original Order, together they foster the traditional values of Christian morality and service to the sick and the poor; values that are enshrined in the Order of Malta's motto: "*Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum*" – defence of the faith and assistance to the suffering. This faith-based aspect of the Order is reflected in its emblem, the eight-pointed Maltese Cross. Representing the eight Beatitudes that marked the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, the use of the Maltese Cross by all five Orders attests to the commonalities and similarities that they each share.

II. THE ORDER OF MALTA IN CANADA

In Canada, links with the Order of Malta can be traced back to the earliest years of European settlement, with Knights of Malta present in Acadia and New France.

However, it was not until 1953 that the first Canadian Association of the Order of Malta was established and had among its first Board of Directors the Chief Justice of Canada at that time, Thibaudeau Rinfret. The Association soon prospered and came to include a number of other significant Canadian figures, including the Governor General, the Right Honourable Georges Vanier, and his wife, the Honourable Pauline Vanier; as well as Paul-Émile Cardinal Léger and Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter.

Today, the Order continues to make an indelible mark across Canada, reaching out to those most in need. By way of example, the Order's auxiliaries in Montreal work in six homes for the aged, which house upwards of 1,000 patients. In Quebec City, the Order is involved in a project assisting children with severe disabilities, while in Ottawa it is working on a day clinic project connected to the Shepherds of Good Hope, who provide shelter to the homeless. In Toronto, the Order contributes to the operational budget of St. Michael's Hospital, to a shelter for the homeless and to a soup kitchen, while they have also established the Canadian Golden Cross Association; a group that visits and supports those with disabilities, the elderly, the chronically ill, as well as their care givers. And in Vancouver, the Order runs eye clinics for those who, for whatever reason, have fallen through the cracks of the social service system and who would not otherwise receive the care they so obviously need. However, these virtuous acts do not even begin to describe the impact that the Order of Malta is having on countless numbers of Canadians on a daily basis.

To those less familiar with the Order of Malta, the range of activities that it attaches itself to is inspiring. This inspiration is also derived from the Order's humble approach as it caters to those that society has perhaps either neglected or forgotten. However, to those of us intimately familiar with its good works, there is great pride in

the fact that the Order remains relevant despite the passage of time. Yet, perhaps more importantly, it is pride in the fact that the Order remains true to its foundations of helping those less fortunate.

III. CANADA’S RECOGNITION OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

The seminal moment in the relationship between Canada and the Order of Malta occurred on June 4th 2008 when the Government of Canada opened official relations with the Order, joining the likes of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland in so doing. And although official relations between Canada and the Holy See had been established some 40 years earlier, the formal recognition of the Order represented a new stage in the progression of ties between Canada and the Church.

In his letter of recognition to the Grand Master, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable David Emerson, wrote that Canada held the Order of Malta in the “highest esteem” and appreciated its “longstanding charitable and humanitarian work.” He continued:

“It is our hope that establishment of official relations with the Order of Malta will facilitate high-level contact for members of the Order with officials of the Canadian government, particularly in relation to areas of potential future cooperation.”

This recognition of our longstanding relationship of close ties was truly a cause for celebration. Moreover, recognition came at minimal cost to Canada, as it is being

managed entirely out of the Canadian Embassy to the Holy See, as is the case with many other countries enjoying diplomatic relations with the Order. On a personal note, it was with great joy that I received the news that our government was to open official relations with the Order of Malta, and not least because I have always been convinced of the inherent benefits to Canada that come with solidifying this relationship.

For example, Canada now has relations with a sovereign international entity with an active international presence around the world; an entity that dedicates itself entirely to relieving the suffering of others and the promotion of good relations between states. Given the Order's network of associates throughout the globe and its presence in some of the most troubled parts of the world, the Order can emerge as another valuable listening post for the Canadian government, contributing to its ability to predict and assess developments in regions not always readily accessible.

The Sovereign Order's influence is also far greater than its budget or membership would initially suggest. For example, its associates typically tend to be prominent politicians and decision-makers, as well as those from the professional, industrial and business sectors who are initially attracted to the Order by humanitarian interests that mirror those of their wider community. Therefore, the Order's ability to affect real change and to enlist solid, high profile support is both substantial and far-reaching.

At a more practical level, the Order is principally involved in offering medical equipment to hospitals and clinics, as well as medicine to a number of developed and

less developed countries. In this regard, Canada is renowned the world over not only for its health care system, but also for its health care professionals and equipment.

IV. HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES

Aside from the undoubted advantages to Canada in formally recognising the Order of Malta, there is also much that Canada can learn from an institution possessive of over 900 years of experience. For example, upon its establishment in the Holy Land in the 11th century, the Order began its humanitarian goal of providing medical services to sick pilgrims of all religious faiths. Since that time, the Order's contribution to humanitarian good works around the world is admired for its selflessness, professionalism and competence. Whether the elderly, the disabled, refugees, the homeless, terminal patients, children or substance abusers, the Order of Malta seeks to provide comfort and dignity to those most in need. Moreover, it is a vocation that it exercises irrespective of the religious profile of a people, territory or country. For this purpose, the Order currently operates more than 200 hospitals, medical centres and ambulance corps. And while the majority of the Orders hospitals are located in Europe, it also operates a maternity hospital in Bethlehem, a hospital in Haiti, in addition to medical centres in Lebanon, Latin America and several sub-Saharan countries.

Malteser International, the Orders relief corps, tackles the great emergencies that unfortunately continue to afflict entire populations – from natural disasters, to epidemics and armed conflicts. This manifested itself most recently in the Order's efforts to relieve hunger in East Africa and the threat of cholera in Haiti. However, it is also engaged in post-disaster reconstruction and long-term development

programmes, attesting to its holistic response to crisis situations. In this effort, it is presently engaged in approximately 100 projects in 30 developing countries.

In many ways, the Order of Malta was an ‘international organization’ long before the term was even invented. It brought together people from various countries and cultures, and engaged in humanitarian work long before institutions such as the United Nations ever existed. Presently, the Order, through the effort and dedication of over 12,500 Knights and Dames, 80,000 volunteers and 20,000 doctors, nurses and health care professionals, is responding to needs in over 120 countries and has emerged as the second largest emergency health care provider in the world after the International Committee of the Red Cross.

V. THE GRAND MASTER AND CANADA

As you are all well aware, in terms of its governance, the Order is led by the Grand Master, who is both the sovereign and religious head of the Order of Malta. The current Grand Master, His Most Eminent Highness Frà Matthew Festing, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting in Rome in May 2009 when he hosted a dinner on my behalf, brings to the post of Grand Master an impressive background of service as Colonel in the Territorial Army and as Deputy Lieutenant for Northumberland. From my engagements with him, it is clear that Fra’ Matthew’s tenure sees a continuation of the centuries-long tradition of the Order of Malta; namely, to defend the faith and to serve the less fortunate.

Indeed, I was delighted to have had the pleasure of hosting Fra’ Matthew Festing on his first official visit since the Order’s recognition. Grand Master

Festing attended the International Fleet Review hosted by Canada's Navy in Halifax, Nova Scotia from June 26-29 2010 as part of the Canadian Naval Centennial. As an aside, as an Honorary Captain of the Navy, I was initially amazed to learn that the Order of Malta maintained one of the world's largest navies throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Scores of European naval officers completed apprenticeships aboard the Order's ships before returning to their home countries. The system spread many of the Order's naval practices among European navies where they eventually became traditions, with many mariners of the pre-Confederation era of Canada being members of the Order.

During the Grand Master's visit, and attesting to the high esteem in which both he and the Order are held, Fra' Festing met with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, and Ministers of the Government of Canada, including the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence, and the Honourable Keith Ashfield, then Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway. The Grand Master's programme also included meetings with officials of the Province of Nova Scotia and military authorities, in addition to a visit to the Faculty of Medicine of Dalhousie University to meet with representatives of the Faculty's International Health Office.

As this visit of the Grand Master represented his first in an official capacity since the establishment of official relations between Canada and the Order, it therefore allowed for the exchange of views with Canadian officials on a range of international development issues of mutual concern; issues that the Sovereign Military Order of Malta has long performed a vital humanitarian role in, and in some of the most vulnerable regions of the world. It is inevitable that, through increased information

sharing and cooperation, Canada and the Order of Malta can achieve great things in alleviating the suffering of others, both at home and abroad.

VI. THE JOHANNITER AID ASSOCIATION

At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to thank today's gracious hosts, the members of the Johanniter Aid Association, for your work in furthering the traditional values of the Orders of St. John. As you know, the original Order was comprised of various national associations known as "langues." Within these, there were Pories, which were in turn sub-divided into Bailiwicks and Commanderies. During the Reformation, the Protestant Knights of the Bailiwick of Brandenburg remained true to the values of the Order of St. John and from them, the Johanniter Order subsequently evolved in the spiritual knightly manner of the Order of Malta.

Today, the Knights and Dames of the Order of Malta and the members of the Alliance of the Orders of St. John continue to fulfil their founding values of defending the faith and serving the sick and the poor. The work that is undertaken in this effort illustrates how a small though dedicated group of people can make a difference in the world. Thanks to your faith, your dedication to the traditional values symbolised by the Maltese Cross, and your ability to apply these values in the modern world, the Order's of St. John will continue to make a vital difference to the lives of those less fortunate.

VII. CONCLUSION

The world has of course changed markedly since the Order of Malta was first established. It therefore no longer needs to preoccupy itself with issues such as the defence of a territory, nor the promotion of trade or political interests. Instead, the Order of Malta of the 21st century, as a neutral and apolitical body, strives to continue its humanitarian mission and to promote dialogue, fraternity and cooperation among the many different peoples and civilizations of the world in an open and impartial manner.

The Order now has over 100 bilateral relations, 7 official relations with states and over 50 postal agreements. It has United Nations sanctioned passport authority and 11 Permanent Observer Missions in the main intergovernmental and international organizations, including the United Nations, the Food and Agricultural Organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The magnitude of its influence is testament to the value of its work and the respect it commands from numerous states and institutions. Of particular note, though a Catholic based organization, the Order has formal links with a number of Muslim countries. This connection, while always historically significant, has become increasingly so in more recent times.

The activities of the Order are, in large measure, facilitated by the establishment of such relations, allowing its embassies to oversee the receipt and the delivery of essential humanitarian supplies, and to ensure the protection of humanitarian personnel. At the same time, the recognition of the Order by more than half of the member states of the United Nations is pivotal in guaranteeing its independence and neutrality.

It is a privilege to be associated with the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and its affiliate Orders. That it continues to remain relevant is testament to its founding principles and its dedication to those principles. And as it approaches the milestone of its first millennia in existence, I am convinced that the Order of Malta will continue to strengthen its impact as well as its ability to assist the most vulnerable peoples of the world.

Thank you very much for your attention.