

## Background Information: The Order of Malta in Lebanon

In September 2005, the international Order of Malta held a conference on the Holy Land attendees including representatives from the Holy Land, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon as well as the High Charges and members of the Sovereign Council and the Papal Nuncio to the Holy Land and Lebanon Archbishop Batti.

The highlights of the conference included statements for the Grand Chancellor H. E. Jean-Pierre Mazery, President of the Lebanese Association, H.E. Marwan Sehnaoui, Raphael Debbone, government councilor.

The primary concern was identified as the defense of the faith in the Middle East. Mr. Deone stated that to defend the Christians in the Middle East and to give them power, three elements of quality, service and dialogue should be assured: schools, healthcare and the orientation for the development of small and medium enterprises that would guarantee their survival.

H.E. Marwan Sehnaoui's introductory speech insisted on the intervention of the Knights in defense of the faith for love and service. This action in Lebanon should be encouraged, supported, reinforced and developed in order to serve an example for other countries of the region, as the role of the Order in the region is fundamental.

Over twenty years ago, the Lebanese Association created and has controlled socio-medical centers in disadvantaged regions with mixed population of Christian and Muslim. The rapprochement between Christians and Muslims can be illustrated by the example of one of the Centers in the Southern Lebanon managed by a great Muslim Shiite woman, Mrs. Rabab El Sadr Caraffedine. These Centers need financial help of the West for their survival, development and well-being. Each of the 13 Centers requires \$100,000 annually. The great sums of money from Arab countries and Iran for Muslim organizations create an unbalance that we shall try to recuperate. Places that were once the Citadels of the Order, the great fortresses for the Defense of the Christian Faith, now, in juxtaposition, have become the Clinics of the Hospitaller.

The Christians of the Middle East lead their everyday battles for survival. Their faith is alive. We, the members of the Order of Malta, whose primary mission is the protection of the religious faith, must be present there. We must intervene in this region of the world. We must contribute to the success of this mission.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Knights came to save and to protect the Christians of the East with their swords and service to the poor and the sick. Today we ask for the assistance of the members of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the support of the Christians in this Eastern land where Christianity was born through the development and perpetuation of the hospital and social works of the Sovereign Order of Malta.

The Holy Land, Jordan, Iraq Syria and Lebanon are the starting point of Christianity. Today the human needs in these countries are considerable: the Christians are a minority and lead an everyday battle for the protection of their faith and for their own survival. Their future depends on the favorable climate of the co-existence of all the communities based on the mutual respect.

The Sovereign Order of Malta responds to this attempt of Christian minorities and during these years in Lebanon it managed to demonstrate its humanitarian and social actions in the whole country in service to “the poor and the sick” of mixed confessions, and created the link of love and essential and constructive comprehension between people. In this sense the Order’s vocation is to spread and develop its action.

Mrs. Rabab el Sadar Caraffedine, an influential Muslim woman who was awarded the Order of the Merit of the Order of Malta for her humanitarian activity stated that “Collaboration for charity purposes and piety is the best and surest way for the dialogue of our cultures as it leads to Heaven, while a political dialogue is based only on personal interests.”