



SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

AMBASSADOR TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Human Rights Council
Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Rights of the child and violations of the human rights of children in armed conflicts
Statement by Prof. Michel Veuthey,
Ambassador to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons,
Deputy Permanent Observer in Geneva

Excellencies,

The Sovereign Order of Malta reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the full protection of children affected by armed conflict, particularly from all forms of exploitation and trafficking. We thank the High Commissioner for human Rights for this important report, which sheds light on the systematic and interconnected violations endured by children in conflict settings, from recruitment as child soldiers to sexual exploitation, forced labour, and forced marriage.

Exploitation is not only a grave violation of children's rights; it is increasingly used as a weapon of war, destroying lives and weakening the social fabric of entire communities for generations. Through its global relief agency, Malteser International, the Order of Malta witnesses firsthand the devastating impact of conflict on children and the vulnerabilities that expose them to exploitation. The Order supports children affected by conflict in contexts such as Ukraine, Gaza, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan, providing emergency relief and protection services in partnership with local organizations and UN agencies. The Order of Malta also works to strengthen awareness and cooperation among relevant stakeholders, an approach highlighted during the Rome Conference on Human Trafficking in December 2025, and is exploring training initiatives on human trafficking with partners such as UNITAR, UPEACE, and the University of Nice, including components on the prevention, protection, and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict.

Protecting children in armed conflict requires urgent and coordinated action. Three priorities are essential: prevention through early identification of risks, accountability for perpetrators, and comprehensive recovery for victims. Children who survive exploitation need more than liberation; they require long-term support to heal, learn, and rebuild their lives. Recovery must therefore be child-centred, trauma-informed, and rooted in community support. Faith-based and local actors play a crucial role in this effort, as they are often the first to reach the most vulnerable children.

Excellencies,

The Sovereign Order of Malta stands ready to strengthen its cooperation with States, United Nations agencies, and the civil society. Children must never be treated as collateral damage of war; they are the foundation upon which lasting peace is built. Protecting them from exploitation today is essential to restoring their future tomorrow.

Thank you.



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OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

AMBASSADOR TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Human Rights Council – A/HRC/61/37
Report of the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict
Statement by Prof. Michel Veuthey,
Ambassador to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons,
Deputy Permanent Observer in Geneva

Excellencies,

The Sovereign Order of Malta reaffirms its commitment to the protection of children in armed conflict and expresses its appreciation to the Special Representative for her comprehensive report ([A/HRC/61/37](#)).

As underscored in the report, children affected by armed conflict continue to suffer grave and systematic violations of their rights. These include abduction, recruitment and use as child soldiers, sexual violence and exploitation, killing and maiming, child marriage, forced contraception, and exposure to extreme trauma, such as witnessing the execution of family members. Such experiences inflict profound and long-lasting harm on children's mental health, development, and overall well-being.

In these environments, the risk of trafficking and exploitation increases dramatically. Displacement, family separation, and the collapse of basic services leave children without protection and acutely vulnerable to criminal networks and armed actors.

Addressing the nexus between armed conflict and child trafficking must therefore be a priority. This requires strengthened coordination among key mechanisms, including the mandates of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, as well as UNODC, humanitarian actors, governments, and relevant non-State actors, including faith-based organisations. Such coordination is essential to ensure timely prevention, protection, and comprehensive support for affected children.

Humanitarian organizations play a critical role not only in ensuring the survival of affected populations, but also in identifying children at risk and protecting them from abuse, exploitation, and trafficking.

Protecting and rehabilitating children in armed conflict is both a moral and legal duty¹ and an investment in the future of societies. Exploitation and trafficking inflict damage that outlasts the conflict itself, with lasting consequences for peace and stability. For this reason, the Sovereign Order of Malta stresses that the dignity and rights of every child are inviolable and must be protected without exception, even in the most difficult circumstances.

¹ Children affected by armed conflicts are protected under international humanitarian law (The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), international criminal law, and international labor law (ILO/C/182 Worst Forms of Labour Convention).



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AMBASSADOR TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Human Rights Council – A/HRC/61/45
Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children,
Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh
Statement by Prof. Michel Veuthey, Ambassador to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons,
Deputy Permanent Observer in Geneva

Excellencies,

The Sovereign Order of Malta thanks the Special Rapporteur, Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh, for her report (A/HRC/61/45), which refers to the [Rome Conference](#) co-organised on 10 December 2025¹ by the Order of Malta, Praeveni Global, and the Pontifical Gregorian University, and for her six years of service as mandate holder.

The Order of Malta expresses grave concern over the widespread and persistent sexual exploitation and abuse of children highlighted in the report. Escalating conflicts, climate-related crises, humanitarian emergencies, and the unchecked spread of new technologies are creating an environment in which children are increasingly exposed to grave violations of their rights. The international community must act with urgency and resolve effective protection.

The private sector must also be held accountable. As clearly stated in the report, existing measures remain inadequate across several sectors, including finance, new technologies, and mining. Both harmful practices and the lack of robust safeguards continue to enable sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

At the same time, the Order of Malta welcomes the progress achieved, particularly in supporting legislative reforms and strengthening inter-agency cooperation at the United Nations level.

Mr. President,

The Sovereign Order of Malta remains firmly committed to the protection of children worldwide. Guided by its centuries-old humanitarian mission, our national associations and Malteser International provide life-saving assistance and psychosocial support to children in vulnerable contexts, including in conflict zones such as [Ukraine](#) since 2022. Our national associations also uphold strict safeguarding standards, including regularly updated child protection policies.

Our national associations are also fully aware of the issue, and many have taken proactive measures. Order of Malta Ireland, for example, has adopted a [child safeguarding statement and policy](#) that is reviewed and updated annually in line with best practices in child protection.

Thank you.

¹ [Report of the Rome Conference Against Human Trafficking: 25 Years After the Palermo Protocol, A Call to Action](#) The Conference concluded that urgent action is required to effectively prevent and combat human trafficking, in particular through the mobilisation of additional resources and the broadening of engagement from governments, civil society, including faith-based organizations, academia, businesses, media, local communities, NGOs, and victims and survivors.



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AMBASSADOR TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Human Rights Council – A/HRC/61/38
Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violences against Children
Statement by Prof. Michel Veuthey, Ambassador to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons,
Deputy Permanent Observer in Geneva

Excellencies,

The Sovereign Order of Malta thanks the Special Representative, Ms. Najat Maalla N'jid for her [report](#).

The Order of Malta would like to express its concern about the rise in violence against children, particularly online.

As emphasized by the Special Representative, the growing use of new technologies among children and young people tends to make them increasingly vulnerable to violence, sometimes committed among themselves, such as with cyberbullying, or by much more organized networks using new technologies for the purpose of child trafficking.

From a legal perspective, such acts constitute serious violations of international law. It is important to remember that there are already many international and regional instruments in place to combat violence against children, particularly online. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Global Digital Compact adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2024, and the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) 2020 Guidelines on Child Online Protection.

From a spiritual perspective, such acts constitute a grave breach of the child's dignity. On several occasions, His Holiness Pope Leo XIV warns us about the dangers that new technologies and artificial intelligence may pose to human dignity.

Mr. President,

The Sovereign Order of Malta, rooted in a thousand-year tradition of humanitarian service to the most vulnerable, reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the protection and well-being of children worldwide. Present in over 120 countries, the Order remains steadfast in its mission to assist children in need, especially in conflict-affected regions such as Ukraine and the Holy Land, where our teams are actively engaged. We also extend our sincere gratitude to the Special Representative for mentioning her collaboration with faith-based organizations and religious leaders. Such partnerships are indispensable in promoting and disseminating best practices for the protection of children. Thank you.