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**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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**Attaché**

**of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Malta  
to the United Nations**

**TO THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**FIFTY-FIRST SESSION**

**Item 3 of the provisional agenda**

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"**

**New York, March 1, 2007**

Madame Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address today, on behalf of the Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of Malta, the Fifty First Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Order would like to commend the Commission on its important work and congratulates the members of its bureau for their knowledgeable leadership of the Session.

Madame Chair,

The Report of the Secretary-General on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child notes that systemic gender-based discrimination inhibits the ability of girls to protect themselves from HIV infection or to respond fully to the consequences of infection. Worldwide, females account for more than 60 percent of 15 to 25 year olds living with HIV/AIDS. Often, girls affected by the pandemic are less likely to have access to health services. Indeed, girl children as well as boy children around the world are in danger of becoming victims of HIV/AIDS disease even before birth. This is an area in which the Order of Malta has expertise and programs and seeks to improve women's health by reducing the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The primary focus of the Order in this area is to protect against mother-to-child infection

by providing mothers with access to screening, pre-natal therapies and treatments to combat mother-to-child infection. In Mexico, the Order of Malta's program brings infected women into pre-natal care-all of whom have given birth to healthy children.

Madame Chair,

The Order of Malta strongly believes that the empowerment of women by providing adequate health and education services is a crucial building block for a democratic nation and a strong economy. Let's look at Afghanistan, a country that has suffered decades of occupation and civil war and is left with an inadequate infrastructure to really support women in their pregnancy. There, the Order of Malta operates an educational program for midwives, training them how to best care for pregnant mothers when hospital care is unavailable. This program has been able to improve, not only the primary health of women and their infants, but also the health infrastructure in general as well as creating jobs. The Order of Malta looks forward to improving women's lives in Afghanistan and globally. Only through true collaboration with institutions and organizations can the committee help to bring about major changes in women's lives.

Madame Chair,

The West Bank is another region in which the Order of Malta has provided critical health services for women. According to the 2006 report of the Secretary-General on assistance to the Palestinian people, continued closures within and between the Gaza Strip and the

West Bank have severely challenged the Palestinian health system's ability to function at appropriate levels. UNICEF's Humanitarian Action Report 2006 also noted that basic equipment for maternal and newborn health was lacking in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Order of Malta, through its Maternity Hospital of the Holy Family in Bethlehem, is very aware of the obstacles to providing maternal care for women in the West Bank. The hospital plays a vital role in the community by guaranteeing quality obstetrical care. This hospital has also become the reference hospital for the region, receiving an ever-increasing number of complicated cases. A mobile unit from the hospital serves the pre-natal needs of women in the outlying areas and continues to expand its services, despite the ongoing conflict in the region. It is a beacon of hope in a troubled region. Thus, women's access to health services has been improved, paving the way for development and peace.

Madame Chair,

The Order of Malta is also addressing the health needs of women and girls in a war-torn region of Africa. Civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has caused more than 4 million deaths since 1998. Still today there are assaults by armed groups against the population, women and girls being particularly vulnerable to these attacks. That is why, in addition to basic medical care and food security, the Order of Malta has started a specialized program to provide psychological assistance to counteract the effects of violence against the numerous women and girls who were brutalized in the war. Many of the counselors employed by the Order have been victims themselves and use their own

experience to help others. Tens of thousands of mistreated girls and women seek medical and psychological aid in the health centers supported by the Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In summary, Madame Chair, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta has long worked towards the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls and is uniquely suited for this role. It is a politically neutral, supranational entity with full diplomatic relations with over 96 countries around the world. Having a particular commitment with respect to international aid, the Order is able to ever-more comprehensively serve the needs of women and girls and lay the groundwork for development and peace. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta appreciates this opportunity for exchange in this area of great concern and looks forward to further collaboration with the United Nations, Member States, NGOs and other groups in strengthening the means for women and girls to fulfill their full potential in society in the 21st century.

Thank you.