

The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Malta

operates on an international level, in accordance with its overall mission. The Emergency Corps of the Order of Malta, with its headquarters in Cologne, Germany, carries out relief efforts in the event of natural disasters or armed conflicts, anywhere in the world, and following the termination of acute emergency phases associated with long-term projects. Operations over recent years include: relief work after hurricane Mitch in Honduras (1998–9), aid to Kosovo (1999–2000), earthquake relief in Peru (2001), assistance for victims after a volcanic eruption in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2002), flood relief in the Czech Republic (2002), and aid to Afghanistan (2002–3); most recently the French Association came to the aid of the victims of the terrible Tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004. Other predominantly medical support operations have been carried out in Zimbabwe and Angola (2002). The International Commission of the Order of Malta, based in Geneva, was founded in Switzerland in 1958 to fight against leprosy and discrimination towards the sick. Since 1999 it has extended its mission to fight against every type of disease or handicap caused by social alienation, most recently in favour of mothers and children afflicted with HIV/AIDS in Third World countries. Leprosy, fortunately, is predicted to disappear across the world, although vigilance in countries at risk will still be needed for some time. It is a member of the International Federation of Associations against Leprosy (ILEP) and co-operates

with the World Health Organisation (WHO).

One of the most important symbols of its historic dedication to the poor and sick is the Holy Family Hospital, Bethlehem, which was created from a hospital run by a religious Order of nuns, the Daughters of Charity. Since the initiative to organize this as a maternity hospital by dame grand cross of honour and devotion Princess François de Lobkowitz (born a Princess of Bourbon–Parma), this hospital has been a beacon of hope in the grim atmosphere of the occupied West Bank of the Jordan. Annual births have declined from their peak, because of the difficulties of access during the recent security emergency, even though there has been a slight improvement since the end of the worst of the *intifada* and more than thirty-two thousand babies have been born there since 1990. The hospital also provides important pre and post-natal care to mothers whose children were born at home, and to infants, on an outpatient basis. The hospital has some thirty-seven beds, five delivery rooms and two operating rooms and in 1998 opened a neo-natal intensive care unit. It is supported by the Order worldwide (the Federal Association, in the United States, for example has raised \$8.5 million to provide a permanent endowment through the Foundation for the Holy Family Hospital, <http://www.hfhfoundation.org>), although the operational responsibilities are carried out by the French Association and is the only hospital operating in the West Bank or Gaza recognised by the Royal College of



Badge of a Knight of Honour and Devotion



Badge of a Knight of Grace and Devotion