

CONFERENCE CALL

Rocca di Papa, 5 December 2015

“Create equality so as to bring about peace”

1) OPENING AND GREETINGS

Cristina Montoya Every day dramatic world events enter into the life of each one of us. We feel dismayed and anguished because the whole world seems to be living in a state of emergency, of uncertainty and conflict.

We urgently need peace.

We must learn how to live together, to walk alongside each other.

Hello everyone, welcome to this link up. Greetings from Rocca di Papa to all of you.

(Applause)

My name is Cristina and I am from Colombia, a marvellous country in Latin America, which seems to be reaching peace after 50 years of armed conflict. Currently I am doing a doctorate researching in communications and I have started teaching at the Sophia University Institute in Loppiano.

(In Spanish) a greeting in Spanish to all the Colombians and to all those who are connected in Central America and all of South America. A Latin American hug to each of you.

(Applause)

Here with us there are people from many parts of the world, Egypt, Algeria, Korea, Jordan, the Central African Republic, Indonesia, Australia, and we could go on.

We wanted to ask Christine, who lives in Damascus, how things are going. What can you tell us?

Christine: In Syria, in Damascus. I have just received a message to bring the voice of the community there in Damascus. After 5 years of war, life has become more difficult. Many people have lost their jobs. Many of their friends and relatives have left. It is as though the population is changing. We try to go ahead, to love, to bring the Ideal and above all, we want to thank all those who are praying for us, and we know so many people are praying for us! We want to ask Jesus once again at Christmas for the gift of peace for everyone, for Syria but for the whole world, with renewed faith.

Cristina Thanks Christine. Yes, we will all ask with you, and we will continue to pray with this faith.

Thinking of you and all those who are in so many situations of war and violence, we remembered a letter Chiara Lubich wrote in April 1944. We looked for it and I will read part of it now. During a break between one air raid and another Chiara wrote a friend called Elena:

“... I am taking advantage of an air raid warning to answer your letter. I am sitting here in a meadow next to the shelter, waiting to go into the “hole” when the bombers arrive.

I feel my powerlessness but surrender it to God. I base everything on a faith that cannot crumble, because I believe in the Love of God. I believe that God loves me ...”¹

¹ From Chiara's letter to Elena Molignoni, dated 16th April 1944, in Chiara Lubich, “Letters of the Early Times”, Editrice Città Nuova, Roma 2010, pp.43-44.

This is what we want to do today too, and this is why we are here, to believe powerfully in God's love, despite everything.

So now let's start.

2) GEN VERDE UK TOUR IN GREAT BRITAIN

Cristina Now let's go to Great Britain, to Birmingham. For over two months, the Gen Verde music group has been there for a series of concerts and workshops, performing their new show. We called them to see how things are going.

Cristina: *give us a few ideas of what you found in the UK, how is it going_*

Alessandra Pasquali: *We did concerts "On the other side", our new concert and "Start now" ... we cannot count the number of young people we have met. We did workshops preparing the different parts of the concert with the young people, so they are on the stage with us and we are really doing the concert together*

Adriana García: *it has been fantastic. You find a thirst for unity, in Sikhs, Muslims and Christians, among people who do not have a religious belief, in young people who don't look you in the eye and who then decided to change their lives.*

Cristina: *Was it difficult to talk about dialogue, encounter, and peace?*

Alessandra Pasquali: *Yes, we felt it was difficult because we are doing a tour at a difficult time from this point of view. Never before has it been so necessary and worthwhile to talk about peace and hope. The people, and young people who we have met, don't want anything else. ... During the workshops, they discover something about themselves they were not aware of and we give them hope not only through our songs, but they discover hope in themselves, because they have an experience of hope.*

Adriana Martins: *[...] we too have had many contacts in the interreligious and ecumenical field. It was like a breath of fresh air for all of us and for the whole community. ... More than ever, we felt that it is not enough to be good Christians, good Muslims or good Buddhists. We must be together and we truly feel this desire to do things together, to witness peace, which is possible, if we are together.*

Alessandra Pasquali: *You can follow us on social networks, on Facebook and we also have a Gen Verde app.*

(Caption: www.genverde.it)

(Song)

Girl (in English) *What I really love about this opportunity is that we have come together as one, we sing as one person and It kind reminds me of a running race, where no one is in front and no one is behind, we cross the finish line together, so to say.*

James (in English) *Working on the Gen Verde tour has been really an enlightening experience to me; being able to experience first-hand the power of open dialogue and positivity; it's truly amazing.*

Prof. Gerald Pillay, Vice-Chancellor, Liverpool Hope University (in English): *It does not dodge the difficult questions, but it leaves you feeling hopeful and what a challenge to all of us tonight in the audience.*

Bhai Sahib Ji, Sikh spiritual leader (in English): *The messages are powerful! That's what we need! All the good qualities that we need, that has been represented in a very, very sort of nice way. It pierced your heart.*

(Song)

Cristina Thanks Gen Verde! You are really in the front line to bring this message of peace and unity through your music!

3) **BISHOPS OF DIFFERENT CHURCHES AT ISTANBUL**

Cristina: From Birmingham, let's go to Istanbul in Turkey, to the ancient city of Constantinople.

An important meeting of bishops of 16 Christian churches has just finished. They were welcomed by His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew. The path to full unity among Christians is difficult but some courageous steps are being taken. Let's see.

(Music and caption: 25th November 2015 / Ecumenical Meeting of Bishops / Halki Island (Turkey)).

Patriarch Bartholomew I: *Today I am even happier to have come up this hill again, because you are all here to welcome me at the entrance to this school, like a family.*

Speaker: *On the island of Halki, a few kilometres from Istanbul, is the Monastery of the Holy Trinity. A meeting of bishops of 16 different churches took place here this year. They have been meeting annually since 1982 to enable communion and fellowship to grow in the light of the spirituality of unity.*

(Surroundings – Music)

Elpidophoros Lambriniadis, Metropolitan of Bursa, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (in English): *Halki has always been a laboratory for the unity of Christians. [...] So bishops from all Churches coming back again and praying together, discussing together, walking around these places together [...] I think a very wise and good decision of his Holiness our Ecumenical Patriarch, who you know love so much especially the Roman Catholic Church and of course has personal contact of love and mutual friendship with the Focolare Movement.*

His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of: *It is through this sincere love, through these meetings, without "ifs" and "buts" that we can meet in the diversity of gifts.*

(Music)

Cardinal Francis Kriengsak Archbishop of Bangkok (Thailand) (in Italian): *Each church has something to give or to say to the others, so if we have a listening attitude, and openness ... we can understand one another better.*

(Music)

Maria Voce (Emmaus) President of the Focolare Movement: *We are not able to achieve unity by ourselves. Unity is essentially the work of God, only of God. Chiara was sure of this and wrote: "unity is something too great. ... it is Jesus' ideal. He came on earth to accomplish unity, the unity of all people with the Father through him, and of people with one another; ... He brings about unity."²*

(Music)

Athanasios Bernard Canepa, Coptic Orthodox (France) (in French): *It is truly the unity we want, unity in Christ in the same faith, the same love, in diversity, and distinctiveness.*

Caption: 28 November 2015 / "Pact of mutual love" / at Kadikoy (Chalcedon).

Bishop Amir: *United in the name of Jesus, we promise, for the whole of our lives...*

Emanuel Aydin, Siro Orthodox Church (Austria) (in German): *For me, the pact of love, the pact of unity that we make here, means to accept one another. Each of us comes from a beautiful garden, like a flower and this flower, this variety of flowers, forms unity, a beautiful bouquet of flowers.*

(Music)

² Cf. C. Lubich, *Unity at the dawn of the Focolare Movement*, Payerne, Switzerland, 26 September 1982.

Ake Bonnier, Swedish Lutheran Church (in English): In that moment we both sign and embrace each other physically, to show that my church is their church, their Churches is my Church. We are one together

(Caption: 28 November 2015 / Istanbul)

Sahak Masalyan, Armenian Church of Constantinople (in English): you feel that you are not alone in the world, because, when you are a minority, you have pressure of majority, you feel very small, yourself and your communities, [...] But when this sort of meetings [...] it is sort of moral support to us, it gives hope and solidarity.

Brendan Leahy Catholic Church (Ireland) (in English): Well there are 40 bishops here, forty is a lot of bishops because we represent a lot of different churches, at the same time compared with the world is very small. But [...] when Jesus came on earth he was in a very limited place for a limited amount of time, but he had a huge impact. And I think here if we manage to create a reality – which we are doing – so the love we have for one another it will have an impact. Perhaps we will not see it immediately but I do believe this variety of churches coming together and spending a whole week together [...] trying simply to love one another in small everyday ways, will create something of that presence of Jesus, and Jesus can work miracles.

(Caption: Istanbul, the Phanar, 29 November 2015 / Vespers for the Feast of St Andrew)

Speaker: At the Phanar, in the Greek quarter of Istanbul, is the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. In St George's Cathedral the annual solemn celebration of the Feast of St Andrew takes place. He is the patron of the Orthodox Church.

His Holiness Bartholomew I Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (in Italian): We all have the task of announcing a new era to suffering humankind. And to do so courageously, like our Chiara was not afraid of announcing peace in the midst of the horrors of the war. ... The Holy Apostle Andrew did not have doubts when he met the Master, nor did Chiara have doubts in entrusting herself to Him.

(Music)

Card. Kurt Koch Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (in Italian): I am convinced about and very grateful for this group of bishops of different churches who meet and seek unity... The Focolare movement, right from the start, has had a great ecumenical commitment... I think above all of spiritual ecumenism, to deepen the fire of unity.

(Caption: Istanbul, the Phanar, 30 November 2015 / Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St Andrew)

Patriarch Bartholomew I (in Italian): (...) We too, all aware of our responsibilities, we have no doubts about the path we are treading, in the encounter between our Churches, in the meeting with other Faiths, in going towards suffering humankind, because only Love can win.

(Only audio)

4) PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I IS AWARDED AN HONORARY DOCTORATE IN THE CULTURE OF UNITY

Cristina: This relationship among the churches took another important step last October when an honorary doctorate was awarded to HH Patriarch Bartholomew at the Sophia University Institute in Loppiano. Piero Coda, President of the University tells us about the meaning of the event.

(Views)

Piero Coda, President of the Sophia University Institute: Patriarch Bartholomew's visit to Loppiano was a very important event, an event about unity It was the fruit of all that has happened over the years. The root of it was Chiara's meeting with Patriarch Athenagoras, and the love with which these relationships have grown and developed. I was glad it happened during Loppiano's 50th anniversary year. The Patriarch had never been to Loppiano before, so there he was able to see the whole Movement. It was like an Expo of the Movement.

The time had come to give a higher profile to the Culture of Unity, through this university that Chiara founded. The events and developments over the years, and that we foresee in future, convey a culture, a way of living that creates fraternity, a capacity to relate. So why give this doctorate to Patriarch Bartholomew? He personifies a commitment to unity; he is the true heir of Patriarch Athenagoras, who had such a special relationship with Chiara; and he was the last church leader who went to visit Chiara when she was in Hospital during her final illness.

We arranged this award in the context of our common journey in dialogue with the Church of the East, of the Christian East, as fostered by the charism of unity. It took on greater importance because Pope Francis ... sent a message in which he saw this as an important ecumenical event.

There is an extraordinary harmony between Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew, which must be a fruit of the Holy Spirit. You saw how happy and moved the Patriarch was by Pope Francis' message. This event was hugely important ecumenically, a special stage on the journey towards full visible unity between the two Churches, that took on new impetus.

Patriarch Bartholomew I: ... Living unity in the Truth in Christ means understanding diversity with love, dialogue, and openness. Even human institutions - if we are able to "transfigure them" with this focus on diversity - will understand that diversity is a gift and not an opposition; it is wealth and not imbalance; it is life and not death. ...

Piero Coda: Ecumenism needs a breath of fresh air and new impetus. The charism of unity is made for that. That is why the idea came, on the basis of this experience, to found a Chair of Ecumenical Studies so that Catholics and Orthodox can study together on the basis of this experience and contribute significantly to the ecumenical movement today.(music)

The Patriarch wanted to meet the students ... and quoted a phrase in the Prophet Isaiah, which is included in the letter to the Hebrews: "Here am I – the Patriarch – and the children God gave me". I had the impression that he saw the students who are studying the culture of unity and trying to live it, as a fulfilment of what he too really wants, what he yearns for.

5) IN DIALOGO CON MARIA VOCE (EMMAUS)

Cristina: Emmaus, these two recent events were in line with all that Chiara did to further ecumenism over many years. You lived in Istanbul for 10 years, and you have seen all that has been happening over the years. Can you share your impressions?

Emmaus It is a very strong impression. Just hearing those last words from Patriarch Bartholomew at Loppiano I relived the moment in Istanbul when we met with him, like children with their father. Truly, we experienced his fatherliness and his brotherliness. And

you all saw this in what he did, in the welcome he gave us even during the official ceremonies. He even spoke Italian in front of his own people, just to honour this group who had gone there for a meeting.

This was what I felt.

We felt that Istanbul has a special grace. It has a special grace, which is like the soul of this city and its history. Although it has grown so much I found the city more beautiful, more open, with new roads and saw that there has been so much development. This made me think that truly it is a special city, special because it has been born from many cultures, peoples and religions living alongside one another. There are Christians of all Churches. It is truly a bridge between East and East. There is a real bridge over the Bosphorus, but the city is also an ideal bridge, because of the encounter among all the realities that are there. In this environment, a meeting like the one between various churches had more meaning and impact because it is where the Church first grew, the church of the first Christians. It was in those areas of Asia Minor that Apostles brought Christianity. I thought, look, we are going back to the early times, as we say in the Movement too. We must go back to the early times. These bishops went back to their own first times so to speak, to the early times of their churches, to the early times in which the Church was one. This created a great nostalgia and a passion for the unity of the Churches in all these bishops. We experienced unity as something real, already achieved among them, already achieved through the charism of unity. Each one recognised that they had been nourished, as a child of this charism, and so they had the firm intention to take this unity ahead.

So much so, I almost thought of saying we are not speaking any more about ecumenism. We can only speak about taking steps forward in the unity that has been built already and that always needs to be perfected.

Someone said, "So has unity been reached then?" I wanted to say, "Yes, it is already achieved, amongst us it is, but unity is God, so it is never complete, not even in one Church alone is it completely achieved. The Churches need to continue the journey. I think that this journey was made up of these steps, like the pact of mutual love, which was a solemn moment in that Church. There every bishop truly become fully a brother to the others and, for each one, the other's Church became their own. It was a reality. This reality brought joy to everyone. There was great joy and this bore witness.

This joy then went out on to the streets of the city, which is also harmonious even though it is huge. It is growing and growing, but it still has an identity, one that comes from this soul. I think it could be a message for Europe and for the world, the possibility to living together peacefully, of true unity among people, it can truly be an example and a message.

I was truly touched by this meeting and also by the attention and love Patriarch Bartholomew should me personally when he said that here is a friendship that continues, a friendship that lasts. I said to him, "But Your Holiness, you have helped this friendship to grow because every time you came to Rome we have met". He said, "Yes, but you too, because you have always arranged for flowers to be delivered, there were gifts in the hotel rooms". When he was giving out the blessed bread at the end of the liturgy, the bread they give to everyone, I approached and someone stopped me because another person was coming

forward. But he turned to me and said, “Emmaus come”, as if to say you must be there. Did you see he took me by the arm?

So there was a fatherly love, but one in which you felt the Patriarch of the East embraces everyone with his gaze, appreciating diversity. He welcomes the treasures the others have and shares his own treasures, embracing all the Churches. In that moment, we felt we were all embraced by him and by this great Church, a Church that has been great and which can be great again. This is what I think.

Cristina: Thank you Emmaus

Emmaus: Thank you (applause)

6) **GIVING A HOME, IN HOLLAND**

Cristina: However, we cannot forget the refugees. A focolare centre near Amsterdam in Holland opened its doors to a large group of young migrants.

Laura van Dun - Holland (in Italian):

On the last Saturday in September, we got a call from our local council. They said there was a group of refugees who needed somewhere to stay. It was an emergency. Looking at one another, we decided this was our opportunity to put into practice the hashtag “open your borders”. We set to work. We cleared the meeting rooms to make room for bunk beds; we got the dining room ready, bought food, games and all that might be useful for this group, not knowing exactly who they were. A second phone call came telling us that there were 118 young people between 15 and 17 years of age. They either had left their parents in their home countries or had lost them on the journey.

Enno Dijkema - Holland (in Italian):

They had survived the journey across the Mediterranean and many other terrible experiences. We gave them a sense of normality, loving them by playing, dancing and taking them to the Mosque or other places of worship.

Laura (in Italian):

Many people from nearby towns helped. For example, a priest came to wash the dishes and council workers played Ping-Pong with them. There was a professional footballer and dance teachers. Some teachers from nearby schools helped them learn Dutch. It was touching to see all these different people wanting to make them feel at home.

Enno (in Italian):

After two and a half weeks, it was very difficult to let these refugees go, as they had to move on.

Laura (in Italian):

We were able to go and visit them where they are now, to spend time with them and play. We know they miss us and we miss them.

7) **SIGN UP FOR PEACE**

Cristina: Different initiatives to help and support refugees happened not only in Holland but also in other parts of the world such as Cairo, Hong Kong, in several Italian cities and in Slovakia.

Helping is not enough, we know. We also need to influence public opinion. For this, we remind you that we are all asked to sign the *Sign up for peace* appeal. You can go to the signupforpeace.cf website and click to sign up. It will be given to heads of state at the United Nations.

8) ITALY – SEEING WITH MERCIFUL EYES

Cristina: In three days, Pope Francis will open the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica. But the Year of Mercy already began in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. The artist Michel Pochet found ways of representing mercy and this led to an exhibition at the La Pira International Centre in the heart of Florence.

Speaker: *Right in the centre of Florence, a small door, which you might not notice, leads into a well-known place: the Giorgio La Pira International Students' Centre, a place where those who come to Florence from many parts of the world can meet and talk.*

- Young man: *I'm from Brazzaville, Congo in Africa.*
- Young man: *I'm from Paris, France.*
- Young woman: *I'm Colombian.*
- Young woman: *I'm Argentinian.*
- Young woman: *I'm from Istanbul, in Turkey.*
- Young man: *I'm from the Philippines.*
- Young woman: *I'm Chinese from Canton.*

Speaker: *Since early 1978, the Centre has welcomed and supported more than 30,000 young people in various ways: practical help and guidance in their studies, friendship, but also spiritual and cultural support.*

The centre was established at the request of Cardinal Giovanni Benelli of Florence. Its inspiration comes from two persons who were leaders in building of fraternity among peoples: Giorgio La Pira and Chiara Lubich.

Maurizio Certini, director of La Pira International Centre: *The centre was founded with a vision of a united world, to have a place in Florence that would open a small door to the whole of Europe, based on hospitality, as we know. Ready to give but also to receive and to learn from everyone.*

Silvia Hallak - Syria: *We have had a very good relationship with La Pira Centre for 30 years ... because foreigners need someone to show them love, and a sense of family. The Centre has done this well ... This exhibition is a witness to mercy and to the work we have done, our love for God.*

Speaker: *The Merciful God is the title of the exhibition hosted by the La Pira Centre. It is an exhibition of some works by the French artist Michel Pochet.*

Michel Pochet: *When the Pope announced the Holy Year of Mercy, I asked myself, what image could depict mercy for a person who is not particularly religious? ... I had painted the Archangel Raphael, and realized I could give the idea of a God who heals using an image I always use now, drawing the eyes in the shape of a fish, because Raphael used drops from a fish to heal Tobias's father. I thought, "Those drops from a fish are like tears." So I understood: God heals by weeping with us. That is his way of healing us. The merciful God is the one who weeps with us.*

Rabbi Joseph Levi - Chief Rabbi of Florence: *Mercy is a central theme in the Hebrew*

Bible, in Judaism. Mercy reminds us who we are, and how we can present ourselves before the divine with full humility, really wanting to help the other humble person nearby, who, like us, bears the divine image in them.

Mohamed Osman - Somalia (first president of the Islamic Cultural Association, Florence):

We Muslims understand the merciful God from the first verse of the Qur'an, which says, "In the name of the merciful and forgiving God." God's mercy is really what we have been experiencing in the La Pira Centre over many years. We want to keep going courageously. Nothing will stop us.

9) IN DIALOGUE WITH JESÚS MORÁN

Cristina: it is a strong message. Practically speaking, Jesús, can you tell us what mercy is?

Jesús Well, I think this film said a great deal. First, mercy is a very rich concept from a semantic point of view, in its meaning. It is enough to think of the words we associate with "mercy". For example, we speak about visceral mercy, to have deep-seated mercy, so it is something intimate that affects us profoundly.

Jews express this concept with the word *rahamin*, which means the mother's womb, the inner organs. To have visceral mercy means feeling for others in the way a mother would feel for her suffering child, especially those who are suffering or marginalised.

Then we also speak of "merciful eyes", therefore mercy is not only a feeling but also a way of seeing, an existential attitude, which means fostering justice, preferring those who are least, preferring forgiveness, create a different culture.

Seeing this film, I would say we could also have tears of mercy.

Cristina: What does this mercy have to do with today's world, with the context in which we find ourselves?

Jesús: I think that mercy, because of its rich semantic meaning, has the grace to unite all of us. First, it is a religious concept, as we have seen which is important for all religious traditions: for Muslims, Jews and for Buddhists, for example and those of eastern religions and for Christianity too. It is shared by all Christian traditions. Just think how important mercy is for the Reformed churches, for example.

However, it is not only a religious concept. Think for example of the studies on sympathy done by Max Heller, in the first half of the 20th century, or more recent studies by Rifkin on empathy. At root, they are talking about mercy in lay terms.

Therefore, a year of mercy is a year that unites all of us, to create a different world, and to oppose the culture of violence mercifully.

Cristina: thank you Jesús.

10) PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT IS ALSO A MATTER OF JUSTICE

Cristina: Cop 21 has been taking place in Paris during the last few days. It is a global conference on climate change. This situation concerns the whole planet and all of us.

(Music)

Speaker: (in Italian): *There is no alternative for the environment at the global level: either we improve it or we destroy it.*

It would be “sad and catastrophic to let private interests prevail over the common good”. Pope Francis said this again in Nairobi and cautioned the rich and powerful countries. Everyone is looking to the international conference on climate change.

Simone Borg Ambassador of Malta to Climate Action, Cop21 Paris(in English): In Paris it's an historic moment at this point in time because about 192 states have met to be able to conclude an agreement that has been on the books for quite some time, which will provide a future for the world, which will ensure that the temperature of the planet remained stabilized.

It will depend very much on good will. And a sense of looking at each other from a fraternal aspect. In a sense that unless we think of future generations, unless states that are perhaps richer think of more vulnerable states that will be worst hit by climate change, like the small islands in the Pacific, like the African nations that will suffer drought, states will not do anything if they do not have the spirit of good will and fraternity.

Speaker: in Italian “Environment and Law, responsibility and participation” was the theme of a meeting attended by 230 people from a variety of professions including lawyers, judges, foresters, environmental engineers and academics from 4 continents. Frontiers are no barrier against environmental damage. We share responsibility for everyone. The environment is an issue of justice. Everyone has the right to drinking water and an unpolluted environment. The talks given defined the environment as a legal good, having economic value, but also a spiritual and aesthetic value, in relation to people, to the present and future.

Socorro Moura Guedes – a judge from Manaus Brazil (in Portuguese): Amazonia contains the world's largest river in terms of the volume of water and the world's largest rain forest. It is seen as the lungs of the world. A few days ago, a huge cloud hung over the capital city, making people worry. It bothered everyone and caused many respiratory problems. It was due to deforestation in a neighbouring state. As a judge, I try to prevent this type of activity, but also seek to build awareness. Our young people do activities, cleaning up rivers for example, to show the local people that safeguarding the environment is something we must all do.

Luca Fiorani Italian National Agency for Energy and Sustainable Development: The human person's capacity to do good cannot be destroyed by any system. We can make good prevail. If we change our lifestyle, we can influence the major economic and political powers. If I choose a product that is environmentally friendly, even if it costs a bit more, I force multinationals to sell an environmentally friendly product. It is my way of voting in economics.

Of course, we must try to influence leaders too, and the people who make major decisions about the future of humanity.

John Mundell is a member of the Focolare's ecological group called Eco-One. He invented the “earth cube”. When you throw the dice each day you do the action shown on the face of the dice. For example, the time is “now”. So don't wait, don't talk, but do something for the environment today.

11) A NEW LEBANON CAN BE BORN IN BEIRUT

Cristina: Let's do something now for the environment. This is exactly what happened in Beirut in a situation of emergency caused by garbage. People rolled up their sleeves. Let's see.

Mona Farhat A Lawyer – Beirut (Lebanon) (in Arabic): For a long time now, Lebanon has been experiencing many crises and problems at the political, social and economic levels. For the last 4 months, there has been another big problem: the problem of waste. A landfill site was

closed and after that, the garbage remained on the streets, piling up into mountains, but the government does not want to find a solution.

Now, like a light shining in the darkness: a group called "Offre joie" (Give with joy) has been inviting people to help clean up the garbage. People came, bringing gloves and masks and began to recycle what can be recycled, especially the plastics.

The experience we had with the young people of the Focolare was really beautiful. We started cleaning up the garbage and realized it was a huge job. We moved mountains of rubbish together with all those who came. There were Christians, Muslims, doctors, engineers, ordinary people, students,... in 8 hours with 40 volunteers we moved 22 tons of garbage, for less than a thousand dollars. At the same time, we moved mountains of hatred and selfishness and overcame corruption...

Our experience did not end there. The following week we went to the largest prison in Lebanon, where the garbage was left in front of the prisoners for over four months. When we finished, I felt that, like Jesus who took on the sins of the world, we had been able to take upon ourselves other people's trash. ... We went home transformed feeling that a new Lebanon was being born.

12) NEWS FROM THE FOCOLARE COMMUNITY IN THE KIRIBATI ISLANDS

Cristina: We have heard that if the temperature of the planet goes on rising some islands will be submerged in the ocean. One of these is Kiribati, in Polynesia. This little island, which might disappear in the a few decades, life is starting again. Let's hear their story.

(Music)

Bobbie: (a focolarina in English) During the month of July, two focolarine and a volunteer from Australia, travelled to the island nation of Kiribati, located in the South Pacific, half way between Australia and North America. This is the Focolare's third visit in recent years to Tarawa, the capital and most populated of this series of 33 atolls. Kiribati is noted to be one of the most endangered countries, listed to disappear within the coming decades, due to raising sea, consequence of the disastrous effects of climate warming.

The village of Buota, where most of the Focolare community is located, is fairly remote and is one of the nation's poorest areas, where unemployment is approximately 88% and access to the region is very difficult due to the poor condition of the road. Most of the inhabitants live a subsistent lifestyle, growing what crops they can (in soil that is becoming ever more contaminated by sea erosion) and by fishing. This village has one primary school and a second pre-school has begun with the focolare members.

To improve the social and educational level of the families and children of the village, most especially for women and children, the Focolare, in collaboration with NGO Associazione per un Mondo Unito (AMU), initiated a small project consisting of a pre-school and women's resource centre.

Makè: Now, 2 years since the opening of the school, the Focolare is beginning to make its way toward relieving some of the problems that the villagers face. The pre-school has over 50 children from 3 to 5 years of age, and the women's centre is going ahead with mini businesses in crafts, bread making, and ice blocks that are sold for a small income.

Bobbie: The "cube of love" is the basic pedagogical tool used by the pre-school teachers. It is a life style that the children bring into their homes and "being the first to love" and "loving everyone" has brought about life changing experiences in the families, where domestic abuse, consequence of poverty and over-population, is a serious social problem. The Cube of Love is

now being used throughout many of the pre-schools in Tarawa and has even reached some of the outer islands!

Bobbie: The citizens of Kiribati are a people of enduring faith who show a remarkable resiliency in front of the continuous depletion of natural resources and frequent natural disasters. Although few in number, we found that those who live and spread the “art of loving” and the Word of Life, continue to provide joy and a sense of hope and co-responsibility for those with whom they come in contact.

Someone said to us, “To develop the Focolare here means to build up also the social environment of the people of Kiribati”.

Cristina: thanks to you all at Kiribati, thanks for what you told us, and all the news you have sent.

13) SILVANA’S FIRST MEETING WITH CHIARA

Cristina: In Chiara’s letter dated April 1944 that we read at the start of this conference call, she said, “I believe that God loves me, and in the name of this Love I ask great things of my life and of the souls that follow my ideal.”

One of the girls who chose to share Chiara’s Ideal with her, the youngest of them, was Silvana Veronesi. Silvana died three days ago. Now we want to remember her hearing what she said in her last interview, in which she tells what happened in her first meeting with Chiara.

Silvana Veronesi, one of Chiara Lubich’s first companions: I was fifteen years old when I met Chiara. At the time, my family had been evacuated to a village above Trent because of the war. I came down to Trent every day to go to school. I was attending the Prati High School.

One day my classmates said, “Listen Silvana, our religion teacher asked for all our exercise books with the work we did together. Since you go by Piazza Cappuccini, where he lives, on your way home, maybe you could take them to him?” I said, “Yes, yes all right.” So that day I took the exercise books and went to Piazza Cappuccini.

I rang the bell and asked for Father Casimiro. I handed him the pile of books, he thanked me and unexpectedly, he asked me a question that I would never have thought of. He said, “Listen Silvana, do you love Jesus?” I was surprised and said, “But I don’t know him.” “Would you like to love him?”, “If you help me to know him?” “I’ll introduce you to a young lady who will tell you about him. She lives just near here.”

He quickly put away the books and we went down the steps to Piazza Cappuccini. He rang the doorbell at number two and Chiara herself opened the door. She was the young lady he wanted me to meet. He said, “This is a student from the school where I teach and I would like you to tell her something about your life”

Chiara smiled at me and said, “Come in Silvanella”. And we went in....

There was a door to a room and we sat on a little sofa there. Chiara said me, “You know Silvana, we have understood that we have one life and for that reason we must spend it well, for something that does not pass away. ...We have understood that only God does not pass away; so we have made God the Ideal of our life.”

As soon as Chiara had said this phrase, I immediately understood this was for me. And I decided in that moment to choose God as the Ideal of my life. He is the only ideal that does not pass away.

Then we stood up. It was already evening so when we opened the front door you could already see the stars. Chiara said, “Look, our souls are like the stars. We would like to form a constellation where every star is more beautiful because it is together with the others.” I left that house where I had found [what I was looking for].

Later on, remembering what she said to me then, showing me the stars which form a constellation, Chiara said that it was practically the first time that she discovered this Gospel lived-out together, so it was the collective spirituality that was progressing, and which was later recognised by the Church. ³ (Applause)

Cristina: Thank you Silvana. We feel we are all part of that constellation.

14) R.D.CONGO – “WAR IS DEATH AND PEACE IS LOVE”

Cristina: Those who believe in love can truly do great things. Only a few words are needed. Let's see what has been happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Boy (in French): *We want peace, we want peace. I'm François and I'm a first grader. Thank you.*

Speaker: *“War is death. Peace is love.” These are children from Kinshasa in Congo, children from a country blessed by nature, but wounded by 30 years of war, fuelled by powerful international interests, greed and corruption. At the beginning of November, more than 2000 children gathered on the big lawn of the main Petite Flamme School in Kinshasa. They shared their dream of a new future for their country. The children of the Focolare, together with hundreds of their friends from another 20 schools, said “no to war and yes to the art of loving that builds peace”. Their audience was made up of civil, diplomatic and ecclesiastical authorities. The national TV channel broadcast the event.*

(Excerpt of a song: For a better world)

The Petite Flamme are schools that provide hot meals and medical care to children living in the suburbs of Kinshasa, the capital of Congo. Over the years, more have been built in other regions of the country, extending their range to teenagers, and offering facilities for deaf and blind children. Several agencies and NGOs support them, including the New Families Association.

On the very colourful stage are many Cubes of love, which were given to each school, as sign of a shared journey and commitment to peace. (Song)

15) CHIARA LUBICH – AT THE SUPERCONGRESS

Cristina: “Nous voulons la paix!”... François was shouting at the start. It is an appeal that not only reaches governments and institutions but each one of us.

A few months after the attacks on the Twin towers in New York, Chiara spoke to a group of young people from different parts of the world. Words that are very relevant to today. Let's hear what she said.

Chiara Lubich: *... Peace. Is peace of such great interest today? Yes it is, of course, and perhaps more than ever before. Not only because dozens of wars are ongoing in the world today, but also because peace is threatened in a different, more insidious way. ...*

³ From an interview made on the 4th anniversary of the death of Chiara Lubich, “Chiara Lubich and the new generations”, Castelgandolfo, 11th March 2012.

The situation is serious. If this is how things are, it is not enough to oppose such great danger with merely human strength. We need to engage the forces of good with a capital G. You all know what this Good is: it is God and all that is rooted in him. It is the world of the spirit, of great values, of authentic love and prayer. ...

However, peace is so precious that all of us, adults and young people, leaders and ordinary citizens, must be actively involved in safeguarding it. ... Naturally, in order to know what to do, we need to be familiar with the deepest causes of this dramatic situation today.

You all know that justice does not prevail in the world, that there are rich countries and poor countries, where there is hunger. Instead, God's plan for humanity is that all people should be brothers and sisters, in one big family with one Father. ... Well then, how can we create greater equality, how can we bring about some sort of communion of goods? It is obvious that goods cannot move unless hearts are moved. Therefore, we need to spread love, the reciprocal love that generates brother and sisterhood among all. We need to invade the world with love! Beginning with ourselves, and with you, boys and girls.

Someone here might ask, "Is love, loving one another, compatible with the lifestyle our cultures have handed down to us? Yes, it is. Look in your sacred Books and in almost all of them, you will find the so-called "Golden Rule". The Christian text says, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk 6:31). Judaism says, "Do to no one what you yourself dislike" (Tobit 4:15). In Islam "None of you is a true believer if you do not desire for your brother what you desire for yourself" (Hadith 13, Al Bukhari). In Hinduism, "Do not do to others what would make you suffer if it were done to you" (Mahabharata 5: 1517). All these phrases mean, respect and love your neighbour.

If you, a Muslim boy or girl, love, and you, a Christian, love, and you, a Jew, love, and you, a Hindu, love, you will certainly reach the point of loving one another. The same for everyone. This would already create a chunk/portion of universal fraternity. ... Therefore, loving is one of the great secrets of our time. Loving with a special kind of love. It is certainly not a love directed only towards our relatives and friends. This love is directed towards everyone, those who are more or less nice, rich or poor, children or adults, from your own country or foreigners, friends or enemies... Towards everyone.

We should be the first to love, by taking the initiative, without waiting to be loved.

We should love not only with words, but also concretely, with facts; and we should love one another.

... if you do this, if we all do this, universal brotherhood will spread, solidarity will grow, goods will be better distributed, and the rainbow of peace will shine over the world, a world which will be in your hands in a few years' time. (Applause)

16) CONCLUSION

Cristina Let's leave one another with these challenge words from Chiara.

The next link up / conference call will be from Mumbai in India on Sunday 7th February, not 6th February as was foreseen, but Sunday 7th. Meanwhile let's go ahead together. (Speaking in Spanish) A special goodbye to all our friends in Latin America and especially Colombia. And a Latin-American hug to all of you.

(Applause)