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Sovereign Order of Malta

Statement by H. E. Ambassador Günther A. Granser

Permanent Observer to the United Nations and other International
Organizations

At the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

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Mr. Chair,

Since it is the first time that I have the honor to speak, I would firstly like to renew my congratulations on your election. We acknowledge the balance, professionalism, sensibility and guidance, which with the excellent support of the Secretariat, you have observed in the successful preparation of this session.

With a focus on drug prevention, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, the Sovereign Order of Malta aims to elaborate and expand on synergies with UNODC on the way to UNGASS 2016.

The Sovereign Order of Malta, the oldest humanitarian entity worldwide with over 900 years of history, has its government headquarters in Rome. The Order is recognized as a sovereign subject of international law, whilst remaining independent and neutral, irrespective of political allegiances, without distinction of religion, race, origin or age. The Order has bilateral diplomatic and official relations at ambassador's level with 105 States, multilateral relations with the EU and the United Nations, where it was admitted by General Assembly Resolution, supported by all Members, as Permanent Observer on August 24, 1994.

Humanitarian consequences of drug use, misuse and abuse are universally recognized today on all levels, including States as a humanitarian and, more precisely, public health challenge. We believe this understanding is the result of the successful humanitarian diplomacy, which is also the mission of the Order. The essence of this diplomacy is persuading decision makers and opinion leaders to act, at all times, in the interest of vulnerable people, and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles.

The Sovereign Order of Malta has a specific vocation in the protection of health and assistance to people affected by diseases. In this context, the Order has been proud to support UNODC where it counts most, among the people who are most vulnerable. Through our support UNODC has been able to provide services to prevent HIV among women who use drugs in Southern Africa, in particular in Namibia, caring for the health of this doubly vulnerable and doubly stigmatized target group in an unconditioned way, putting them and their health FIRST and putting them on a path that might eventually lead to recovery.

Ultimately, the Order will be in a position to support the UNODC's Youth Initiative, which is promoting young people worldwide not to be only a target of drug prevention initiatives, but protagonists of prevention and health education. Youth is inspired to work for a society where drugs are not accepted as a way of life, where young people are protecting their own health, maintaining critical capacity, future perspectives and dreams. With this initiative, the Sovereign Order of Malta is continuing its work to protect the health of the most vulnerable and support prevention initiatives in school and community.

Our contribution wants to underline that it is time to start to work concretely for the overall health of those who need it. Those children and adolescents which because of personal vulnerabilities or difficult situation in their family, school or community, may be at risk of starting to use drugs. Those that have been so vulnerable as to develop drug use disorders and need treatment, health care and social protection. And, those who are in recovery, who need access to continuous and ongoing support addressing possible relapse as for any other chronic condition, with prompt concern, care and compassion.

The Order want to express appreciation to the health oriented approach adopted by UNODC in the application of the international treaties and, in particular, for the work of drug demand reduction targeting children and adolescent at risk, people affected by drug use disorders, and patients with HIV, Hepatitis ad TB.

The preparation of UNGASS 2016 should be inspired by this new orientation looking to the person as a value and responding to the population affected with humanitarian spirit, social cohesion and science based methods.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the Sovereign Order of Malta is pledging full support and active participation in addressing the problem of substance abuse from a humanitarian perspective in the debate leading to the UNGASS 2016.

Thank you, Mr. Chair