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STATEMENT

BY

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to the United Nations

ON THE OCCASION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

New York, September 24, 2007

I am honored, on behalf of the Sovereign Order of Malta to have the opportunity to participate in H.E. the Secretary-General's high-level event on climate change.

In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment prophetically proclaimed in its Stockholm Declaration that defending and improving the human environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal to be pursued in harmony with the established and fundamental goals of peace, and of worldwide economic and social development. The Sovereign Order of Malta respects the link recognized in this Declaration between environmental health and social well-being, as well as the implicit responsibility of the current generation to secure the health of the planet for future generations.

Pope John Paul II linked protecting the environment to “authentic human ecology,” which promotes both human dignity and respect for creation. We are not merely consumers of a once seemingly boundless supply of natural resources, but trustees of an environment, which not only is limited in the fruits which it shares, but sensitive as well to the way mankind uses those gifts. How we treat the environment is a true measure of our stewardship, and a sign of respect for our Creator.

Achieving true stewardship of the environment requires a shift of focus in both the moral aspect of our behavior as well as technical advancement. Morally, we must not allow the desire to obtain more material things to blot out our responsibility to the basic needs of people, our environment, and our future. Technologically, our innovation and entrepreneurial spirit can facilitate the coming of a more environmentally conscionable energy path. These shifts can be accomplished through changes in lifestyle based on traditional moral virtues, which can lead us into an era of sustainable and equitable development in which the concept of “sacrifice” is no longer looked down upon with disdain.

As noted by the President of the 61st General Assembly, H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, during the informal thematic debate this July and August, climate change is an issue of economic development as much as one of global justice and equality. Inaction on climate change would have serious social and economic implications and would magnify the existing inequalities between developed and developing countries. History teaches us that human relations are easier during times of plenty, but when resources are scarce the earth’s fragile ecosystems become strained, groups and individuals react quite differently to deteriorating circumstances, and this can lead to a breakdown of established codes of conduct, and even outright conflict. Projected climate change will exacerbate the occurrence of infectious diseases such as malaria and dengue fever and further strain the natural resources necessary for survival. Widespread prevalence of infectious diseases leads to increasing levels of poverty. Poverty in turn is strongly associated with infectious diseases not typically associated with climate change,

such as HIV/AIDS, and in many situations leads to civil unrest. Standing alone, all three situations, the strains on natural resources, increased levels of poverty, and civil disenchantment, can lead to conflict, and generally all are considered emergency situations. Together, however, the three work synergistically leading to an inevitable situation of misery. Members and volunteers of the Order—living in the service of others, of the poor and the sick, regardless of their race, origin or religion—bear daily witness to this painful cycle, and understand that all three situations must be addressed.

Ultimately, human rights are inextricably linked with the environment, with neither preservation of the environment nor protection of human rights being capable without keeping the other in mind. As stressed by many delegations during the informal thematic debate, the crisis of climate change has caused violations of the right to life and human rights. The Order believes human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and social obligations towards the common good are met.

The most important cause of the current climate change crisis is human activity and we have allowed it to become an extraordinary crisis. Therefore it demands an extraordinary response from all of us individually and collectively. Such stewardship requires a keen awareness of the environment, and challenges us to use our intelligence, ambition, and ability to adapt and innovate to discover the earth's productive potential in an environmentally sustainable way while satisfying our needs. We must learn to see the mutual connection that all living things, including ourselves, have in the world's

ecosystem—plants and animals have to be granted some level of dignity and rights. Additionally, development planners must focus on integrating environmental conservation with their development objectives. With environmental consciousness as a major part of development, it is less likely that wide scale environmental destruction will occur.

Such sensitivity to the fragility of the only place that humans can call home, must be cultivated and nurtured through renewed education in solidarity. Such teachings exalt the principles of respect for one another, for the recognition of that which is great within all of us, even if unseen, for understanding, and patience. With these beliefs, the prospect of delving into a difficult task such as stemming the tide of environmental destruction through climate change will be seen as necessary and right to preserve a viable home planet for future generations.