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STATEMENT

BY

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**Ambassador and Permanent Observer of the
Sovereign Military Order of Malta**

TO THE

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

New York, September 15, 2006

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Madame President,

Honorable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates:

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta commends the work of the High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. As shown in the Report of the Secretary General last May,¹ there are now almost 200 million persons who have migrated from their home countries to other countries, most seeking a better life for themselves and their families. The movement of such large and growing numbers of persons across international borders in the quest for financial opportunities as well as other improvements in their quality of life poses important economic issues for the world community. The High Level Dialogue is a useful forum for exploring these issues. The Sovereign Order encourages continuing discussion of these issues.

As the Secretary General also notes,² however, the migration of such vast numbers of persons also presents correspondingly large challenges in protecting the human rights of migrants. We must never let a staggeringly high number – 200 million – blind us to the reality that each of those millions of men, women, and children is an individual human being. Thus, the Dialogue and later consultations must not consider only how migration affects the macro-economic employment conditions in the receiving country, or how the billions of dollars in remittances may impact the home country. The

¹ International Migration and Development, A/60/871, 18 May 2006.

² *Id.* ¶¶ 255-276.

Dialogue also must consider the ways both types of nation must protect the human rights of each individual who has chosen to pull up stakes and relocate to a new country, often while leaving some family members behind.

Madam President, these are issues of profound historical and continuing concern to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. When the Sovereign Order was created over 900 years ago, our mission was to protect and care for persons in need, particularly the poor and those traveling far from home. We follow this mission today. Aided by our well-established international sovereignty, which is reflected in full diplomatic recognition by 94 other states, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta provides care to the sick and the needy in more than 120 countries. We conduct these programs through our 12,000 Knights and Dames who are members of the Sovereign Order as well as through more than 11,000 employees and 80,000 trained volunteers. In addition to various permanent programs of medical aid in various regions of the world, the Sovereign Order provides disaster relief during periods of armed conflict and natural catastrophes wherever the needs arises.

As part of this world-wide program of aiding the poor, we have found that migrants often are among those who the most vulnerable and the most defenseless. In too many countries, they live on the margins of society. Far too often, the so-called “host” countries treat these men, women and children as anything but guests or as new members of the political and economic community. Too often they are invisible, or worse.

Therefore, while the High Level Dialogue and future consultations among developing nations and developed nations address the economic effects of migration, both positive and negative, the Sovereign Order urges all affected states to give equal time to considering the dangers that migrants face. These dangers include the well-documented problem of trafficking in human being. Trafficking may endanger the lives of the persons seeking to find a better life elsewhere or, perhaps equally shameful, may doom them to a life of servitude that is the modern-day equivalent of slavery.

Madam President, none of these problems is fanciful or exaggerated. Each threatens the fundamental human rights of millions of persons to life and to economic well-being. And each type of problem can be eliminated or dramatically alleviated, if only states have the will to act.

In particular, I note the often abusive treatment that migrants receive under what are euphemistically called “guest worker” programs. These persons too-often receive sub-standard wages, wages that frequently are offset by exorbitant charges they are forced to pay to their employers for food and lodging. Similarly, the so-called “brokers” who recruit these migrants in their home country and ship them like chattel to other countries often hold them bound to such inflated fees that the migrant workers may remain perpetually in bondage, unable to pay off their supposed debts or to provide the amount of earnings to their families that originally stoked the migratory dream in the first place. Enforcing these schemes is, often times, the misuse of government-issued travel documents: employers seize their migrant workers’ passports, thus as a practical matter confining them to their servitude, no matter how grim and abusive the conditions.

Madam President, abuses like these afflict millions of migrant men, women and children. The abuses are real. The victims are our fellow human beings. Governments can provide real relief. There are some practices that states can and must *cooperate* to address, and others that *individual* states themselves can and must remedy.

In the short term, it may appear economically advantageous to governments to ignore these challenges. Some home countries may be content to export their citizens, so that they can generate remittances that may alleviate local poverty or fuel local investment. Some receiving countries, both developing countries and developed, may perceive an economic benefit from using low-cost suppliers of goods – goods whose low cost may simply reflect subsidies extracted from the toiling of underpaid and overworked migrant laborers.

That is why, Madam President, it is absolutely vital that the High Level Dialogue and all subsequent discussions of migration and development must pay careful attention to the obligation of all affected states to protect the human rights of the growing number of men, women and children whose dreams of a better life are in jeopardy every day.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta appreciates the opportunity to present its views on these important issues.

Thank you, Madam President and Members of the General Assembly.