Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this item for the first time on behalf of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The Order is the world’s oldest humanitarian organisation and has a longstanding history of assisting those who have been forced from their homes. In carrying out its activities, The Order shares the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence upon which the office of UNHCR was founded. We are committed to assisting those in need regardless of race, religion, class or creed.

In recent years, the challenge of providing refuge to those displaced has grown, both in scale and complexity. The increase in demand for assistance has coincided with a period of fiscal austerity as the world economy seeks to recover from its own crisis. The resulting scarcity of resources must be shared among a growing number, with many experiencing forced displacement for increasingly prolonged periods.

Most recently, crises have been regionalised, placing pressure on already under resourced areas and overwhelming local support services. This has made capacity building for host countries a crucial component of providing humanitarian support.
In response to these trends, the Order of Malta, through its humanitarian arm Malteser International, seeks to empower host communities through training and infrastructure development. We believe that through capacity building, the challenge of providing for refugees can also be an opportunity to develop the welfare capacity of host countries.

The Order is active on the Turkey-Syrian border, providing training and employment to the Turkish citizens of Kilis. We support a Syrian school in the city, subsidising its running costs and training local teachers to engage with traumatised children. This ensures that the children’s education continues despite their unfamiliar surroundings.

In north eastern Thailand, Malteser International has been assisting refugees from Myanmar for three decades. The protracted nature of the situation, has made the need for local capacity building essential. Malteser’s efforts mirror the approach taken by UNHCR, placing responsibility on the hosts to provide for the displaced, whilst helping strengthen their ability to do so. Medical training of Thai citizens has boosted their capacity to assist not only refugees but also the surrounding rural villages.

In conjunction with local partners, Malteser is also enhancing water, hygiene and sanitation standards by developing local facilities and increasing awareness. Both the refugee and Thai community are central to the design and implementation of these programmes. These skill and knowledge transfers aim to help these actors operate independently in the future. Infrastructural development can answer the immediate needs of those displaced and provide a legacy for future development.

Protracted refugee crises have unfortunately become a recurring theme. The responsibility lies with the international community to reverse this trend by ensuring resettlement and repatriation initiatives are well devised. Malteser International is helping to combat this challenge by developing the civic capacities of countries of origin, paving the way for the repatriation of the long term displaced. In Kayin State, Myanmar, we are currently preparing water, sanitation and health facilities in 84 villages which will facilitate the return of Thai based
refugees. These multi-purpose facilities are being designed to answer numerous development challenges. First, access to clean water and sanitation facilities will reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. Additionally, newly constructed community buildings will act as cyclone and flood-resistant evacuation centres, improving the ability of these communities to withstand natural disasters.

With financial constraints set to characterise the nature of humanitarian efforts in the foreseeable future, the Order is encouraged by the UNHCR’s commitment to developing partnerships with other humanitarian actors.

Through the strategic provision of assistance to refugee communities, we see the opportunity to initially protect and ultimately empower those in need. Emergency response can be integrated with longer term development programmes. This serves to provide immediate relief and also to enhance the capacities of host communities. Through the efficient use of finite resources, the Order of Malta will continue to assist refugees and their praiseworthy hosts wherever possible.

Thank you for your attention.