

CONFERENCE CALL

Rocca di Papa, 26 September 2015

“Towards a new age. Mutual love among peoples”

OPENING and GREETINGS

Pope Francis (in Spanish): War is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples.

Antonella Bianco: His words are loud and clear and demand a practical response. They were said at the United Nations Headquarters, in a place which at its beginnings was the symbol of fraternity among nations. Words addressed to leaders of international community, but which also challenge each one of us.

A big hello to all of you worldwide who are following the Conference Call.

My name is Antonella, I am Italian and I work at the New Humanity Secretariat.

Here we are in the garden of the Focolare Movement's International Centre. We're here because the historic room where the Link-up was held for a very long time is now being rebuilt.

As always our cell phones and computers are working so if you want to write text messages and greetings, send them to

N° 00 39 3428730175

Or via email to: collegamentoCH@focolare.org

Or post your comments on Facebook: Collegamento Ch.

So let's start our tour around the world straight away. We got a text message from Philadelphia in the USA. They wrote: "Hello to you all from the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. There are more than 2 million people here from all over the world, waiting for Pope Francis to arrive, for the family festival taking place on the famous steps of the art museum. Many people have stopped at the Focolare Movement's stand. They appreciated the gift the Movement represents for the Church and the world. Cardinal Rylko was here too. Good bye to everyone. From Jo, Mary, Katy and Kevin and all those who prepared this event.

Antonella: Greetings from us all too! (Applause)

From Cuba

Antonella: Pope Francis started his journey in Cuba. Let's hear from Rolando about what his visit meant to the Cuban people.

Rolando Halley (in Spanish, with Italian subtitles): Greetings to everyone from Cuba! We have just spent four intense days with Pope Francis. It was a time of grace! Our people, from the leadership to children, heard a message from heaven.

The Pope told us how to live as brothers and sisters, being merciful and being alongside those in need, without marginalising anyone.

He also told us that if we want to go far, we have to go together. And this requires dialogue to find the things that unite us and also areas where there may be differences.

In Cuba, everyone is talking about the Pope! With this joy in our hearts, we would like to be there with you, with that complete trust to Mary like children.

From India

Antonella: Thanks to all of you there. And now let's jump to India, there's a place called Sironj in the heart of India. And there is the first church to be dedicated to Chiara Luce Badano. Her parents were there too, Maria Teresa and Ruggero, and they sent this greeting.

Doni (a focolarina): *This church dedicated to Blessed Chiara Badano was just inaugurated. It was a very moving moment and I think even more for the parents. Now I let Maria Teresa say how it was for her.*

Maria Teresa Badano: *Yes, as you've already said, we're just coming out of the Mass, after consecrating this Church, and we wanted to share to you our great joy of this moment. We just cannot describe how happy we are. It's something very beautiful, very moving. We feel that we also have to thank God for this gift, one of the many gifts he has given us. And if you allow me I would also like to thank Chiara Lubich.*

LoppianoLab

Antonella: Thank you. Do you know that that same day, yesterday, at Pompeii in southern Italy, a centre for disabled children was named after Chiara Luce?

Now let's go to Loppiano where Loppiano Lab is being held for the sixth time. Aurelio should be on the line. Are you there, Aurelio?

Aurelio Molé: Yes. Hello Antonella, thanks!

Antonella: We can see you. Hello Aurelio!

Aurelio Molé: Hello to everyone and a huge hello from all of us here in Loppiano where a fantastic edition of LoppianoLab is coming to an end. There have been over 2,000 people here and all the meetings were overflowing. The theme this year was "Beyond fear" and LoppianoLab wants to go beyond fear by building a strong network of personal and social contacts so as to work on shared projects and activities and to think in a constructive way. Just now the main session dedicated to active citizenship, the culture of dialogue and the economy of communion is ending. There have been excellent speakers.

Here with me is Steni Di Piazza, who is President of MEC, Micro Credit for a Civil Economy based on Communion. So I'll ask him: Muhammad Yunus is the famous banker who promoted micro credit. He said that banks lend money to the rich and instead micro credit lends money to the poor. Can you explain more?

Steni Di Piazza: This means that banks today, especially with interest rates that are ever lower, prefer to lend to the rich because they gain much more from

then. On the other hand they realise that it is also profitable to sell derivatives and so small loans don't bring in money. So at that point micro credit is marginalised. In order to allow micro credit to evolve, the Italian legislature has passed a law, article 111 of the banking law, which makes it possible to set up financial services for specific purposes. such as little banks that lend micro credit.

Last year we set out to meet the challenge, right here at Loppiano and talking with the young people, we said: "Given that the Italian legislature has allowed us to do this, can we manage to set up a micro credit bank? Let's see what happens when we meet next year.

This year we officially opened up the bank, the MEC, on 5th June, Micro Credit for a Civil Economy based on Communion. That means that we are now able to help the little people, young people who want to set up a business and who want to give work to others. What is more this bank is now obliged to help, to assist, to accompany young people in the early stages of borrowing, so that these small businesses don't fail straightaway but little by little can grow and develop. This is how we can create and build together the culture of a civil economy and the culture of an economics of communion.

Aurelio Molé: We know that you have already done a lot of good work. That's all from Loppiano, back to you Antonella.

Antonella: Thanks Aurelio and all the best to LoppianoLab.

From Mexico

Antonella: So now we leave Loppiano and go to a little town called "El Diamante", at Acatzingo in the province of Puebla in Mexico. Recently they celebrated the 25th anniversary of the little town. Let's hear from them:

Mauro: *We celebrated the 25th anniversary of El Diamante Mariapolis on August 22nd. About 750 people came.*

Regina: *It was an opportunity for us to thank God and all those who over the years have given their life for this beautiful little town.*

Mauro: *We started the event by unveiling a commemorative plaque. Then we had a short meeting going over the story of the Movement here and rejoicing at the many times when God intervened.*

Regina: *Then there was a thanksgiving Mass. During the offertory the families in the neighbourhood brought all that is needed for the liturgy. And then there was a party. You cannot imagine how much providence we received - of all kinds - which made it possible to celebrate this anniversary according to local customs.*

Mauro: *Many people were there who had not been here for a long time. They were very impressed to find it transformed. Then of course good wishes came from all those who have been here over the years and who helped build the little town. They brought photos, messages, and many beautiful memories.*

Antonella: Thanks so much to everyone at the Mariapolis El Diamante!
(Applause)

Mariapolis

The Great Conquest

Antonella: The Mariapolis, or city of Mary, is a temporary town where the only law is mutual love. The first one happened in the summer of 1949 almost by chance, up in the mountains near Trent, in the valley of Primiero. We went back to those mountains and discovered that one of the peaks there is called "Campanile Mariapolis". Our guide Sandra is the granddaughter of the alpinist who first climbed that peak in 1959 with his friend.

(Music)

Sandra: *(in Trentino Primiero dialect - Italian subtitles): Between 1949 and 1959 Chiara Lubich, together with many other people, came to the Primiero Valley for their summer holiday. They were holidays with a difference... alternative holidays. Later they were called Mariapolis.*

My grandfather got to know these people. His name was Michele Gadenz, but he was known as "Micel". He was also a very active rock climber, in fact he opened many climbing routes on the Pale de San Martino Mountains in the Dolomites.

One day, with his famous friend Tullio Bonat - you are from Tonadico too - they decided to climb a peak that had never been climbed before and had not been named either. It was near the Pala of Our Lady. They named this rock tower Campanile Mariapoli - Mariapolis Bell Tower. If you look at the tourist guidebook for the "Pale di San Martino", the name Campanile Mariapolis is still there.

So, Tullio, do you remember this adventure on Campanile Mariapoli together with my grandad Michele? Why did you give this name to the rock tower?

Tullio *(in Trentino Primiero dialect - Italian subtitles): Every so often, we climbed a new peak.*

Your grandfather Michele thought of the name "Campanile Mariapoli" because the Mariapolis was going on at the same time in Primiero.

Sandra: *Tell me something about this climb.*

Tullio: *You set off from the Treviso refuge and climb as far as the Mughe Pass and then turn right. The second campanile, the higher one, is the Campanile Mariapoli. It is four rope lengths. They are beautiful peaks!*

Sandra: *Now, one more thing, dear Tullio, can you say hello to everyone? ...*

Tullio: *My best wishes, to the Mariapolis? Certainly, yes. I am very happy that you have interviewed me, after all these years, I'm glad you still remember me!*

Mariapolis in Algeria, Bangkok (Thailand and other countries) and Wallis

Antonella: As you see, now we have come indoors, into one of the rooms at the Centre of the Movement. *(Applause)* And we say hello to everyone who's in here, especially the delegates of the Movement in the whole world who have been here in the last few days.

So, after the first Mariapolis in the Primiero Valley, they multiplied throughout the world. This year over a hundred Mariapolises took place in many different countries. Let's hear about three of them:

Algeria

At the Mariapolis in Algeria this year, there were more families than usual. Some had come from Tunisia, Morocco and the Sahara. Of the 150 participants - more than the building could hold - over half were young people who had come with their friends who were Gen. The five-day Mariapolis ended with much joy and tears, expressing the strong unity among all, and the graces experienced by this Muslim people, who feel their faith illuminated by Chiara's charism.

Bangkok

The Mariapolis in Thailand was held in the ancient capital, Ayutthaya, and people came from neighbouring countries too. It was like an Expo of Asian cultures. Among the guests was the Abbot of a famous Buddhist temple in the outskirts of Bangkok, together with his disciples. The pact to keep mutual love ended this joyful Mariapolis. It was symbolized by a bracelet that each person tied on the wrist of another.

Wallis

In Polynesia, we had a seven day Mariapolis with 75 people coming from the islands of Wallis and Futuna. 8 young people came from France to be with us. The theme was "Let's build brotherhood." The young people's program was prepared so as to help them rediscover a sense of the sacred: in the sacraments, in nature, in relationships. A game brought children and adults together.

Argentina

Antonella: A focolare closes, or one moves to another city... some of us have had this experience. Let's hear how three Argentinian Gen reacted.

Silvio: *Hello! We are Pablo, Ivan and Silvio, Gen 2 from Parana, in Argentina. We live in the Gen house that was opened last year when the men's focolare in our city was closed. It was a big suffering for us because we felt that the focolare was like a tabernacle of Jesus in the midst. We did not want to remain stuck in that suffering so we set out to bring our Ideal and the fire we have within us.*

Pablo: *After a few months, we thought of opening the Gen house as a focal point for young people. We named the house ELETTO, after the focolarino who gave a concrete witness and gave his life for young people. And we took on the commitment to be Gen 3 and Gen 4 assistants.*

Ivan: *On March 20, we found a house for rent, quite a distance from the city centre. It is a challenge because it's a bit far from our universities, but right from the start we felt God's love. There was so much practical help, not only from the whole Movement, but also from our neighbours who cooked for us and fixed up lights at the start, when we did not have gas or electricity.*

I had a good experience with a Gen 3, during a Gen 4 meeting. He brought his little brother to the meeting, but then put aside his own plans to stay and help me. Afterwards, he told me that it had helped him start living the Ideal again.

Pablo: When we got settled in the house, we wondered how we could share Eletto's life. We have seen everything going ahead, especially with the youth. The Gen 3 boys came to spend a few days with us. The Gen 4 boys come every two weeks. The Gen 2 boys and girls in our city and the Youth for a united world come too. We feel Eletto very close to us.

Ivan: It's a real gift to live this experience of unity while we are studying and working. We are growing in the Ideal and sharing every joy and every meeting with Jesus Forsaken. We see Jesus in every young person who comes to the house, who expect us to give our best, even when we have to start again. We are sure Eletto is guiding and accompanying us on this journey, to give the Ideal by living the "Golden Rule".

We assure you of our unity, we are living with the whole Movement!

All: CIAO!

(Applause)

Antonella: Thanks a lot Pablo, Ivan and Silvio. We greet you and all the other young people who we know are following the link up at O'Higgins.

IT'S THE HOW THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Antonella: Something difficult like an illness, it can be lived, perhaps like an ordeal or it can be transformed into an adventure. Let's listen now to the story of Caitlin from Texas.

Footage: Caitlin Rowley, aged 16 from Houston, Texas. This is her family, Mom, Dad, and her brother, Chandler. Challenges aren't new to Caitlin. Here is how she dealt with one of them.

Caitlin Rowley: When I was 14, I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, which is an inflammatory bowel disease where your intestines get basically just swollen up and angry for no reason. The diagnosis itself was hard to accept; but little did I know a bigger storm was on its way.

A few months later, I had a lot of serious complications and ended up in the hospital, in ICU for several months. I was in a huge position of weakness and suffering but I knew that God had a plan for me. And from the beginning I knew that he had a plan for me and I was going to trust in it no matter how hard it got.

I decided I should really channel the strength and light that could come out of it. So I like to say "attitude is the difference between an ordeal and an adventure." So, I realized that if I let God's light and love shine through me, others can draw strength from me... especially my family, that was a really big part of it, being there for my family, being a pillar strength for my family even when I was the one suffering because I could see they were so clearly suffering as well.

God's love, as it usually does, grew and expanded and reached even farther with the hospital staff. A lot of the nurses and doctors would come into my room and just be there with me; it was their choice, they didn't have to. I also put some of my favourite Bible verses and quotes on my hospital door. So I really tried to make my room even just a welcoming place, a place where people could really tell that Jesus was present. He was in our midst even through the pain and suffering.

So many good things have come from it: I grew deeper in my faith, my family grew a lot closer and my perspective on life has really changed. And so I am really thankful for the suffering - even though that is hard to say - but I am very thankful that it happened to me and I know that this is only the beginning of what this experience is going to provide for me and ...God has a plan!

Antonella: Hi, Caitlin, thank you! We know that you are watching together with your brother. We send a big hug from all of us! (Applause)

Voices from the world: Crises and commitment to unity and peace

4000 in 24 hours

Antonella: In this link up too we cannot avoid mentioning the many conflicts happening in the world, which are often forgotten about in the news... Yemen, the Central African Republic, Burundi, South Sudan, Somalia, even the one which made us hold our breath recently between Colombia and Venezuela...

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that at the end of 2014 there were over 59 million people who had been forced to flee their homes: forced migrations caused by wars, conflicts, persecutions of different kinds. Those numbers continue to grow.

Here are two stories from Sicily, the southernmost part of Italy.

Music

Francesca Cabibbo, journalist: *There are stories of young people who come from India, Pakistan, Nigeria and The Gambia. They are young Muslims, Christians and Hindus, migrants who have come on boats and who whose lives have been saved from the sea. Some are staying here in Chiaramonte Gulfi where some cooperatives, Our Lady of Gulfi and FO.CO have started projects for asylum seekers.*

Flavia Cerino, lawyer: *In Sicily, the situation is dramatic because these people come in on the boats, and it is extremely dangerous. They come in big numbers that increase from month to month. Sometimes we get information about arrivals every day. Once, 4,000 people were rescued in 24 hours.*

(Music)

Pakistan boy: *I belong to a Christian family. Christian are 2 per cent of the total population in Pakistan. In November 2014 I left my country and reached here through Turkey, Croatia and then Italy. It was very hard to leave the country, the place where I was born, I was brought up and did my education. And my brother and sister are there. My parents are died so it was very hard for me. Even when I started my journey I wasn't sure that I will reach here or not. Sometimes during the journey they kill the guys. Lot of fear and threat was in my mind. Now life is getting better, I am learning the language. If I could have any job opportunity I will prefer. Let's see what the destiny will bring to me. I am very much hopeful.*

Antonella: Sometimes these journeys can take years, facing endless danger.

A young Nigerian: I come from Nigeria, I had problems with a group called Black Us, in Nigeria. I had to leave the country because they threatened to kill me. I was sitting on a train when I saw three or four Nigerians. One of them told me: "We can help you." We moved from Benin to Niger and spent five days in the desert.

When I get to Tripoli I saw a group of people who came by car and started shooting at me, they put a mask on my face, they took me and took me away by car. So I spent from July until November imprisoned, before I could escape. We were 8 and sometimes we were called from our room and told to unload ammunition. I knew they were weapons, as well as bombs because we were told, "if you make a mistake the bombs will explode and you'll die." I was scared, I decided to run away because if I continued I would have died. I said, "If I survive I survive, if I die I die."

I jumped the fence of the place where we worked, and one of them saw us and started shooting at us. Among the eight of us, four died on the journey. We kept running and continuing to run away we got to a place where a man was working in the farm. The owner of the farm came to us. I was afraid and wanted to run away but he told me: "Do not worry", he spoke Arabic and I was scared. One night he told us: "Enter the car", but in the trunk, not in the car. It took us for about 30 km in the bush. I could feel the sea breeze. When we get there, the man told us, "enter the ship." Then they led other groups of people on the boat. Then the boat started, and spent the days at sea. And when I started to vomit, even the other people on the boat told me that I was already dying, everyone on that boat were crying. So I got up and I looked around me the sea and did not know what to do. So I started praying, singing a song, and when I finished the song, "Lord, deliver me," I saw people, they had come for help throwing life jackets. Everybody was fighting for life jackets and I remained seated while the people were transported. And when people are over, a man came to get me. That's how I came to Italy.

To lose everything and to dream again

Antonella: There are hundreds of thousands of people like him, even millions, a continuing influx that seemed to catch Europe unprepared, fearful and divided, causing dismay and tension within governments and among nations. At the same time a huge humanitarian effort took place, which offered shelter, people who listened and shared all that they had.

Austria has also become a destination for many people who are escaping from war.

Maryam Hanna: When the war started, it destroyed everything, taking away all our dreams.

George Basmaji: I did not want to fight or kill people, that's why I left Syria.

Serli Alepoglian: When the engine broke down, we were sure we would not be saved.

Bedros Koshian: We had our luggage and our children with us. It was snowing and the soldiers were on the other side waiting for us.

Speaker: For months thousands of people fleeing from war-torn countries were wanting to get into Central and Eastern Europe. Their preferred destinations are the countries of central and northern Europe, and Austria too. In Vienna, the Siro-Orthodox

bishop Msgr. Aydin, together with the Focolare Movement, has been helping refugees who have lost everything.

Dr. Emanuel Aydin: We have got 30 people in our house. They sleep together in two large rooms, until we can get the bedrooms ready. Right now we are looking for a house for 6 families and schools and kindergartens for their children. Sometimes they are ill and we take them to hospital. Then there are the language courses ... We are working day and night.

Bedros Koshian: Every day we go to see two or three houses, but they don't let us rent them because we are refugees.

Ruba Boules: We asked ourselves: will we ever learn this language? But we are starting to understand more now at the German lessons.

Zaki Khazzoum: It's difficult for anybody to leave their country and their job.

Erich Vorobil: We try to sort out every day problems together, to help them integrate in Austria. For example, taking care of a child who needs to learn German or who just needs a toy.

Maryam Hanna: If God wants it, my hope is that we can find work and adapt to this new life.

Zaki Khazzoum: We came to this country where there are many beautiful things and we are trying to settle here. But we always think of Syria. The most important thing is to end the war so that there can be peace for all.

Joelma and a tile

Antonella: During our last link-up there were some stories like these. Joelma from Dallas asked herself what she could do for them.

Joelma Regis: Lately I have been struck by the suffering in the world; especially experiences that I have heard from Focolare members who live in countries of war. And I wondered what I could do for them. Here, on this side of world, what can I do?

I am an art student at a university. My idea was to create an art project that would raise money to send to those people. In the beginning my idea was just to sell my own artworks, but then I thought to invite other artists to join me and donate something for the cause. We were 12 artists. They were so generous in giving their talent and their time.

The title of the art exhibition was "The Other, Another Me – tearing down the walls of indifference". One of the main artworks was a wall by tiles, more or less like this (she shows the tiles). People were invited to take home one piece as something that would remind them that we are all connected, and how we can help to tear down the walls of indifference in our everyday lives. People really welcomed this idea.

During the process of organizing the whole show there were many difficult moments. Especially one moment that I was working with the clay and I was so tired and I really thought of offering my little small suffering to those people in Syria. And I gained more energy to keep going. I knew that the more pieces I made, the more money I would raise to send to them. So I kept going.

I also needed to think about a reception and I wanted to do something nice and the parents of one of my classmates donated all the food and drinks. Small little signs that I felt were an encouragement that this was a project that we needed to go ahead with.

We were able to raise about \$4000 which will all go to families in the Middle East.

Drop by drop – a bridge between Latina Italy) and Mae Sot (Thailand)

Antonella: There are many refugees in the world who try to cross the sea in boats, but no one wants to welcome them. Others cross mountains or forests. There are large refugee camps in Northern Thailand with thousands of people who have fled from Myanmar. Most belonging to Karen ethnic group ... In recent years, bonds of friendship and sharing have grown with children from Latina, near Rome. They are here with us, and have come with their parents and their teacher. Thank you and welcome! (Applause) As I said, there's a bridge between them and the Karen children in Thailand.

In the last few days, two focolarini left Bangkok heading to the north of Thailand. They went to visit our Karen friends, bringing the goods from the latest container that arrived from Italy. Here is their greetings that they just sent us, because they're still on their way:

Luigi: *Good morning everyone. We are on our way to Mae Sot. As you can see, our van is full of gifts and we are very happy. This is...*

Roberto: *Roberto*

Luigi: *And my name is Luigi Butori. We are both focolarini. We are going to Open our borders in Mae Sot, 490 km away from here.*

This is the School called Drop by drop which is a project started by the people in Latina, Italy. The children in Latina, and our friends there, set up this project, to help us all the way out here, in the countryside.

Here we are, right on the border between Thailand and Myanmar. These children cannot get into the refugee camps. They are children of families working here in the countryside and thanks to this project, aid was received and the school began. There was nothing here before, and the great thing is that love brings about wonderful things that did not exist before. These children are mostly Karen, one of the persecuted ethnic groups which try to flee Myanmar and take refuge in Thailand.

Here are some of the children who have received aid from Italy and also from the Movement's members here in Thailand. There are about 200 people whom we help. This is just a small but beautiful group.

The aid we receive is channelled into the Drop by drop School, the Mae La refugee camp, a small village called Gaspar, another place that has no name and is in the middle of fields, and an orphanage called Heavenly Home. So it goes to about 200-250 people. Greetings to all.

Antonella: Thanks, Luigi. And thanks, Roberto. (Applause)

And thanks to the children. This Drop by drop project has a Facebook page for those who want to follow it.

Let's stop wars!

Antonella: Now let's go back to Loppiano, to hear from Pasquale Ferrara. He is a diplomat and an expert in international relations and teaches at the Sophia University. Are you there? Hello Pasquale.

Pasquale Ferrara: Hello everyone.

Antonella: Pasquale, we have a few questions for you. What are the deeper reasons behind all these migrations in different parts of the world?

Pasquale: The first thing to be clear about is that migratory movements are not only a humanitarian issue, they have a lot to do with international and structural changes in the world. In some ways migrants bring history to our doorstep and tell us about events not only linked to conflicts but to massive inequality, to climate change, to international social conflict and unbalances of all kinds. These migrations are the tip of an iceberg and we can't analyse them only through the lens of humanitarian aid. We must remember that on the basis of the universal declaration of human everyone has a kind of planetary citizenship, in addition to their own nationality and everyone has the right to life and to a life worthy of being lived.

Antonella: Thank you. We heard Pope Francis at the UN and he asked governments to commit to resolving the serious problems which are doing so much damage to humanity, starting from wars. Is there a solution or is it just a dream?

Pasquale Ferrara: There is a way forward that the Pope himself mentioned, which is reconciliation. The world today is so divided that it needs a new global political agenda, a universal approach. We have seen that past conflicts that seemed unresolvable have been ended, just think about Germany and France after the Second World War, but also the recent reconciliation between Cuba and the United States of America, which was also due to Pope Francis' intervention. Then there was the recent conflict between the Colombian Government and the FARC. This means that we must commit ourselves, patiently and competently, and conflicts can be resolved. Violence is never the answer.

Antonella: We have heard many stories that made us see that we can't sit and wait for national authorities or international bodies to do something, and as you said there are positive signs. But we ordinary citizens can be active too. Do you think these actions we do can have an effect at higher levels?

Pasquale Ferrara: For sure, governments can't manage to keep up with the complexity of the issues and they can't resolve the conflictual situations at the heart of society. This is why we need an approach which starts from reconciliation and by strengthening the social fabric, at grassroots level. From this point of view it is essential that any initiatives need to be well grounded. It is not just doing initiatives that seek to resolve issues, but initiatives undertaken in contexts where we know what the major issues are and what are the causes of the crisis, whether it is at local or international level.

So we need commitment but also knowledge and the awareness that we are giving an important contribution.

Antonella: Thanks Pasquale, thanks for all you have said to us. Bye for now.

Let's go on with the Conference Call

Hope in Damascus

Antonella: We've seen how terrible it is to have to flee, but it's also terrible to remain in such a tormented country ... Some families gathered in the focolare in Damascus to greet us and share their stories... Let's listen to them.

Salem: *Hello, my name is Salem, a young person of the Focolare in Syria. We want to say hello to our family of the Movement in the whole world and to tell you what is happening in our country. Syria is in the midst of a great suffering especially recently when there have been more bombings, more destruction, more deaths.*

Abboud: *Hello, I'm Abboud and this is my wife Soha. A year and a half ago there were four of us at home. We were a nice family, happy with our lives and we accepted everything. But suddenly only two of us were left because a rocket fell on our house and we lost the most precious things we had, our two children, Antoun and Michael. They left for Heaven and we did not even see them after they died. Our life was filled with pain. So many people have lost children, not just us. Then we met a marvellous family who stayed with us in this life's trial, in joy and in pain. The family of the Focolare, the Work of Mary was with us, helping us. You are more than our family.*

Soha: *Antoun and Michael were what was most dear to us. Suddenly I found myself with no children. It was very difficult, I asked myself where is God in this? Why did God take them? What I had done to deserve that? I thank God who sent us this child. No-one can take the place of Antoun and Michael but this new son has helped me come out of myself. I thank God who sent me a second family: the Focolare.*

Suhair: *I'm Suhair, Soha's sister. I felt that the world had ended for me. It all seemed too difficult ... But I remembered when Jesus carried the cross. It was very heavy but it was Simon of Cyrene who helped him carry the cross. So Jesus was less burdened. Our cross would have been heavier without the people of the Movement; we would have been crushed by it.*

Vivian: *My name is Vivian. I met the Focolare recently. Every day I go to work under the bombs. Seeing people die in front of me day by day made me think more and more about leaving, even though we don't want to because we love our country and we love our neighbourhood. But when my children and I see the bombings and we have to walk through the streets between one bomb and another... I felt I wanted to know more about the focolare and I opened one of Chiara's books. She told the story how they were in the air-raid shelters they opened the Gospel and discovered that they had to bring Love. Then I learned to open the Gospel every day to see what I should do, what I can live. Living here, in this atmosphere of death where we say goodbye to a child or to an older person killed by a bullet or a rocket, I feel called every day to live and to intensify this Love. I ask you to pray more for peace in Syria.*

Chafic: *I never thought of leaving Syria but in the last two months I have started thinking about it. I hear my 4 and a half year old son asking me if we will ever live in a country where there are no bullets and death; and my 2 year and a half old daughter is so*

afraid of explosions and cries when she hears a noise, covering her ears with her hands. We should not have to live in fear. I don't want to leave the country where I was born, where I live. And all the sacred land of my country. Leaving, going away by sea, I don't know how, maybe die ... But I see death every day. My friends die, this one is dead, the other was killed by a bomb ... All this made me think of leaving to let my children live without bombings, without seeing the dead, but to see life, a beautiful life. That's what makes me think of leaving.

Nadine: I'm Nadine, a Syrian Gen. I now live in Damascus. After all the experiences we've heard of great suffering or simple experiences of everyday life, I learned how to live entrusting each day to God and at the same time accepting death. Chiara said that if they had died during the war they wanted written on their gravestone, "And we have believed in love." This urges me and all of us to keep going and I feel that we can truly teach others how we try to live, in the face of death and fighting for life by continuing to live very beautiful moments together because of the atmosphere of love that we have in this family.

All: Thank you!

Antonella: Thank you, thank you. (Applause) We are with you and we hope that are able to follow this Conference Call, that there is electricity so you can follow this Call.

Dialogue with Maria Voce (Emmaus) and Jesús Moran

Antonella: And now we invite Emmaus and Jesús to come. Emmaus, those were very strong experiences.

Emmaus: Very strong, really very strong. I have the impression of not being able to speak after hearing this, because I really want on the one hand to take on all this pain and suffering and on the other hand praise God for this voice of hope which despite everything emerges from this suffering. Because when you hear all that they are living through and they say "But we feel called to intensify our love" or the other one who says "I want to be ready to face death, but I really want to live life".

These seem to me to be such a witness to us, because I feel I should praise God and thank them. This sacred land, as they say, is their land, and it becomes more sacred because they are living this experience.

So I truly feel ... there is a shrine of Jesus Forsaken, I would say, in that place as in all the places where there is suffering. It is not only there, because we have seen various parts of the world and there are the places we don't know about, we don't hear of. But the whole earth is crying out this "why" of Jesus Forsaken. And this world becomes more and more like a shrine. A shrine is where you go to find someone, you know there is a presence of God there, a presence that goes beyond human strength, which is there and can change things. It is Jesus who gave his life for us and who can go on transforming all that seems like death and suffering into life. So a great thank you to them and a commitment, a commitment on our part.

We too ask what to do. We may not be able to do much but we want to assure them that we are with them, that all their sufferings are ours, all their doubts are ours, that when they don't know what to do, neither do we, and that we are living life together.

That is what I feel most.

Antonella: (Thank you Emmaus...)

We know that you have spent the last two weeks with the delegates of the Movement from around the world. We imagine that you have talked about many things, looking at the life of the Movement and considering the challenges in a changing world. Perhaps you asked what contribution the movement can give now...

Jesús, is there some news?

Jesús: I would like to say two things in particular, along the lines of what Prof Pasquale Ferrara was saying. First of all that in the last fortnight we have seen how much life there is in the whole Focolare Movement worldwide. This life is taken ahead by all the vocations that we have: adults, young people, and children. On the other hand we see that the life and commitment does not correspond to a similar level of influence in society, institutions and public opinion.

So I believe the perspective that is emerging is this: we should go ahead on the lines of the appeal that Emmaus made a few weeks ago, which is to move onto a greater level of influence which can have an effect on social and political structures. We should intensify our collaboration, first of all within the Movement, but also with others, because it is not likely that we can make this move on our own.

The second thing is the role of local communities, because we spoke a lot about the local communities which are not an extra structure in the Movement, but a living and dynamic reality. It is the whole of the Work of Mary, the entire Focolare Movement in one place, which lives and works and thinks.

Personally I said that I see these local communities as a place in which a critical conscience can develop and express itself with regard to society. It is a critical conscience which is specifically ours and which comes from a vision, the vision of unity. And we would like our local communities to be like that.

When Chiara founded the Gen Movement she said: there is a protest movement and we want a Gospel-based protest. Today too, seeing all these evils, there are some groups which are anti-systemic. I said in the last few days that we are an anti-systemic influence, and so we are, but, as I said, we do this from the point of view of unity. We bring this new strength.

I believe this way of seeing things has come clearer in the last few days.

Antonella: That is marvellous, it really opens up a big horizon.

Emmaus, in these two weeks you have given us the theme on unity to live in depth this year. Just now the communities in different parts of the world are listening. What do you have most at heart? What would you say to this "people of unity" who are listening?

Emmaus: I think we are on the same lines. Truly I believe that if we live our charism in a radical way, our charism that is summed up in the word "unity", because unity is not only a point of the spirituality but it is the whole charism. If we, all of us who have got to know the Movement and all those who have come into contact with the charism, and that is certainly all those who are following this link up and a lot of other people who are not following it. But if all these people decide now to live it. We decide on it together, I first of all say "Yes, I want to live this, I don't want to live anything else" What do all these things we are witnessing tell us? They show that all the terrible things

that happen occur because of a lack of unity. And we have the remedy, because it is unity. We can live unity, we can build unity, and we can witness to unity because we have the grace to do it, because we have the charism of unity to do it. And this year is a special year for this reason. It is a year in which we will have a special grace to do this, a grace which will become concrete in dialogue, in dialogue with anyone, with every person.

So if all of us, from me to the furthest person who is listening to me and to those who will get this message tomorrow, perhaps through a friend who tells them or someone else. If we all set out in this way, with this intention, to say: whoever I meet is my brother or sister, I need to build a bridge of unity with them, whether they are a friend, an enemy, someone of my faith or another faith. If we all did this I think it would be truly possible to change something. I commit myself first of all, but I think everyone will because we are doing it together. And the fact of saying it now, means that we will do it and take it seriously. We have already done it, we are already committed.

Antonella: We will do it, Emmaus, we will. (Applause)

Thank you. Thank you.

Dying for our own people

Antonella: This radical approach takes me back to the 1970s when Chiara spoke to us, she gave us a motto, not any other motto, empty, but: ... "Die for your own people". She gave it to us Gen at that time. What Chiara gave us had a root, it was Father Tito Banchong, who was a young religious, originally from Laos. He had come to Rome to study. He decided to go back to his own land knowing that he might be killed. He wanted to go back out of love for his people. In fact, after a while we had no more news of him and we thought he was dead. Instead he wasn't, and recently Roberto Catalano interviewed him for us.

(Caption: Rocca di Papa 15 May 1977)

Chiara Lubich to the Gen School: "So your motto Gen is: to go home and to die for your own people." (Applause)

Roberto Catalano: Father Tito, you are well known in the Focolare Movement, because in the 1970s you had an important meeting with Chiara and shared with her your desire to return to Laos during a very difficult time in your country's history.

Fr. Tito Banchong: When I finished my theology studies, Laos had just become independent. It was in the hands of the Communists. I decided to go back to my country when I learned that all the missionaries had been expelled from Laos. I said to myself: Christians are still there, but who's going to guide them? Who's going to encourage them? Nobody. I talked to Chiara and asked her advice.

When I saw her, she asked me: "Why do you want to go back to Laos? There are the Communists, you can't do anything!" I said, "I must go back to my people because there's no priest. If I have to die, I will die for them!"

And Chiara said: "Go ahead. I will always be with you. Wherever you are, I will always be with you! Trust in the Lord."

This is why I returned to Laos. I went back and after a year and a half, I was arrested as I walked down the street, I am not sure why, and put in prison, I don't know why. I was in prison for four years, without any reason being given.

But I know that it was God who sent me there. As I said before, Chiara told me "God will put you where there is suffering." But it happened so quickly! ... I was happy, because I was living the Word of Life that Chiara had given me.

Roberto: Did they try you, or did they release you?

Fr. Tito: Nothing at all, no trial. I was released. After my release, I went to look for all the Christians in the province of Siam Quan and I found them. Many had been there for over 30 years without a priest.

Roberto: Then they put you in prison again...

Fr. Tito: Yes. I happened again on the street.

Many prisoners asked me: who are you? Why are you never sad? ... They give you so little to eat, and you share it with others, those who have nothing to eat. You're never sad. Do you have some relatives? Why haven't your relatives come to see you? Oh, they live so far, far away...

Roberto: What was your relationship with the prison guards like?

Fr. Tito: It happened that the bad people in the prison were all converted. They became good and started to share all they had.

Before I came the people in charge were really hard hearted, then slowly they changed ... they became better. Two of them are friends of mine, still. They are still alive! With Love you can break the bonds of hatred...

Antonella: With love, we can break the bonds of hatred. Thank you so much, Fr. Tito.

Chiara Lubich: Daring to think of a new age. Mutual love among peoples

Antonella: Now we're coming to the end of our Link Up. We've heard many stories; we've listened to many testimonies. All of these bring us back to one of Chiara's writings, which was like a manifesto, a prophecy and applicable so much to our own day.

She wrote it during the Mariapolis in 1959, the last one held in the valley of Primiero. It was an international Mariapolis as people from many different countries were there.

Let us read some excerpts.

Antonella (reads): from the Manifesto of the 1959 Mariapolis

If one day all people, not as individuals but as nations, learn to put themselves aside, to put aside the idea they have about their own country, ... and if they were to do this as the expression of the mutual love between States that God wants, just as he wants mutual love among individuals, that day will mark the beginning of a new era. For on that day, Jesus will be alive and present among peoples. ...

Now is the time for every people to go beyond its own borders, to look farther. Now is the time to love other countries as our own, to acquire a new purity of vision. To

be Christians it is not enough to be detached from ourselves. The times we live in ask something more of the followers of Christ: the awareness of Christianity's social dimension. ...

... We hope that the Lord may have mercy on this divided and confused world, on peoples closed within their own shells, contemplating their own beauty – so special to them - although it is limited and unsatisfying. With clenched teeth they hang on to their own treasures, those very treasures that could help other peoples, where many are dying of hunger. May the Lord cause the barriers to fall, and charity to flow unhindered between one land and another, in an endless stream of spiritual and material goods.

Let us hope that the Lord brings about a new order in the world. Only he can make humanity one family and cultivate the distinctive characteristics of each people, so that the splendour of each, placed at the service of others, may shine with the one light of life. By making each earthly country beautiful, this light will make each one a foretaste of the eternal Country.¹

Sign up for peace – Conclusion

Antonella: This was Chiara talking 56 years ago.

This is truly the end of our Conference Call. The Gen are going to come now. We leave with this new step that we were saying, with this new outlook ahead of us that Emmaus and Jesús have talked about. Is there something you want to tell us?

Joao: Before ending this Link Up, we'd like to invite you to sign an appeal for peace and for unity of peoples. This is one of the activities we have in the world. The appeal is Sign up for Peace. And you can find it in this link: <https://www.change.org/p/sign-up-for-a-global-petition-for-peace-now>.

Antonella: We ask you to send us news on this initiative and all the other initiatives that are happening in the world, to: newhumanity@focolare.org

Many message have arrived. We can read only one, from the focolarine of Bangui in the Central African Republic: "We are with you all. We can see you, even though we did not hear everything very well. Thanks for all the beautiful news. This morning, there was a very tense situation here. There was shooting in various districts. Some people died and others fled. We offer everything for you, for the Conference Call and for peace in the world."

We're also with you, thank you.

So we'll meet next time. The next Conference Call is on December 5, at 12 noon.

¹ Cf Excerpt from "Mary, bond of unity among nations", Summer 1959 – Published in "Essential Writings", New City Press, New York, 2007. pp. 231-233