



Contact:

Jill Watson, Communications Manager
jill.watson@malteser-international.org
Phone: 1(305) 448-5111
1(305) 590-1818

For Immediate Release:

March 21, 2017

Malteser International Americas and Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations Speak to Packed Crowd at the United Nations on the Global Refugee Crisis

Humanitarian leaders spoke about helping refugee women find hope and stability with viable opportunities and solutions amid crisis

MIAMI – Over 65 million people are caught in the refugee crisis. Women are most at-risk of being kidnapped, abused, and even killed. Malteser International Americas, an affiliate of Malteser International, the humanitarian relief agency of the Order of Malta, led a side-panel at the United Nations (UN) on Tuesday, March 21, 2017, which brought together thought leaders across the humanitarian spectrum to share their experience how they are helping women find hope and opportunity in the midst of the global refugee crisis.

The poignant panel entitled, **“Women Caught in the Global Refugee Crisis: Finding Hope and Opportunity in Despair”** occurred during the **UN 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**. Speakers to over 200 attendees were Ravi Tripptrap, Executive Director, **Malteser International Americas**; Ninette Kelley, Director of the New York Office, **United Nations High Commission on Refugees**; H.E. Mr. Odo Tevi, **Ambassador of Vanuatu to the United Nations**; James Wiley, COO, **Counter Human Trafficking Compliance Solutions**; and Amal, a **female refugee**.

These global humanitarian leaders offered a hard – and often heart-wrenching – look into the world of female refugees. They offered their experience empowering refugee women, and shared their global relief efforts and solutions, which have led to opportunity and hope for women in countries most challenged with refugees and internally displaced people (IDP).

Malteser International’s empowering *Cash-for-Work* program in Middle Eastern Refugee Camps was highlighted. The program offers trainings and cash-for-work for unskilled females, while offering renewed stability, better livelihoods and stronger family structure.

“Each woman in a refugee camp has a deeply personal story, which is oftentimes accompanied by unconscionable tragedy. Many have lost children and family members. The lives of these mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives are filled with anguish, and their dignity has been stripped from them. Malteser International’s *Cash-for-Work* program empowers women and offers them a life-saving opportunity to create stability and normalcy for themselves --and their families-- within the camps,” said Ravi Tripptrap, Executive Director, Malteser International Americas.

Malteser International has been operating health care programs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, since August 2014, providing emergency relief for refugees, IDPs, and entire host communities.

While the expert panelists presented a wealth of knowledge on the current situation and expected future trends, the audience was captivated by a refugee named Amal who share her harrowing experience of life on-the-run after she fled her country when her husband was captured, injured, and their safety was threatened.

“When you are a refugee you have to leave your whole world behind. In Sudan we were not safe, and we had to run away. We had to leave our home and our jobs and flee to Egypt with our son, but even there we were not safe. I felt alone and scared because my husband was very sick, and my son was only 4 years old. We refugee women have to work hard to keep our hope, even if it is as small as a match. We have to kindle that little flame, to keep holding light in the midst of darkness” said Amal. Amal is now continuing her education in the United States with hopes of becoming a baker.

Co-leading the panel was the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations. The Order of Malta provides aid to refugees along the Balkan route, in European countries where it provides housing and assimilation assistance, and in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas, where many lives fleeing by sea have been saved.

“Respect for human rights today is lower than at any time since the adoption of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Order of Malta strongly believes that every human has rights and that is why we ardently work around the globe to support migrants and refugees,” said Oscar R. de Rojas, Ambassador and Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN. Ambassador de Rojas also provided opening remarks, while Deb O’Hara-Rusckowski, a Dame with the Order of Malta American Association and a Delegate to the United Nations for the Order of Malta, moderated the panel.

For more than 60 years the UN’s High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) has protected and promoted the rights of tens of millions of refugees and displaced people. Ninette Kelley, Director of the New York Office, UNHCR, told the crowd that offered global insight on the refugee crisis and how the agency works to better the lives of women around the world.

“UNHCR’s work builds upon the resilience and strength of refugee and displaced women, helping them to improve their lives, as well as those of their children, families and communities, every single day,” said Ninette Kelley.

While violence, conflict and persecution lead the reasons children and families around the globe flee their countries, climate change is another devastating cause. In 2005, the UN declared the inhabitants of the village of Lataw on Vanuatu to be the Earth’s first climate refugees. As a result, the country of Vanuatu, and H.E. Mr. Odo Tevi, Ambassador of Vanuatu to the United Nations, have been vocal about refugees and displaced people due to climate change and natural disasters.

“In times of crisis women and girls are mostly forgotten. Lending a hand to women and girls during difficult times not only saves them, but it provides hope for the whole family,” said Ambassador Tevi.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by Council resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.

##