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RELIEF FOR DARFUR: THE SOVEREIGN ORDER OF MALTA CALLS FOR PROTECTION FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS IN SUDAN

Khartoum/Cologne, 19 May 2006. The Sovereign Order of Malta has appealed to all parties involved in the conflict in Darfur to guarantee security for the humanitarian organizations working there, so that they may continue to run relief programs to help the local population. Two of the parties involved in the conflict signed a peace agreement on 5 May in Nigeria. Other rebel groups refuse to acknowledge this agreement.

A Sovereign Order of Malta medical team operates three healthcare centers in the north of the Sudanese province of Darfur under the banner of Malteser International. In tense negotiations with rebel groups the Sovereign Order of Malta has obtained a promise for the security and safety of its staff.

"The situation in Darfur is dramatically bad. Pregnant women cannot be looked after; children cannot get vaccinations. Provisions of medicines in healthcare centers have been exhausted," explains Georg Nothelle, head of the Africa desk: "That is why we are under extreme time pressure to get the necessary security agreements, to keep our own staff members out of danger and to be able to provide urgently needed relief for the population without delay."

The Sovereign Order of Malta will support and expand basic healthcare structures for 80,000 inhabitants in the region south of the province's capital, El Fasher. A second stage plans for vaccinations and an extended fight against malaria. The further expansion of the relief programs will depend on whether security promises are kept.

The Sovereign Order of Malta has been active in Southern Sudan since 1998, and in Darfur since summer 2004. Eleven international and 237 local staff members provide basic health care for 630,000 people in Sudan.

New York, May 22, 2006