



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

Ambassador to monitor and combat trafficking in persons

**Calling for the Ethical Imperative to Stand Up for Children in War - High Level Meeting
On the Occasion of the International Day of Peace**

Co-Organized by:

Arigatou International, Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Child Rights Unit, Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations in Geneva, the Sovereign Order of Malta, the Latter-day Saint Charities, and the World Council of Churches, in collaboration with other partners.

**Statement by Professor Michel Veuthey
Ambassador to monitor and combat trafficking in persons,
Deputy Permanent Observer in Geneva
Geneva, 22 September 2025**

Excellencies, Dear colleagues,

Human trafficking in armed conflict, especially trafficking of children, is one of the most widespread and devastating crimes of our time. Its most brutal face is the recruitment and exploitation of children as soldiers, one of the gravest violations of children's rights and of international humanitarian law.

Today, thousands of children are still used in conflicts. They are targeted because they are vulnerable, cheap to maintain, easily manipulated, and quickly indoctrinated. For armed actors, they are instruments of war. For society, they should be its most protected members.

The consequences are devastating. Many are sent to the front lines without training, facing almost certain death. For those who survive, the suffering is far from over. They return deeply traumatized, often forced to commit unspeakable violence, and burdened with scars (psychological, social, and legal) that make reintegration into families and communities extraordinarily difficult. War does not only kill children. It turns them into weapons. This is a profound perversion of childhood.

This crime preys on the most vulnerable: street children, orphans, unaccompanied minors, and those living in rural poverty. It is recognized internationally as one of the worst violations of children's rights and as one of the gravest crimes against humanity.

On this International Day of Peace, we must reaffirm a simple ethical imperative: children are never soldiers. They are never instruments of war. They are never expendable.

Standing up for these children is not optional. It is a moral and spiritual duty, a legal obligation, and the ultimate test of our collective humanity.

The Sovereign Order of Malta is currently actively involved in the informal consultations on the draft resolution on the *«Promotion and protection of the human rights of women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations: ensuring justice, remedies and reparation for the victims»* which will be presented at this Human Rights Council. We are asking the Core Group to **include references to human trafficking** in the resolution text, particularly regarding **sexual exploitation** and the **online recruitment of children**. Such references would help establish a clearer framework for remedies for victims of these human rights violations. Thank you.