



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.