



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

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE  
AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA

ICRC – 4th Consultation with States on International Humanitarian Law  
Working Group on Prevention Good Practices  
Statement by Ambassador Michel Veuthey,  
Ambassador to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons  
Deputy Permanent Observer  
Geneva, 6 May 2026

Respect for international humanitarian law cannot be ensured without effective preventive measures.<sup>1</sup> The Sovereign Order of Malta emphasizes the importance of adapting preventive measures and awareness campaigns to their local contexts. **It is crucial to raise awareness of international humanitarian law (IHL) among local populations by facilitating local initiatives relayed through local media, such as local radio, as well as through civil society actors, and local artists, all in local languages.** In this regard, I would like to highlight the **"Woza Africa"** campaign, which was led by the ICRC in 1996.<sup>2</sup> The campaign aimed to raise awareness of IHL among African youth by disseminating its principles through local music artists (such as Youssou N'Dour, Papa Wemba, Lucky Dube, Lagbaja, Lourdes van Dunem) in an accessible and engaging manner. Furthermore, **engaging local religious leaders as advocates for IHL is essential**<sup>3</sup> for reaching the deepest levels of communities. Such figures carry a moral authority that few other actors can match, positioning them uniquely to prevent IHL violations at the source. offer a direct line of influence over armed forces, non-state actors, and civilian populations alike — their sermons providing a powerful and recurring platform from which calls for respect for IHL can resonate with genuine conviction. Beyond direct advocacy, religious leaders can lend symbolic legitimacy to humanitarian rules, easing their acceptance by anchoring IHL norms in moral authority and illuminating their deep coherence with sacred texts. Moreover, by virtue of their proximity to local populations, religious actors are often uniquely positioned to detect early warning signs — identifying behaviors and tensions that may foreshadow future IHL violations before they escalate. Finally, local religious leaders are often trusted figures who can act as a **bridge between warring parties**.<sup>4</sup> In **Colombia**, for instance, the Catholic Church has maintained a close dialogue with both the government and various guerrilla movements, including the FARC and the ELN, for over thirty years, in steady pursuit of a lasting and just peace.<sup>5</sup> **Ultimately, religion at its best has always been a call to peace.** Let us choose to answer that call.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 96, n° 895/896, Autumn/Winter 2014.

<https://international-review.icrc.org/reviews/irrc-no-895896-generating-respect-law>  
*RICR, Sélection française*. Vol. 96 (2014/ 3 et 4) « Générer le respect du droit »

<sup>2</sup> See Kole OMOTOSO, *Woza Africa! Music Goes to War*. Foreword by Nelson MANDELA, 1997, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 95 p.  
[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL38500416W/Woza\\_Africa!](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL38500416W/Woza_Africa!)

*Woza Africa ! Quand la musique défie la guerre*. Editions du Jaguar, 1997. Préface de Nelson MANDELA

<sup>3</sup> UK Government, British Embassy to the Holy See, and Glocal Ethics. ["The Role and Responsibility of Religious Leaders in Times of War, Atrocities and Polarisation"](#), Wilton Park, 17.19 February 2025

Anaïs BRUNIER. « Exploring new approaches to humanitarian engagement with armed non-state actors: the role of religious leaders in promoting compliance with IHL » [Armed Groups and International Law](#). November 20, 2024 .

<sup>4</sup> Ronald OFTERINGER ICRC. [Faith-based organizations and religious leaders : Essential partners in humanitarian action. 22-07-2015](#)  
Datuan MAGON, Dominic EARNSHAW. « Engaging *Ulama* in the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law: A Case Study from Mindanao » *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 2025, 17, 1–14 <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huad072>

<sup>5</sup> Piergiuseppe PARISI and Adelaida Maria IBARRA PADILLA. « The Colombian Catholic Church's Quest for Legitimacy in the Colombian Armed Conflict ». *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Volume 17, Issue 2. January 24, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> The foundational document in this regard is [Pacem in Terris](#), the landmark Encyclical issued by Pope John XXIII.