

**Address to British Association SMOM**  
**by**  
**Fausto Solaro del Borgo,**  
**President of the Italian Association**  
**London, 17 November**

First of all, I wish to thank your President for having invited me to your annual dinner tonight and given me the opportunity to tell you about the Association of the Italian Knights of the S.M.O.M.

Allow me now to congratulate for the 130th anniversary of your Foundation; we Italians are, after the German and your Association, the third oldest National Association in the world, just two years younger than yours.

After leaving Malta and arriving in Rome in 1834 the only Grand Priorities still existing were the three Italian ones (Rome, Lombardy and Venice, and Naples and Sicily) while the Order gradually organised itself in other countries through the creation of National Associations.

In 1877 Prince Chigi Albani della Rovere, by recommendation of the at that time Lieutenant of Grand Master Fra' Giovanni Battista Ceschi di Santa Croce, proposed to the Italian Government to establish a Volunteer Corps offering assistance to the sick and the wounded of the Italian Army during times of peace and war. That year was born what is today known as the Auxiliary Military Corps of the Italian Army - SMOM; in the same year the Association was established in order to sign the relevant agreements with the Government, since the Grand Priorities lacked the necessary legal personality.

All Italian Knights and Dames are, at the same time, members of the Grand Priory to which their family belongs, and of the Italian Association.

The Military Corps distinguished itself for aiding the population after the disastrous earthquake in Messina on 27th December 1908 that caused over 80,000 casualties, and two years later King Victor Emanuel III, in recognition of the acquired merits, decreed that the Corps was to become an integral part of the Italian Army, although under the direct responsibility of the Association of the Italian Knights, and to take the name referred to above.

The Military Corps was later entrusted with the management of hospital trains during the First World War and this tradition was maintained during the Second World War when hospital trains were again managed by the Corps.

During the campaign of Russia the Corps took back to Italy over 2,600 wounded soldiers and obtained the highest military decorations as a result of such activity.

It is worth reminding you that at the end of the Second World War the Peace Treaty allowed Italy to keep a limited air fleet, and the Allies allowed 36 military aircraft to pass under the cross of the Sovereign Order and be assigned to the Military Corps, which managed the fleet for several years. The earliest paratroop units of the recomposed Italian Army were trained using the aircraft of the Military Corps. There is still an aircraft with the white eight-pointed cross on red background exhibited at the Museum of Aeronautics outside Rome.

The Commander of the Military Corps is the President of the Association and the Chief of the Military staff is an Italian Army Lieutenant General (three stars).

I told you about our Military Corps before explaining what the Association of Italian Knights does nowadays since it was just the creation of the Military Corps that led to the foundation of the Association in spite of the existence of the three Grand Priorities, and also to allow you to appreciate the peculiar position that the Sovereign Order enjoys in Italy today and the consideration that all Italian Governments, both rightwing and

leftwing (and maybe leftwing to a greater extent), have had and still have for us.

I believe that it is a unique case in the world that a unit of the army of one country is supervised by a body of another sovereign country. Just think that whenever our staff (medical officers mainly) is engaged in a military mission abroad, there is the flag of the Order flying below the Italian flag.

Until the end of the Second World War the Association virtually limited its activities to managing the Military Corps, leaving the relationships with the Italian members of the Order to the Grand Priorities. It was only in the Fifties that it was decided to launch activities in the healthcare field. And the fields of operations between Grand Priorities and the Association were clearly defined, leaving to the first the responsibility of all activities concerning spirituality and charitable works while the Association would deal with all healthcare activities and relief services.

The Order has obtained in Italy full recognition as sovereign State, which is also evidenced by the fact that the most recent agreement on medical co-operation executed between the Grand Chancellor and the Ministry of Health of the Italian Republic (leftwing Government) was ratified by both Houses of Parliament as any other international treaty. The agreement acknowledges that all relationships for healthcare activities carried out in Italy and entrusted to the Italian Association are held with the Government and not with the Regional Authorities, as the laws in force would instead provide.

Today the Italian Association, within the framework of the Italian public healthcare system, manages a neurology rehabilitation hospital with 240 beds and 60 day-hospital beds, and in addition 17 anti-diabetes centres.

As you maybe know, nowadays diabetes is, at least in Italy, the second most widespread disease, after heart dysfunctions and before cancer. The Ministry of Health is recognising a special position to our organisation in the fight against diabetes, since we are at present the only institution in Italy – and maybe in Europe – that avails itself of the epidemiologic information of as many as 45,000 patients being presently treated in our centres.

Last but not least, the Association runs an Ambulance Corps that has entered into agreements with the Civil Protection Department of the Government, with 3,000 members. The Corps is engaged both in civil protection services and in major national and international calamities, where it operates in full agreement with Malteser International.

Since this year our Association has started activities also in the Third World countries and in these days we are carrying on a feasibility study to build a socio-sanitary structure in Equatorial Guinea and a project for a professional school for girls in Southern Sudan.

Many thanks again for having allowed me to show you how our Order works in Italy through the Association of the Italian Knights and please excuse me for not having always used the most suitable English wording.