



General Assembly

Forty-eighth Session

103rd Meeting

Wednesday, 24 August 1994, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Insanally (Guyana)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Earthquake in Algeria

The President: May I, on behalf of all the members of the General Assembly, extend our deepest sympathy to the Government and the people of Algeria on the tragic loss of life and extensive material damage resulting from the earthquake that struck Algeria on 17 August 1994.

May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity, and respond promptly and generously to any request for help.

I call on the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Lamamra (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for the kind words you addressed, on behalf of the General Assembly and on your own behalf, to the Government and the people of Algeria with respect to the earthquake that struck my country, resulting in the death of 171 people and in injury or homelessness for thousands more. I express the gratitude of the Government and the people of Algeria for the solidarity manifested by many countries and by the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The Government of Algeria mobilized fully to face the catastrophe. We have been unwavering in our efforts. The

earthquake site is in fact where Emir Abd Al-Kadir fought for the liberation of our country. We shall spare no effort to rebuild the area.

We shall not forget those who have shown solidarity with us. I reiterate my thanks to you personally, Mr. President, and to the General Assembly for the solidarity expressed today. I shall not fail to convey this sympathy and solidarity to my Government and to the victims and their families.

Agenda item 127 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (Article 19 of the Charter) (A/48/853/Rev.1/Add.3 and Add.4)

The President: Members will recall that at its 102nd plenary meeting, held on 29 July 1994, the General Assembly had before it the provisional version - in blue - of document A/48/853/Rev.1/Add.3 indicating that Haiti had made the payment necessary to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter. At that meeting the Assembly took note of that information, and of the fact that, owing to an oversight, the Assembly had not been notified earlier of this payment, which was made last June, and that, had Haiti been allowed to vote at the 101st plenary meeting, held on 28 July 1994, it would have voted in favour of draft resolution A/48/L.60, entitled "Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982".

Members will have noted that the final version of document A/48/853/Rev.1/Add.3 indicates also that Angola and the Solomon Islands have made the payments necessary to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

Regrettably in the case of Solomon Islands, owing to an oversight, the Assembly was not informed earlier that Solomon Islands had made, last March, the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

As concerns Angola, since the issuance of the provisional version of document A/48/853/Rev.1/Add.3, Angola has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the fact that Angola and Solomon Islands have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter?

It was so decided.

The President: In a related matter, I should also like to inform the Assembly that, in connection with the vote held on 28 July 1994 on draft resolution A/48/L.60 on the law of the sea, the Permanent Representative of Solomon Islands has indicated to the President by a letter dated 1 August 1994 that, had Solomon Islands been allowed to vote, it would have voted in favour of draft resolution A/48/L.60.

May I take it that the General Assembly also takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The President: This information pertaining to Solomon Islands, as well as the information concerning the same matter communicated by the delegation of Haiti, will be reflected in the official record of the 101st plenary meeting.

I now draw the attention of members to document A/48/853/Rev.1/Add.4.

In a letter contained in that document, the Secretary-General informs me that, since the issuance of his communications dated 9 March, 5 April, 26 May and 29 July 1994, Mauritania has made the necessary payment

to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (continued)

Notification by the Secretary-General under Article 12, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations: Note by the Secretary-General (A/48/411/Add.3)

The President: As members are aware, in accordance with the provisions of Article 12, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations, and with the consent of the Security Council, the Secretary-General is mandated to notify the General Assembly of matters relative to the maintenance of international peace and security that are being dealt with by the Security Council and of matters with which the Council has ceased to deal.

Members will recall that the Assembly took note of the notes by the Secretary-General on agenda item 7 contained in documents A/48/411 and Add.1 and 2 at its 57th and 86th plenary meetings on 17 November and 21 December 1993.

In this connection, the General Assembly has before it a note by the Secretary-General issued as document A/48/411/Add.3.

May I take it that the Assembly takes note of that document?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: Request for the reopening of the consideration of agenda item 40 (The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom democracy and development)

Letters from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly and to the President of the Security Council (A/48/928, A/48/954)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/48/985)

The President: I now draw the attention of the General Assembly to two letters from the Secretary-General addressed to both the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (A/48/928, A/48/954), and to the report of the Secretary-General on the establishment of a human rights verification mission in Guatemala (A/48/985).

In order for the General Assembly to consider this matter in the near future, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of agenda item 40, entitled "The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development".

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to reopen consideration of agenda item 40?

It was so decided.

The President: The Assembly will consider agenda item 40 at a future date to be announced in the Journal.

Agenda item 121 (continued)

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations: Approval of the appointment of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Note by the Secretary-General (A/48/983)

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly, in its resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994,

"Decide[d] to establish an Office of Internal Oversight Services, under the authority of the Secretary-General, the head of which [would] be at the rank of Under-Secretary-General" (*para. 4*).

By that resolution, the Assembly further decided that the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services:

(a) Should be an expert in the fields of accounting, auditing, financial analysis and investigations, management, law or public administration;

(b) Should be appointed by the Secretary-General, following consultations with Member States and approved

by the General Assembly. For that purpose, the Secretary-General should appoint the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services with due regard for geographic rotation and in so doing should be guided by the provisions of paragraph 3 (*e*) of General Assembly resolution 46/232 of 2 March 1992 whereby the Assembly decided, in particular, that, as a general rule, no national of a Member State should succeed a national of that State in a senior post and there should be no monopoly on senior posts by nationals of any State or group of States;

(c) Should serve for one fixed term of five years without possibility of renewal;

(d) Might be removed by the Secretary-General only for cause and with the approval of the General Assembly.

In the light of the provisions of resolution 48/218 B, the Secretary-General proposes to appoint Mr. Karl Theodor Paschke as Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services for one fixed term of five years, effective 1 October 1994.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to approve this appointment?

It was so decided.

The President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 121.

Agenda item 180

Observer status for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in the General Assembly: draft resolution (A/48/L.62)

The President: I call on the representative of Italy to introduce draft resolution A/48/L.62.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Italy is pleased and honoured to be among the sponsors of the draft resolution contained in document A/48/L.62, entitled "Observer status for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in the General Assembly".

The Order of Malta has been in existence for almost 1,000 years. For the past two centuries its headquarters have been in Rome.

The 64 sponsors listed in the document were later joined by Bhutan, Chad, Djibouti, Jamaica, Guinea-Bissau and Mali. As a result, the number of sponsors of the draft resolution now totals 70 countries belonging to all regional groups.

The text includes two preambular and two operative paragraphs. In the preambular paragraphs the draft resolution recalls the Order of Malta's long-standing dedication to providing humanitarian assistance and its special role in international humanitarian relations. It also emphasizes its intent to enhance cooperation between the United Nations and the Order of Malta. Operative paragraph 1 contains the decision to invite the Order of Malta to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer. Operative paragraph 2 requests the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to implement the present resolution. The text, as members have noted, is taken largely from the 1990 resolution granting observer status to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

How can one define the Order of Malta? It is certainly not a non-governmental organization; nor is it a State, since it has no territory and no population of its own: it is what the Romans used to call a *sui generis institutio*, in the unique situation of having lost its territorial power two centuries ago but enjoying international recognition. In fact, 64 States Members of the United Nations have full diplomatic relations with the Order - a privilege, may I say, that is not shared by any other institution of this kind.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta is by far the most ancient institution in the world whose mission it is to provide humanitarian assistance. It was founded in the year 1070 under the name *Hospitaliers de St. Jean-de-Jérusalem*. Since then it has dedicated its activities to the needy, the sick and those wounded in war and in peace. This goal is its very essence, its *raison d'être*. The goal is achieved through the hospitals and health facilities that the Order has established, and continues to establish, throughout the world and through the individual services it provides in homes, shelters and the humble dwellings of the poor.

Today the Order of Malta carries on its humanitarian activities in over 100 countries, with special attention to disadvantaged groups, such as lepers, the elderly and abandoned children. It also makes an outstanding contribution to assisting refugees and victims of civil wars. To give just one example, the Order of Malta was one of the very first institutions to provide assistance to those

suffering from recent events in the former Yugoslavia, where it supplied food, medical aid and transportation.

This is why we think that the extraordinary, multifarious and world-wide contribution which the Order of Malta makes to international humanitarian relations - and which it has made for almost 1,000 years - fully justifies granting it observer status in the General Assembly. Such a decision would provide the Order of Malta with an important incentive to redouble its already considerable efforts, expanding them into areas in which the United Nations has been increasing its actions to alleviate human suffering.

The draft resolution on which the General Assembly is about to take action is meant not only to recognize the role of the Order of Malta in international humanitarian relations, and not only to commend the dedication of the thousands and thousands of people all around the world involved in its volunteer services for the sick and the needy: it is also, and above all, meant to facilitate and enhance the Order's humanitarian activities in a concrete way by improving its links with the United Nations and ensuring better coordination in this vital area for mankind.

The President: I should like to propose that, if there is no objection, the list of speakers for the debate on this agenda item now be closed.

It was so decided.

Mr. Sy (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): Ambassador Paolo Fulci, the Permanent Representative of Italy, has just introduced the draft resolution contained in document A/48/L.62 of 22 August 1994, which proposes that the General Assembly grant observer status to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The Senegalese delegation's cosponsorship of this draft resolution indicates our full support for this welcome initiative, and I therefore do not need to add anything.

However, while confirming this full support for the draft resolution, I take this opportunity to say how important and meaningful the decision we are about to take will be. It will be important because it is part of the very *raison d'être* of our Organization, the paramount objective of which is to create better conditions for lasting international peace and security. Establishing such conditions of peace and security will enable the peoples of the world to encourage dialogue over confrontation and solidarity over the self-interest of States. It will, in short, help all peoples of the world to aspire to a better life and

to coexist peacefully. The decision will be meaningful because it will be a recognition of the unquestionable merits of an institution whose mission and goals have for over 900 years been to ease the suffering and pain of humanity and to contribute to its well-being. In all the continents, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta has admirably fulfilled this role, to the extent that almost one third of States Members of the United Nations recognizes it as a veritable member of the international community.

For its part, Senegal is definitely one of those States, since it has had close and fruitful diplomatic relations with the Sovereign Military Order of Malta for nearly 30 years. These relations have given rise to excellent cooperation and have allowed the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to work in Senegal on many humanitarian projects, among which is the fight against the terrible disease of leprosy. Thanks to the Order's financial, logistical and scientific support, the Dakar Institute of Applied Leprology has made serious inroads against this dangerous disease.

If, in accordance with the theme of its fiftieth anniversary, the goal of the United Nations has always been and remains to create a better world for all peoples, it can be said that the Sovereign Military Order of Malta has a place reserved for it in this Assembly. That place - which, moreover, it should have taken up long ago - is more than ever deserved today, especially since, with the draft agenda for development and the scheduling of such important conferences as that on social development, current trends favour work on solving economic and social problems.

Accordingly, the international community has everything to gain by exploiting the experience in this field of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a symbol of peace, friendship and solidarity among all peoples.

Mr. Cassar (Malta): My Government is pleased to add its support for the proposal for observer status in the General Assembly to be granted to the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta, more commonly known as the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, in view of its past historical ties with Malta and its people.

As the Permanent Representative of Italy remarked in presenting this proposal, the Order already enjoys observer status at several other organizations linked to the United Nations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In addition, the Order has diplomatic relations

with many countries, including my own, and has delegations to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Commission of the European Union, the Council of Europe, and United Nations Offices in Geneva and Vienna, among others. This acknowledgement of the Order's humanitarian role has greatly enhanced its ability to provide assistance through the exchange of information and the facilitation of cooperative efforts.

Since its inception in the eleventh century, the Order has been well known for its dedication to the alleviation of human suffering. The Order benefits today from a structure which allows it to delegate a large part of the control of its operations to its priories, sub-priories and national Knights Associations worldwide, thus allowing it to respond promptly and appropriately to crises and needs as they arise. Their activities range from the operation of established medical facilities to the provision of emergency aid on an ad hoc basis to the victims of war and other disasters.

It is important to note in this context that the Hospitaller Order interprets its vocation in the widest sense and does not limit its efforts to caring for the sick but seeks to alleviate the suffering of those living in or forced into the margins of society - the poor, the persecuted and the displaced - and by doing so sets a bold example of the safeguarding of human rights and the dignity of all persons, regardless of race, colour or creed.

As grave humanitarian situations punctuate nearly every corner of our international community, the United Nations aid programmes and other humanitarian organizations are finding the task of deciding where and how best to administer aid increasingly overwhelming. As a result, a more cooperative and efficiently coordinated international effort could only benefit further those who desperately need assistance.

For those reasons, my Government believes that the granting of observer status in the General Assembly to the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta would further enhance the Order's humanitarian activities and allow for closer cooperation not only between the Order and the United Nations but also with those within the United Nations whose aim it is to alleviate what is clearly an ever-increasing cycle of human suffering.

Mr. Barac (Romania): I am not a member of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, but it is a privilege and a great honour for me to speak under agenda item

180, entitled "Observer status for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in the General Assembly".

It is already well known, but I would like to stress once again in this Hall, that the Sovereign Military Order of Malta is the oldest institution in the world whose mission is to provide humanitarian assistance. Since its foundation in the eleventh century, the Order has been steadfast in its dedication to alleviating human suffering in war and in peace, and over the centuries this vocation has earned it universal respect for its humanitarian activities in the world.

The Order's primary objective - to alleviate suffering and bring the comfort of charity to the afflicted - is embodied in its commitment to providing assistance. The Order achieves this goal wherever it can, through health facilities and through individual services in homes, shelters and the poor dwellings of the disinherited. Its commitment is not to the sick alone, but also to the marginalized, the persecuted and the displaced, thereby safeguarding human rights and dignity.

Today the Order provides assistance at a level that far exceeds anything it has traditionally been able to offer. The octagonal cross has become the emblem of hospitals - some with a high degree of specialization - as well as of hundreds of clinics, first-aid stations and dispensaries with a broad network of structures and with specialized assistance for the needy. Among the groups to which the Order dedicates special attention are the handicapped, diabetics, pregnant women, abandoned children and the elderly. It also arranges for the collection and distribution of medicine, especially during epidemics and after natural disasters.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta has diplomatic relations with 64 States Members of the United Nations, making it an equal member of the international community. I would like to mention that diplomatic relations between Romania and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta were established more than 60 years ago, on 28 January 1933. I would also like to emphasize that, through its associations in various European countries, the Order provided emergency humanitarian assistance to Romania in the aftermath of the 1977 earthquake and again after the revolution of December 1989.

For those reasons, Romania cosponsored the request for the inclusion in the agenda of the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly of an additional item concerning observer status for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta

in the General Assembly, and it is also among the sponsors of the draft resolution before us.

Finally, I would like to express my deep conviction that the granting of such a status to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta would definitely enhance cooperation between the United Nations and the Order of Malta, as well as facilitating the Order's humanitarian activities.

Mr. Catarino (Portugal): We have before us a draft resolution concerning the granting of observer status in the General Assembly to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. My delegation counts itself among those that have cosponsored that draft. We did so bearing in mind the historical ties between our country and the Order of Malta and our long-standing diplomatic relationship.

Our position also reflects our appreciation for the outstanding and lasting work that has been carried out by the Order of Malta in the service of international solidarity and humanitarian action: namely, the improvement of health conditions in developing countries. We believe that the Order of Malta can make an important contribution to the fulfilment of the goals of the United Nations in the humanitarian sphere, and we share the conviction that the status of observer in the General Assembly will permit the Order to perform its duties better, by enhancing its cooperation with the United Nations system.

My delegation would therefore like to join the previous speakers in supporting draft resolution A/48/L.62 and to express the hope that it will be adopted unanimously without a vote.

Mr. Yoo (Republic of Korea): At the outset, let me join you, Mr. President, in expressing sincere condolences on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Korea on the human and material suffering sustained by the people of Algeria in the recent earthquake. My delegation extends sincere solidarity and best wishes for a speedy recovery from this tragic natural catastrophe.

The Government of the Republic of Korea is pleased to join the other sponsors of the draft resolution proposing permanent observer status for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in the proceedings of the General Assembly.

Since the eleventh century, when it established the first hospital service in human history, the Sovereign

Military Order of Malta has been consistently dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of war, natural catastrophe and other calamities. Today, with its broad network of structures all over the world, the Order provides commendable assistance and valuable emergency services to the needy, the abandoned and the afflicted, thus safeguarding the dignity of man.

At the threshold of the third millennium, despite the advent of the post-cold war era, the world still suffers from nationalistic, ethnic, religious and political conflicts, as well as from natural disasters. In view of these deteriorating world humanitarian situations, it is all the more necessary to enhance cooperation between the United Nations and international humanitarian-assistance institutions. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta, an outstanding, exemplary humanitarian assistance institution of international reputation, well deserves privileged relations with the United Nations. The delegation of the Republic of Korea is happy to note that the Sovereign Military Order of Malta has already been accorded observer status with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Migration Organization, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

More than ever before, it is imperative for all of us to encourage the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a neutral and impartial humanitarian-assistance institution, to assist and protect the victims of various calamities while avoiding any politicization of its work. I am convinced that, in granting permanent observer status to the Order and thus consolidating its cooperation with the United Nations, we can encourage the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to perform better and to facilitate the accomplishment of the duties to which it has been devoted.

Mr. Whannou (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): It was a source of great satisfaction for the delegation of Benin to have been among the first delegations to request the General Committee to include in the agenda of the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly an item entitled "Observer status for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in the General Assembly". My delegation made this request particularly because of the close, long-standing bonds between my Government and the Order of Malta, and because of the Order's important, laudable humanitarian activities in Benin.

I should recall that it was the representative of Benin, Ambassador Mongbe, who introduced this subject at the

meeting of the General Committee. He strongly supported inclusion of the item in the agenda, emphasizing that the Order - which was founded in the eleventh century - richly deserves observer status not only because of its very long history as an institution with a unique legal status, enjoying full diplomatic relations with more than 60 States, but also because of the humanitarian activities it carries out in more than 100 countries.

Today, I reiterate Benin's full support for draft resolution A/48/L.62. Its adoption would foster the cooperation that exists between the United Nations and the Order of Malta, and would promote the development of the humanitarian activities - which are among the priority goals of the United Nations - that the Order carries out, often in cooperation with the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system, with a view to making the world a safer and more peaceful place for all its people.

Mr. Castellanos Carrillo (Guatemala) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I wish on behalf of my delegation to speak briefly of the worldwide activities of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

As everyone knows, the Order engages in a great number of international humanitarian activities throughout the world. Since its foundation, it has become one of the largest, most active institutions in the world. Its work with the sick and the disabled on five continents is invaluable and, in many countries, irreplaceable: it is not content with working only in the developed world, where, to be sure, it does a fine job; its work goes on in many developing countries as well.

In Latin America, the work of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta has been repeatedly acknowledged by virtually every country. The experience of my own country enables me to state that the Order provides support and cooperation in areas of common benefit, including donations in cash, food and medicine; for Guatemala this is invaluable and irreplaceable assistance. I take this opportunity before the General Assembly to pay tribute to the Order for all it has done.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta is the oldest humanitarian-assistance institution in the world. Ever since its foundation in Jerusalem almost nine centuries ago, the Order has been steadfast in its dedication to alleviating human suffering in war and in peace. Over the centuries this vocation has earned it universal respect

for its humanitarian activities in the world and recognition by 64 States Members of the United Nations.

Today the Order provides assistance at a level that far exceeds anything it was traditionally able to offer. The octagonal cross has become the emblem of hospitals, some with a high degree of specialization, but also of hundreds of clinics, first-aid stations and dispensaries, with special attention being given to the handicapped, lepers, diabetics, pregnant women and abandoned children. It also arranges for the collection and distribution of medicine, especially in cases of epidemics and natural disasters.

The Order was one of the first to call attention to the humanitarian plight of the victims of civil war in the former Yugoslavia, and to provide assistance to them. This has taken the form of food, medical and pharmaceutical aid and transportation for the sick, the wounded, the persecuted and the displaced.

From what I have said, it is clear that the Order has long participated in the work of the United Nations family. The General Assembly should acknowledge this by granting observer status to the Order. This would unquestionably strengthen cooperation between the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and the United Nations and would, first and foremost, facilitate and help expand the humanitarian activities carried out by the Order.

Mr. Chaves (Kyrgyz Republic): The Kyrgyz Republic expresses very sincere solidarity with and condolences to the people of Algeria in this moment of trial.

It is a great honour for me, on behalf of the Kyrgyz Republic, to offer support for the draft resolution on the granting of permanent observer status to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in the General Assembly.

The United Nations is the home of the global community, and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta has since its very foundation been at the service of all mankind, without distinction as to colour, race or creed. It was established under the label of an order of knighthood by a hospitaller order, that is, an order that renders help to the wounded, the sick and the victims of war.

The United Nations, an institution created for the maintenance of peace and for the elimination of war, must recognize this institution - the first in the world that began continuously to help the victims of war who, we all know, are primarily those in society least able to protect themselves: women, children and the defenceless.

In keeping with international law and its development, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta represents a *de jure* institution unique in character and, as it has been said here this morning, it is recognized by many countries of the world. But the United Nations has a particular interest in recognizing an institution which enhances the role of international law in helping mankind to cope with disasters, catastrophes and war.

The particular interest of the Order of Malta in the programme to control leprosy deserves special mention here. This contagious disease has afflicted mankind since time immemorial and it remains incurable. It exists in all countries of the world; even in the most advanced countries there are cases of leprosy. The Order of Malta has made tremendous efforts towards the eradication of this disease which, although still incurable, is now controllable thanks to modern medicine.

For all those reasons, the Kyrgyz Republic fully supports the draft resolution and the initiative that it be adopted unanimously this morning.

The President: We shall now take a decision on draft resolution A/48/L.62.

I should like to announce that Papua New Guinea has become a sponsor of this draft resolution.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/48/L.62?

Draft resolution A/48/L.62 was adopted (resolution 48/265).

The President: Before calling on the first speaker in explanation of position, may I remind delegations that such explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Bierenbaum (United States of America): The United States Government has great respect for the important contribution to humanitarian matters made by the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. We appreciate as well the contribution made by this organization to the work of international organizations, including the Economic and Social Council.

However, my Government must disassociate itself from the consensus reached on granting it observer status at the General Assembly. Observer status at the General Assembly is properly limited to non-member States and

intergovernmental organizations. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an exception and a unique case. The ICRC is expressly granted status and responsibilities by international conventions which are widely ratified. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta does not have similar status and thus, in our view, should be treated as the worthy non-governmental organization that it is.

We are seriously concerned that the status accorded non-governmental organizations and the status accorded observers to the General Assembly will be diluted by this action. There are many organizations having "a special role in international humanitarian relations". If we use this as our criteria, numerous non-governmental organizations and other organizations will seek observer status. The General Assembly will not be able to draw lines. The impact on the Organization could be quite severe.

In light of the action taken, we recommend the establishment of a working group to study the criteria that should be used by the General Assembly in determining which organizations should be given observer status in future. We will be making a formal proposal to this end in due course. Once such a working group has completed its work and the criteria are agreed to by the General Assembly, we will then be in a much better position to analyse any future request for observer status and make consistent and careful decisions on these questions.

We hope that no further request will be brought before the General Assembly until the working group has produced its analysis and the criteria are agreed upon.

Ms. Wilmshurst (United Kingdom): My delegation would not have voted for this resolution had it been put to the vote. This is not because of any doubts we have about the nature of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta itself, but the question of granting observer status to the Sovereign Order should not be considered on its own. It should be put in the context of observer participation generally in the work of the Assembly.

The granting to organizations of observer status in the Assembly is not, of course, governed by express provisions of the Charter. The Assembly has created its own practice. The observer status of United Nations specialized agencies is regulated by agreements with the United Nations but other intergovernmental organizations are left to be dealt with by individual, ad hoc resolutions of the Assembly. Until very recently, and leaving aside national liberation movements, these ad hoc resolutions by the Assembly

covered only intergovernmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations have their own special arrangements. In particular, and in accordance with Article 71 of the Charter, there are arrangements for non-governmental organizations to be in relationship with the Economic and Social Council.

However, in 1990 the Assembly made an exception to its practice and granted observer status to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The debate on the resolution granting observer status to the ICRC was very short, but it was clear that the ICRC was regarded as an exceptional case. As my delegation mentioned in the General Committee when this item was up for consideration as to whether it should be put on the agenda, the Permanent Representative of Italy said in the debate on the ICRC,

"In the view of the sponsors" - and there were 138 of them - "this proposal should not be considered, indeed could not be considered, in any way as a precedent for any possible request to grant the same status to non-governmental organizations.

The special - I would even say unique - role conferred upon the ICRC by the international community and the mandates given to it by the Geneva Convention make of it an institution unique of its kind and exclusively alone in its status." (*A/45/PV.31, pp. 76-77*)

The Assembly has now adopted a resolution for another organization of non-governmental nature to have observer status in the Assembly. The arguments in favour of the proposal are not, in the view of my delegation, of the same cogency as for the ICRC. We have, however, been faced with the fact that many countries here represented have special relations with the Sovereign Order, and this has given the Order, in their view, a special claim. My delegation has gone along with the decision today because it is aware of the very strong support that exists for the granting of observer status to the Sovereign Order of Malta, but we do not consider that the decision which we have just taken should represent a precedent for the consideration of any other organization - and let us be in no doubt that there will be more.

We strongly support the continuation of the existing practice with regard to non-governmental organizations and their access to the Economic and Social Council. But if the Assembly were to propose to change its practice in relation to non-governmental organizations, in whatever

field, we believe that the whole matter should be considered more carefully, and the Assembly should decide, before there is a whole host of new applications for observer status, what that new practice should be.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 180?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.