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STATEMENT

BY

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to the
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**FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

PLENARY MEETING ON HIV/AIDS

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the 58th session of the General Assembly. I am confident that your efficiency and capacity will lead the good work of this session.

It is useless to underline the importance of this meeting. According to 2002 statistics, HIV/AIDS now afflicts 42 million people (as compared to 37 million in 2001), with 4.2 million new HIV infections worldwide. These figures reveal the extremely perilous nature of the disease. It has been estimated that, by the year 2010, there will be at least 60 million and possibly 80-110 million people with HIV/AIDS. Each day in 2002, 8,500 people died of AIDS worldwide. 1,670 were children under 15 years of age. At the same time, 14,000 people per day were newly infected. Of the 42 million people affected, 95% live in developing countries.

Although public education programs have been implemented, and medical treatment is available, the aforementioned statistics prove that the spread of HIV/AIDS is causing a global catastrophe irrespective of so-called *risk groups*. In fact, we are facing what the Secretary General has called *the most formidable development challenge of our time*. Basic medical care, affordable medicines, prevention and research, together with technical assistance, can be substantial factors, through an increase in financial support. It is absolutely necessary to mobilize large-scale resources, both in terms of financial means and in terms of skilled personnel.

First of all, there is a need to consolidate the current projects and programs, by means of suitable structures and professional management systems; and there is a need to make certain that the quality of work can be maintained and further increased. HIV/AIDS control must remain a specific priority over the long term, particularly in those countries and regions where destitution

is most urgent, where adequate public services are lacking, and where self-help initiatives are worthy of being sponsored. Such programs should also focus on providing clean drinking water, setting up sanitation facilities and offering public education and nutrition programs.

But all the legal, practical and social measures taken in the struggle against HIV/AIDS must be accompanied by education. An education based on the traditional value of morality.

The HIV/AIDS crisis is a central subject of focus for the humanitarian facet of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The *Comite Internationale de l'Ordre de Malte* (CIOMAL) has established programs of medical and palliative care for sufferers of HIV/AIDS. The primary goal of these programs is to protect against vertical infection by providing mothers with access to screening, pre-natal therapies and treatments. The Order is particularly active in Mexico (in collaboration with the National Institute of Perinatology and the AmeriCares Foundation), in Argentina, Kenya, and South Africa. The Order's presence in this field stands in accordance with its tradition of medical assistance.

Mr. President,

The Order of Malta is fighting HIV/AIDS to its utmost. We are confident in upholding our collaboration in solidarity with the Member States of the United Nations, the entire international community and civil society. We can continue to talk, we can continue to recommend, but what we really need is to convert words into action through the common effort of the whole international community. We are convinced that only a global strategy can be effective to combat the threat represented by HIV/AIDS.

Thank you very much Mr. President.