

**Address by H.E. Antoine ZANGA, Ambassador of Cameroon and Doyen of the  
Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta**

**Solemn Audience on 11 January 2022**

Your Excellency,

For the second year in a row, and because of health restrictions, the Solemn Audience at the Diplomatic Corps will unfortunately not take place in its traditional form with the physical presence of all the Heads of Mission. Nevertheless, the essential is preserved, thanks to this ingenious message exchange that you have so opportunely set up and the support of technology that enables our illustrious colleagues, and a wider audience, to follow us live on the Order of Malta's YouTube channel.

The past years have been marked by major threats to international peace and security. These are enormous challenges for all humanity: terrorism, climate change, migratory movements, the rise of populism, the arms race for unlimited power, and international hypocrisy and selfishness. One of these challenges, if not the major one, turned out to be a formidable pandemic - Covid-19 - appalling because of its great capacity to defy conventional prevention and treatment protocols. This challenge, with its social and economic disruption, has disturbed our daily lives, realigning our various commitments and reformulating our priorities.

As always, the main victims of these multifaceted threats are to be found in the most disadvantaged sectors, and without solidarity the tragedy can only be perpetuated. But fortunately, alongside those who still believe in humanity, the knights continue to erect bulwarks to provide support and hope to the destitute, without distinction of religion or origin.

Under your leadership, Your Excellency, throughout the year 2021 and faithful to a

thousand-year-old tradition, the Order's members, employees and volunteers have been able to help those in need through an efficient network, providing first aid to refugees and displaced persons living in war and conflict zones, intervening in areas affected by natural disasters, offering healthcare, organizing medical and social campaigns and accompanying people with disabilities. These activities are performed in some 120 countries on a permanent basis, and after the many emergency interventions the Order of Malta's teams remain in place to reduce poverty and vulnerability.

We must pay special tribute to the campaign, carried out with determination and dedication, to address the medical and social consequences of the pandemic for the past two years. From the very first moments of the crisis, the Order's teams were mobilized to meet the many emerging needs, including healthcare, testing, the production of masks, economic and social support, up to the vaccination campaign.

Partnerships have been established with several countries to strengthen synergy in fighting Covid-19 and to relieve hospitals with their ever-increasing admissions. Respiratory devices, protective equipment, medicines, patient assistance, home testing and follow-up, rehabilitation and vaccination support, and other aids, have been provided. These arrangements, which we would like to see further extended to less fortunate countries, are a concrete manifestation of international solidarity which you never cease to support through numerous diplomatic initiatives.

Health restrictions have not been able to curb the diplomatic influence of your illustrious institution. Throughout the past year there has been numerous visits of heads of state to the Magistral Villa: H.E. Egils Levits, President of the Republic of Latvia; H.E. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany; H.E. Ingrida Simonyté, Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania; and many other high-ranking foreign personalities such as the Foreign Ministers and Deputy Ministers of

Palestine, the Russian Federation, the Argentine Republic, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of El Salvador, the Republic of Panama as well as the visit of the Minister of Tolerance of the United Arab Emirates.

The Order's diplomatic network continued to expand with the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Hellenic Republic and with the Kingdom of Lesotho.

You continue to be a regular participant in discussions on issues such as peacekeeping, sustainable development goals, human trafficking, biodiversity, climate change, refugees and migrants. Religious freedom is one of your priorities, as demonstrated by your participation at the World Interfaith Summit in Dubai and your presence at the G20 Interfaith Forum in Bologna. You have been able to introduce the religious component into multilateral humanitarian diplomacy and contribute to the advancement of freedom of belief and interreligious dialogue.

In fact, as the Holy Father pointed out in an audience he granted you last June, "You speak with the diplomacy of the heart". Yes, solidarity and humanity are your leitmotifs and we, who represent our respective states, have the responsibility to accompany you in this noble undertaking and to promote these ideals in our countries.

This family, which is the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Order, has continued to renew itself with new ambassadors presenting credentials: H.E. Maria Fernanda Silva, Ambassador of the Republic of Argentina; H.E. René Juan Mujica Cantelar, Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba; H.E. Carlos Antonio Cordero Suarez, Ambassador of the Republic of Honduras; H.E. Anatolia Urecheanu, Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova; H.E. Bernhard Kotsch, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany; H.E. Eric Chesnel, Ambassador of the Republic of Gabon; H.E. Guzman Carriquiry Lecour, Ambassador of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay and H.E. Linda

Scott, Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia. We extend them a warm welcome and wish them success in their mission.

I would be remiss if I did not solemnly renew the condolences of the entire Diplomatic Corps following the death of His Excellency, Venerable Bailiff Fra' Matthew Festing, 79th Grand Master of the Sovereign Order of Malta. May his soul rest in peace.

Your Excellency,

The time has now come for me to convey to you the best wishes of the Diplomatic Corps for this year that has just begun. These wishes are extended to all your loved ones, to the illustrious members of the Sovereign Council, to all the Order's members and volunteers and to their families. May the New Year bring you peace and hope.

Happy New Year 2022.