HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ORDER OF ST JOHN OF JERUSALEM

1. In order to place this Annex into perspective, it is necessary to examine the history of the Order of St John and the evolution of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. The latter organisation is a 19th century offshoot of the original Catholic Order of St John, which dates its birth to the 11th century and which still exists as a major organisation of the Catholic Church.

2. The Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta. The Order of St John traces its origins to approximately 1050. In or about that year, a group from the Marine Republic of Amalfi obtained permission from the Caliph of Egypt to build a church, convent and hospital in Jerusalem, to care for pilgrims of any religious faith or race. The Order of St John of Jerusalem—the monastic community that ran the hospital for the pilgrims in the Holy Land—became an independent religious order under the guidance of the Blessed Gérard Tonque, regarded as the first Grand Master of the Order.

3. On 15 February 1113, Pope Paschal II issued a Papal Bull approving the foundation of the Hospital and placing the Order directly under the authority of the Holy See. The Bull granted the Order the right to freely elect its superiors without interference from other secular or religious authorities. By virtue of the Papal Bull, the Hospital became an Order exempt from the Church.

4. The role of the Order was to nurse the sick and to provide succour to pilgrims and to participate in the military defence of pilgrims and the territories that the Crusaders had conquered from the Moslems. The Order thus became both religious and military. All the Knights were Religious, bound by the three monastic vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. As time went on, the Order adopted the white eight-pointed Cross that is still the symbol of St John today, and broadened its charitable mission to include the duty of protecting Christendom.

5. When the last Christian stronghold in the Holy Land fell in 1291, the Order settled first in Cyprus and then, in 1310, on the island of Rhodes. From that moment on, the defence of the Christian world required the organisation of a naval force. The Order built a powerful fleet and would eventually become the pre-eminent maritime power in the Mediterranean and one of the leading naval powers of the world. The Order’s ships sailed the Mediterranean for several hundred years, escorting convoys of ships from Christian nations, rescuing Christian slaves, mounting international disaster relief operations and harrying Moslem shipping. The maritime role of the Order at this period became so important that two years on convoy, ie two years service at sea, was required of novices before they could qualify as fully professed members of the Order.

6. The independence from other nations granted by Pontifical decree, and the universally recognised right to maintain and deploy armed forces, were the grounds for the international sovereignty of the Order from its beginning. In the early 14th Century, the members of the Order who came to Rhodes from all over Europe and the institutions of the Order in Europe were grouped according to languages spoken into sub-groupings referred to as ‘Langues’ or ‘Tongues’. There were initially seven Langues: Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Aragon (Navarre), England (with Scotland and Ireland) and Germany. In 1492 Castile and Portugal split off from the Langue of Aragon and constituted the eighth Langue. Each Langue included Priories or Grandpriories, Bailiwicks and Commanderies. The Order was governed by the Grand Master (the Prince of Rhodes) and the Council. It minted its own money and maintained diplomatic relations with other States. The high offices of the Order were divided between representatives of different Langues, and the seat of the Order, the Convent, was composed of various nationalities.

7. The forces of Sultan Soliman the Magnificent attacked Rhodes in 1522. After six months of siege and fierce combat, the Knights were forced to surrender in 1523. In recognition of the valour of the Knights, Soliman allowed them to leave Rhodes with full military honours. The Order remained without a territory of its own until 1530, when the Knights took possession of the island of Malta, a gift from the Emperor Charles V with the approval of Pope Clement VII. It was established that the Order should remain neutral in any war between Christian nations. In 1565 the Knights defended the island from attack by the forces of Soliman the Magnificent. This eventually successful action became known to history as the Great Siege.
8. In 1571, the fleet of the Order, then one of the most powerful in the Mediterranean, contributed to the ultimate destruction of Ottoman naval power at the Battle of Lepanto. Two hundred years later, however, in 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte occupied the island during his Egyptian campaign. The Knights, because of the Rule of the Order that prohibited from raising weapons against other Christians, surrendered to Napoleon and were forced to leave Malta. In 1800 the British occupied Malta, but although the sovereign rights of the Order in the island of Malta had been recognised with the Treaty of Amiens (1802), the Order was never allowed to return to the island.

9. After a period of wandering throughout Europe, and short sojourns in Messina, Catania and Ferrara, in 1834 the Order settled in Rome, where it owned the Palace of Malta in Via Condotti 68 and the Villa on the Aventine. Both of these properties remain in the possession of the Order to this day and both have extraterritorial status. From the time of settlement in Rome, the original hospital mission became the main activity of the Order, and grew stronger throughout the last century, reinforced by the contribution and activities of the Grand Priories and National Associations in the various countries of the world. Large-scale hospital and charitable activities were carried out during World Wars I and II and have intensified since 1945.

10. The Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta is one of the largest individual organisations of the Catholic Church. It is at one and the same time a major Religious Order, a recognised ancient Order of Chivalry and a major charitable organisation. Although its 'territory' is confined to two buildings in Rome, the Order is regarded as a sovereign nation, issues its own stamps and coinage, exchanges diplomatic representation with 100 nations and maintains a permanent mission to the United Nations. The head of the Order, who is elected for life, ranks as a Cardinal of the Church and is referred to and receives the dignities of a Prince. The current Grand Master (the 78th), elected in 1988, is Fra' Andrew Bertie, an English nobleman (descendant of the Stuart kings and distant cousin of the Queen) and one time officer in the Scots Guards.

11. The SMOM is heavily involved in charitable, hospital and relief work throughout the world.

12. The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. Along with other religious Orders and Houses, the Order of St John was suppressed in England and Wales by King Henry VIII in 1540, and its holdings confiscated. In the early 19th century, the Langue of England was re-established by several English and Scottish gentlemen. Although of highly questionable legitimacy in the eyes of the still existent Sovereign Order and with very vague objectives, the new Langue of England not only survived but in fact prospered. Following a final refusal of recognition by the Sovereign Order, the 'English Priory' declared itself to be the Sovereign Order in England, under the title 'The Sovereign and Illustrious Order of St John of Jerusalem, Anglia'.

13. Following this declaration of sovereignty, the English Order continued its growth, assisted in 1861 by the recruitment of the 7th Duke of Manchester, who became Grand Prior. The Venerable Order was eventually to solidify its objectives and its place as a well-established national Hospitaller organisation began with the creation an ambulance corps in the 1860s, an action spurred on by the continuing demands of the Industrial Revolution, which, unfortunately, was not marked by increased government interest in either industrial safety or emergency health care. The Order in fact stepped in to fill a large social gap.

14. In 1871 a new Constitution brought about a further change of name to 'Order of St John of Jerusalem in England'. In 1876, the Princess of Wales was recruited into membership, followed by the Prince of Wales. In 1877 the British Priory of the Order established St John Ambulance Associations in large railway centres and mining districts so that railway men and colliers might learn how to treat victims of accidents. This was followed up in 1887 with the creation of the St John Ambulance Brigade. In 1882 the British Grand Priory founded a Hospice and Ophthalmic Dispensary in Jerusalem.

15. The status of the Order was codified in 1888 by the grant of a Royal Charter by Queen Victoria, under the title 'The Grand Priory of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem in England'. The original Royal Charter was confirmed and updated by a Royal Charter of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1955. This latter Charter was updated in 1974 and the Statutes of the Order, derived from the Royal Charter, were updated by Orders in Council in 1999 and 2003. The 1974 Charter recognised the worldwide scope of the order by setting its current name and short title.

16. Although not a State Order, by virtue of Royal Charter the Venerable Order of St John is a Royal Order of Chivalry, with the reigning monarch as the Sovereign Head of the Order. Whilst the British Order is ecumenical in membership, and from its early days counted Roman Catholics as members, it is identified with the Reformed tradition, through its Royal Head, who is also Supreme Governor of the
Church of England. The British Order received collateral recognition from the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM) in 1963.

17. The Venerable Order sponsors the St John Ambulance Brigade and is involved in other international charitable work, the major one being the St John Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem.

18. The Alliance Orders. In addition to the SMOM and the Venerable Order, three other branches of the original Order of St John survive. These are:
   a. the Bailiwick of Brandenburg of St John and Jerusalem (Die Balley Bandenburg des Ritterlichen Ordens Sankt Johannis vom Spital zu Jerusalem);
   b. the Order of St John in the Netherlands (Johanniter Orde in Nederland); and
   c. the Order of St John in Sweden (Johanniterorden i Sverige).

19. The Bailiwick of Brandenburg. The Bailiwick is descended from the Langue of Germany of the SMOM. The Bailiwick had converted to the Protestant teachings of Martin Luther in the 15th century but was still recognised as a constituent part of the SMOM. The Bailiwick was dissolved in 1806 but reconstituted by the King of Prussia as a lay order of knighthood in 1812. In 1852 the Bailiwick of Brandenburg of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem was officially re-established by cabinet Decree. From that time the Bailiwick has involved itself in charitable and hospital work in Germany and abroad.

20. Although nominally Protestant, the Bailiwick of Brandenburg is actually Ecumenical, including both Catholic and Protestant members. Perhaps the finest hour for the Bailiwick occurred during World War Two when the following members of the Johanniter lost their lives as a consequence of their participation in the Plot to assassinate Hitler in July 1944:
   a. Major-General Heinrich Count zu Dohna-Tolksdorf (Knight of Justice).
   b. Albrecht von Hagen (Knight of Honor).
   c. Ulrich von Hassel (German Ambassador to Italy from 1932–1938, dismissed for his anti-Nazi sentiments, Knight of Honor).
   d. Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin (a determined opponent of the Nazis from as early as 1932, Knight of Justice).
   e. Lieutenant-Colonel Fritz von der Lancken (Knight of Honor).
   f. Major Wilhelm Count zu Lynar-Lubbenau (Knight of Justice).
   g. General Friedrich von Rabenau (Knight of Justice).
   h. Major Adolf Count von Schack (Knight of Justice).
   i. Werner Count von der Schulenburg (one time German Ambassador in Moscow, Knight of Justice).
   k. Field-Marshal Erwin von Witzleben (Knight of Justice).
   l. Malte Prince zu Putbus (Knight of Justice—not directly involved in the July plot).
   m. Knight of Justice von Ribbeck (Johanniter knight not directly involved in the July plot).
   n. Lieutenant-General Hans Count von Sponeck (Johanniter knight not directly involved in the July plot).

21. Three members of the SMOM also died as a result of their participation in the plot:
22. **The Order of St John in the Netherlands.** The Netherlands branch of the Order is descended from a Dutch House of the SMOM which was probably first established at Utrecht in about 1122. In 1580 the Protestant rulers of The Netherlands confiscated the holdings of the various religious houses and the SMOM was not accepted. Dutch knights of the Order continued to exist, however, subordinate to the Bailiwick of Brandenburg. The Order was illegally suppressed by a decree of the French occupying forces in 1810 and, with the abolition of the Bailiwick of Brandenburg in 1811, it disappeared. When the Bailiwick was restored in 1852 several Dutch nobleman were admitted and, later at the instigation of Prince Henry of the Netherlands, a separate commandery was created under the protection of the Dutch Crown, by a royal decree of 30 April 1909. Following the Second World War it was reorganised independently of the Bailiwick of Brandenburg, becoming directly dependent on the Dutch Crown, but without becoming a Dutch State Order, on 5 March 1946 and, on 10 September 1958, was officially renamed the 'Johanniter Orde in Nederland'. The Order involves itself in hospital and aged care and confines its activities almost exclusively to The Netherlands.

23. **The Order of St John in Sweden.** The Swedish Branch of the Order is descended from a group of Brothers of the Order who arrived in Sweden in about 1170 and established several institutions for the care of the sick and aged. All Catholic institutions in Sweden were abolished at the time of the Reformation, but Swedish noblemen continued to serve as Knights of St John, members of the Bailiwick of Brandenburg. A Swedish Commandery of the Bailiwick was established in 1920 under the protection of the Swedish King. In 1946 the Commandery was removed from the Bailiwick and established as a Swedish Order under the patronage of the crown. The Order is heavily involved in charitable work in Sweden and abroad.

24. **The Alliance.** For many years, the various branches of the Order of St John refused to recognise each other’s legitimacy. However, in 1961 the three European branches of the Order (Brandenburg, The Netherlands and Sweden) formed an ‘Alliance’ with the Venerable Order. The SMOM and the Venerable Order consolidated the Alliance in 1963 with the publication of a joint declaration, recognising each other’s legitimacy and pledging mutual support and cooperation in pursuit of the aims of the Order. This declaration was re-affirmed in 1983.

25. The five Orders brought together by this agreement are referred to as the ‘Alliance Orders’ and are regarded as the only legitimate Orders of St John. To the five main ‘Alliance Orders’ are added the four Associations in union with the Bailiwick of Brandenburg, namely:

- **a.** Johanner Ridderskap i Finland (Order of the Knights of St John in Finland).
- **b.** Association des Chevaliers de St Jean, Langue de France (French Association of the Knights of St Jon).
- **c.** Genossenschaft der Johnniterritter in der Schweiz (Swiss Association of the Knights of St Jon).
- **d.** Johannitarend Magyar Tagozata (The Hungarian Commandery of the of the Order of St John).