

Rocca di Papa, 15/06/2019  
GENERATING PEACE

**1. Opening and greetings**

**2. Live link up with the USA - New York, Mariapolis Luminosa**

**3. Chiara Lubich: Generating peace**

From Chiara Lubich's talk to the VII Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace – Amman (Jordan), November 29<sup>th</sup> 1999

**4. LEBANON. A rich tapestry**

This country has all it takes to be a model for the world of shared life in society and among religions. Yet the longstanding political and economic crises undermine this careful balance. For 50 years the Focolare has been seeking to make its own contribution.

**5. LEBANON. IRAP: a school and a home**

It started as a school for children with hearing and speech impediments, but IRAP is much more than this. Everyone feels at home there and workshops for crafts and cookery have developed creating jobs and settings for a shared life. IRAP's story shows that integration is not something exceptional but the daily life and destiny of the Lebanese people.

**6. Travelling in Syria - Damascus**

A report on a journey with Egilde Veri who came back to Syria after 14 years and after a terrible conflict. We travel to Damascus with her to meet and hear from the Focolare community there.

**7. Travelling in Syria - Homs**

Travelling from Damascus to Aleppo, you go through Homs. We saw for ourselves what is happening there: the rebuilding and the people's determination to go back to a normal life in a country where the war is not yet over and rubble blocks roads and hinders lives. We saw what the Focolare is doing through projects run by the Action for a United World (AMU) and the New Families Association (AFN).

**8. Travelling in Syria – part 3 ( Aleppo )**

In the souk in Aleppo we hear from Jalal: war means destruction and loss, that is true, but crossing the threshold of the Focolare we find a home and a community, a refuge and place of comfort, hope and joy, where people support one another in getting up and starting over again.

**9. Dialogue with Maria Voce (Emmaus):**

**10. Conclusion**

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

**1) OPENING AND GREETINGS**  
(SONGS AND APPLAUSE)

Jean Paul: Welcome everyone to this Link-up! (*Repeats in Arabic*)  
Greetings to all of you who are here in the hall and especially to those who are connected all over the world!  
Hi Stefania!

Stefania: Hello Jean Paul!  
The footage you saw at the start of this link up is from the journey that Emmaus and Jesús made to Lebanon and Syria. You can find all the news about this journey on the website [www.focolare.org](http://www.focolare.org). Today's link-up is "SPECIAL", dedicated to these countries, to the stories of the people in those communities.

**2) LIVE LINK UP WITH USA - New York, MARIAPOLIS LUMINOSA**

Jean Paul: But before we begin our journey in the Middle East, we want to go to New York, to Mariapolis Luminosa... There are 80 young people from Canada, Mexico and the USA spending a week together, the United World Week. This year the motto we took as young people of the Focolare for our projects was "No One in Need".

Christina is on the line, hi Christina.  
(In English, then in Italian) What have you been doing during this week?

Christina (*in English*)

Jean Paul (*in English and then in Italian*) I will translate.  
For the past week we've been exploring the red pathway, building a more united world through the areas of Economy and Work. We had workshops, guest speakers and discussions on how we can reach the goal of "no-one in need". The theme of our week was "live to give". Our generation wants change. We want to change society by giving more and taking less, starting with ourselves. Economy of Communion Entrepreneurs gave us a new perspective on work and finances. They inspired us to put the person at the centre of everything that we do. We participated in a climate justice panel in New York City. A speaker invited us to take action for our common home starting with small steps in our daily life and also advocating for policy change on a higher level.

(*In Italian and then in English*) I heard that today is the last day, what are your future plans?

Christina (*in English*)

Now we are launching a new pathway for peace. Through education and concrete actions we will focus on human rights, justice, and a culture of legality beginning in our own local communities. Now we hand the microphone back to you in Rome. We know that the rest of the link up will cover stories from Syria and Lebanon. We want to greet our community there. We thank you for what you do every day to build peace and we send you all of our love and unity.

Jean Paul: ok I will translate (*in Italian*) Thank you Christina. We are with you! (A greeting in English and they reply from the USA – applause)

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

But...Stefania, I know you are a journalist, but nothing more....

Stefania It's true, we haven't even introduced ourselves! Yes, I am a journalist I have been working at the Focolare Communications Office for a year and I am also part of the Conference Call team. Instead you, Jean Paul, are an engineer...

Jean Paul: I am an engineer, I'm 27 years old, I am Lebanese, I'm a Gen, a young person of the Movement, I am here in Italy, I am working having completed my studies. I am very happy to be here for this special Link-up which will also talk about my country! (Laughter and applause as he waves the Lebanese flag).

Stefania The land of cedars. A truly beautiful country. I have recently returned from Lebanon and I can confirm it.

### **3) CHIARA LUBICH: "Generating peace"**

Stefania: Now we will start with Chiara, who will talk to us about peace. It was 1999 and just as today, the world then was struggling to find pathways to peace.

That year the Balkan countries were trying to emerge from a terrible war, lasting twenty years. Chiara was in Amman, Jordan, at the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

*Chiara: [...] Another step in the art of loving is perhaps the most demanding of all. It tests the authenticity and purity of love, and therefore, its real capacity to generate peace. It is to be first in loving, which means not waiting for the other person to take the first step, but rather to be the first to act, to take the initiative.*

*This way of loving means taking a risk. However, if we want to love as God does and develop the capacity to love, which God has put into our hearts, we have to act as he did. He did not wait for us to love him. Rather, he showed us always and in a thousand different ways that he loves us first, regardless of our response. [...]*

*Clearly, anyone who aspires at removing the mountains of hatred and violence faces a daunting task. But - and this is important - what is impossible for millions of separate, isolated individuals becomes possible when people choose reciprocal love, mutual understanding and unity as the motivating force of their lives.*

*And all this has a purpose, a secret key and a name. When we of different religions enter into dialogue, that is, when we are open to one another in a dialogue based on mutual kindness, reciprocal esteem and respect, we also open ourselves up to God. In the words of John Paul II, "we allow God to be present in our midst.*

*This is the great fruit of our mutual love and is the hidden force that gives vigour and success to our work for peace. [...]*

*Mutual love and unity give great joy to those who practice it. However, they call for commitment, daily training and sacrifice. And this is where a particular word in the language of Christians appears in all its dramatic clarity. It's a word the world does not want to hear, one that it considers foolish, absurd and futile. This word is "the cross."*

*Nothing good, nothing useful, nothing fruitful can be achieved in the world without encountering and accepting weariness and suffering; in a word, without the cross.*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*Dedicating one's life to the cause of peace is a commitment not to be taken lightly! It calls for courage, and knowing how to suffer.*

*[...]I would like to tell you one last point that teaches us how to put into practice true love for others. It consists of three little words: make yourself one. 'Making ourselves one' with others means taking as our own their worries, their thoughts, their sufferings, their joys. [...]*

*'Living the other,' furthermore, embraces all aspects of life and is the greatest expression of love, because by living in this way we are dead to ourselves, to our ego and to all attachments. We achieve the "nothingness of self" to which great spiritualities aspire; we become empty of self out of love and by welcoming others. We give space to the other person who will always find room in our heart. And we have an attitude of learning from others, because we really do have something to learn from them.*

*Clearly, all of this is not only a matter of being kind and understanding. It is not just a method to promote 'interpersonal relationships,' or a strategy for consensus-building or for selling one's agenda. Love has only one goal: to give of oneself totally and selflessly.*

**Stefania:** "Committing yourself to live and bring peace is not to be taken lightly! We need courage; we must know how to suffer."

These words of Chiara give the deeper meaning of our journey in Lebanon, of what we lived in Lebanon and in Syria and of what we saw.

Five of us left at the end of May: in Lebanon we were with Kim Rowley who is now in the control room, hi Kim. Greetings, we can see her in the video (applause). There was also Lorenzo Giovanetti who is on camera here on my left (applause). While in Syria we went with Egilde Veri, a journalist, and Marco Tursi a film-maker, greetings Egilde, greetings Marco! (Applause)

I think I can speak for all of us when I say that we will never forget the strength of the people we met and got to know, their strength in living, struggling, building a future despite all that they have been through.

A map will appear on the screen: on it you can see our journey: we arrived in Beirut, in Lebanon, and from there we went to Damascus, then to Homs and finally we reached Aleppo.

We must say this journey would not have been possible without the help and collaboration of our local communities who accompanied us and who have worked with us for this conference call. Together with them we have chosen to give voice to the many people in Lebanon who bring a spirit of unity in a very complex situation and to those in Syria who lived eight years of war with courage and hope. Many of them, as we shall see, are rebuilding homes, restoring dignity to the most vulnerable people like children and the sick, for the many who are unemployed, also thanks to Action for a United World and New Families Association projects that have been operating there for several years.

#### **4. LEBANON: a rich tapestry**

**Stefania** So let's begin and travel to the 'Land of Cedars', let's go Jean-Paul

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

(In different languages, subtitle in Italian)

(Music and footage)

Voice over (in French)

*From the pure snow of our mountains  
From the incense of our eternal cedars  
An incomparable spirit of peace was born.  
War is not the fruit of my will.  
My will is love.  
My will is peace.*

(Music)

Stefania (Voice over off screen): *These verses by Naji Karam, a Lebanese archaeologist, express the deepest essence of the "Land of cedars". He is talking to us in the ruins of Jbeil, ancient Byblos; that has been continuously inhabited for over 7,000 years (music)*

Naji Karam, archaeologist (in Arabic): *The name "Lebanon" has to do with whiteness; it refers to the White Mountains. The oldest text in which the name "Lebanon" is written is about 4000 years old, and it is mentioned in the Bible 72 times. The Lebanese people – and this is shown by ancient mythology - is a peaceful people. The word "love" has existed since the time of the Phoenicians. This is important because it has enabled the Lebanese to dialogue with everyone. (Music)*

Stefania (Voice over): *This small country really is unique in the Middle East: it connects 3 continents and its population is multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural.*

Jeanine Jalkh, journalist, L'Orient Le Jour (in French) *In everyday life, Lebanese people live together very happily. The problem starts as soon as politics comes into play trying to exploit these differences, to defend the personal interests of various political leaders. Unfortunately, we saw it during the war. (Music)*

Stefania (Voice over): *A civil war that devastated the country from 1975 to 1990, with bombings, terrorist attacks and bloodshed that left more than 150,000 dead and nearly one million displaced. A long trail of bloodshed that affected everyone, disrupting relations between the various Lebanese communities, especially Muslims and Christians.*

Jeanine Jalkh, (in French)

*Here we are in Sodeco square, and just there is the demarcation line or green line, which divided the city into two parts during the Lebanese civil war. The Christian area started over there and on the other side was the predominantly Muslim area. Right beside this line, we have this building, the Yellow House, which has been restored, to stand as a symbol of the war, to remind everyone of the civil war. (...) It is of course a symbol for the future and for the new generations that have not known war. (Footage)*

Stefania (Voice over): *The Lebanese are in fact a youthful people: 47% are under 24 and the percentage of university graduates is high. But due to the severe economic crisis that has affected the country for years, half of them are forced to look for work abroad, in the Gulf countries or in the West.*

Jad Aoun, architect (in Lebanese): *I have a problem common to many young people here and that is, I cannot find a job. I left Lebanon and found work. I worked, but I had to come*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*back and now I'm looking for a new job. I still hope I'll find one here, in my country, but this hope is fading.*

Younna Bouzamel, Political Science student (in Lebanese): *I work with a former parliamentarian who is fighting corruption, I'm helping him and this gives me hope, because I see there really is hope, there are people who are working to fight corruption. (Music)*

Stefania (Voice over): *Lebanon is indeed a melting-pot: 18 religious traditions coexist here and even political offices are equally distributed between ethnic groups, cultures and faiths. It's an increasingly difficult balance to maintain, if we consider that about half of the country's 6 million plus population are Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Lebanon is in fact the country with the highest number of immigrants per capita in the world.*

*Moreover, despite numerous efforts and the bloodshed, the ancient prejudice of the clashes based on religion has not yet been eradicated. But there are those who bear witness to a different vision, like Dr Ibrahim Chamseddine, a moderate Shia scholar and politician.*

Ibrahim Chamseddine, founder, Imam Shamsuddin Foundation for Dialogue: (in Arabic): *There is no religious conflict between Muslims as Muslims, and Christians as such; absolutely not. (...)*

*Fear has become an industry in Lebanon.*

*Because politicians are astute and hypocritical, they use any means to divide people. They say to Christians: "Watch out"; and to the Muslims: "Watch out". And if that is not enough, they say to some Muslims: "You are Sunni, watch out!", and to the others: "You are Shiite, watch out!" As they say, it's: "divide and rule".*

*When different people from the same homeland protect and care for each other, then they build up one society and one state is built, and they go back to being naturally Lebanese. (Music)*

Bishop Joseph Naffah, Maronite bishop: (in Arabic) *Let's not forget that the world has become a small village. There are no longer places that are only Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist. We are interconnected, at least when we travel or surf the Internet. This is why the whole world looks to Lebanon, because it is a 'workshop' that teaches us a lot and helps us build a new world.*

*Today we are in the Kannubin Valley, the Valley of the Saints or the Holy Valley. It is the heart of our Christian faith, because during the persecutions between the 16th and 19th centuries, people hid in the caves to maintain their faith, freedom and dignity.*

*I am at the Vicariate of Besharre and Zgorta. Unfortunately, during the war blood was spilled between them. That is why the Patriarch decided to appoint me as Bishop for both of them. I am happy to be a sign of unity at the heart of our Christian Maronite people. (Footage)*

Stefania (Voice-Over): *Unity is certainly the greatest need and challenge for this country where the Focolare Movement arrived 50 years ago also through Aletta Salizzoni, one of Chiara Lubich's first companions and Guido Brini. With the warmth and family spirit that characterizes the Lebanese people, the first communities grew up immediately. Daisy and Samir live in Beirut; they have three children and 7 grandchildren. They met the movement in the early seventies.*

Daisy Najm: (in French) *We followed Chiara in everything she gave us. It was the Holy Spirit that pushed us. "Yallah", "go ahead!"*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*One of the most significant choices we made in our lives was to go to the United States. It was 1989, the war was very bad and there were no more schools, universities or jobs.*

*We stayed there for two years. There were times when we couldn't see what God's will was. A particularly strong moment was when we decided to come back to Lebanon, just when we were beginning to settle there. We felt that Lebanon needed us.*

*Samir Najm: (in French) You know, Lebanese people are born into politics, formed in politics, so we are all politicians, on one side, on the other. When Chiara asked us to do politics we tried to have politicians who knew the ideal (of unity) and that is why, over time, we had 13 politicians, who are now in the municipalities, in the unions and they have changed. And now there are so many people engaged in politics. (Music and footage)*

*Samir Najm (in French): The most beautiful thing in Lebanon is the family.*

*Daisy Najm (in French) Everything is based on the family. Here are some traditional Lebanese dishes.*

*Love is there, that needs to be everywhere. It's the family, it's humanity ... (music and applause)*

Stefania: Jean Paul, I think you recognized several people in this report!

Jean Paul: Yes, I can affirm I recognised many; in fact I am the son who was not present in the last family we see in the video. (*Greetings to the family*)

Stefania: Of course, you were here in Italy when we went there. You told me earlier that you want to make a contribution to your country, but what does it mean?

Jean Paul: It is true that I now live here, I studied in Lebanon but now I work in Rome. I am one of many millions of Lebanese living outside the country. Just think there are more of us who live outside, than those who are in Lebanon. I feel within that I want to and I believe that I can change something, I can help my country, I don't yet know how and I don't know what I have to do. I'm discovering it every day; maybe from here, or from there, I don't know yet but I am sure I can do something one way or another.

Stefania: In Beirut I spoke to many people and one of the words that sum up Lebanon is "complexity". Can you explain what this means?

Jean Paul: Lebanon's complexity can be seen in the variety of people there.

Let's start with the composition of our people: there is no Lebanon without Christians, but neither is there Lebanon without Muslims.

Each of us has many peoples within ourselves, because many civilisations have passed through our land down through history. Let me give an example to show how much we have been influenced by many peoples - our Lebanese language is an Arabic dialect which includes words in French and English.

So, in this case, complexity is an enrichment, it is really beautiful!

## **6) Lebanon - IRAP, A SCHOOL AND A HOME**

Stefania: Let us continue our journey, where do we go next?

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

Jean Paul: We are going to north Beirut to see what is happening at IRAP, a school for deaf and dumb children. More than that it's a family and a home

**IRAP VIDEO** (in many languages, subtitles in Italian)

Dalal Beairy, production supervisor: (sign language): *I came to IRAP as a child. I studied and grew up here as if it were my family* (footage)

Nicole Helou, general assistant (in French): *I started IRAP almost thirty years ago, around 1986. When I arrived here, there was war; I didn't know what to do.*

*I have always been attracted by the needs of society, by doing something for others; someone told me about IRAP. I said: "What can I do in a house for the deaf when I don't even know sign language? But a friend told me: "Try it, try it." (Music and footage)*

*IRAP means: Phonetic Audio Rehabilitation Institute; it is school and home at the same time; a school for hearing impaired children and adolescents, a specialized school where children are welcomed from a young age. And after school, there is family life; because when Jeanine and Souad started this work, their goal was to offer a family life. (Footage) Since there was the war - a long war that never ended, that stopped and then started again - there were many needs. We welcomed many displaced people and we needed to do something to support ourselves. So we started bake cakes and that's how the first patisserie began, with pastries and cakes. Then the macramé craft workshop started too; it has developed little by little. (...) This helps us live. That is how it was during the war and it has kept going, even better today. (Music and footage)*

Dalal Beairy: (sign language): *I am in charge of the cookery workshop and its production. Our products are also sold in supermarkets. I do the general supervision and control of hygiene, quality and finishing of the work. (Footage)*

Nicole Helou (in French): *We don't even know the children's religion, nor where they come from or who they are. The children are hearing impaired, they come to us, we take them in, we welcome them into our hearts and we give them everything we can. (Footage)*

*The IRAP philosophy is shared by the professionals who work here, those in the specialized educational team, and the ones who have specialised in teaching hearing impaired children. (Footage)*

*Now let's go to Biakout, a region on the outskirts of Beirut. We have been there since the war years, after the 1980s. Displaced people and refugees from southern Lebanon came to live in our region. (Music)*

*We started from the needs of that time, and then it developed as you will see now into work for women - embroidery and sewing - and a nursery for street children. (Footage)*

*At both IRAP and Biakout Christians and Muslims live together. During the formation courses we teach them about faith where, through daily life, we try to identify shared values. We try to develop and teach children about this life of sharing, respect for others, love, mutual love, the gift of self, being able to give freely. (Music and footage)*

Stefania (in French): *What do you do in the workshop?*

Josiane social worker, Biakout (in French): *The workshop is for training and production. We did a sociological study and discovered that there were many women from remote villages, displaced people who could do manual work; so we started giving embroidery lessons for those who wanted to learn. We gave them work to do at home, which we then sold through IRAP.*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*The main purpose is women's development. Since we are in a neighbourhood that is mixed - Muslims and Christians - from the very start we worked with everyone. We give top priority to this living together because we know very well that when we become friends, when we work together, when we know each other better, we are no longer afraid of each other. (Music and applause)*

Stefania: Thank you. Thank you and Greetings to everyone at IRAP who are following us! Ciao to everyone (applause)

## **6. SYRIA - DAMASCUS**

Stefania: On 26th May we left Beirut for Syria

As soon as we crossed the Syrian border on the right hand side of the road we saw a massive poster in Arabic and English saying "With love and peace, welcome to Syria". It struck me as a paradox but over the following days I understood more and more that I had to set aside the ideas I had about the situation in the country and open my heart and mind. I asked myself, perhaps for the first time: what Syria will I discover?

*(Music)*

Edilde Veri (voice over) - *I have been along this road before. It was 2005 and I was simply a tourist on holiday. Then in 2011 the war began in Syria. In recent years I have often wondered what happened to the people and places I had photographed. Now I'm back here again. They tell me this road was closed for a long time. People fought here and snipers shot at passers-by. Damascus is over there in front of me ... I look at it and I'm afraid to find out what's left of the city that enchanted me so much. (Music)*

*My guide in Syria is Zena. (Music) She is a Lebanese focolarina and has been living here for two years. With her I'm rediscovering Damascus.*

Zena: *This game is called the dice table (she repeats the name in Arabic - music).*

*You have to do this... and then throw: five and two. Roll the dice! Every house here in Syria has one of these. (Music)*

*Here is the Damascus souk. The souk has different departments, we are now in the spice souk and then one alley is full of fabrics and then a whole alley filled with household goods. Everything you can think of, you can find here. (Music) This is candy floss, see how white it is, then we top it off with pistachio, to give it a nice touch.*

Eqilde: *Is this how you eat it?*

Zena: *Yes, you eat it like this. Music*

Eqilde (voice over) - *Life in the souk never stopped. During the war, it closed on the worst days and reopened as soon as things were calm again.*

*I can't believe that only a year ago there was fighting here...*

Zena: *This area, especially last year, was bombed very much. Many, many bombs landed here.*

Eqilde (voice over) - *Damascus was one of the last cities to be liberated. And a bomb landed near the Focolare.*

Zena: *Look, the floor tiles here are different, you see. I was about to go out to work and I heard "boom". You know when you hear something so loud: what's that? And then you*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*hear the cries of the wounded. We hid under the stairs for 5 hours until someone came to get us out, and then we went to Aleppo. (Music)*

*Come, I'll show you where the focolare is. See those bricks. See that roof there. The focolare is there.*

Egilde: *Very close*

Zena: *Oh yes, just 100 meters...and the bomb landed here. (Music and footage)*

Egilde (voice over) - *Tonight the community of Damascus is celebrating someone's birthday and for a moment the war seems far away. Zena introduces me to Hanan. Her story reminds me suddenly of where I am. Sharing and listening sometimes makes the pain a little less.*

HANAN (in Arabic): *We lived in a village called Daraya. Before escaping, we lived with the rebels here for two years. We saw people dying on the streets. It's terrible to see someone you have known dead.*

*We had a very big house, but due to the war we lost it. We also had some shops, but we lost them too. I lost my memories, I lost my joy. (Music and footage)*

Egilde (voice over): *Hanan's family fled to Damascus and found a place to live in this suburb where thousands of displaced people are now living. It was hard at the beginning, they escaped without taking anything with them, and at first they slept on the floor. (Music) After a few months, some young people from the community contacted her. They went to see her and began to help her family with a small amount of money.*

HANAN: *They gave me everything, especially love. I hadn't felt love since losing everything. At one point I decided to bring the love that these young people had given me to other families.*

Egilde (voice over): *Today Hanan is visiting one of these families and she took me with her. Their story is like hers. The bombs reduced their house and shop to dust. Hanan is no longer a guest here. She is a friend, a shoulder to lean on.*

Woman (in Arabic): *There are so many kind things you have done for us. One day it was raining heavily and you came and brought us a heater. How did you manage to bring it? I was touched because if I asked my brother for a heater for my children who were feeling cold, he would have said he couldn't go out. You have experienced what I have experienced and so you know what it means. That's why you left everything and hurried here. I thank you with all my heart for this. It was a very nice gesture. Thank you.*

*(Music)*

Egilde (voice over) - *I thought I would find a city of closed doors, empty and silent. But in the evening, the bars in Damascus are full of young people. Life is back. Or maybe it never left. I asked Samer about this over a beer.*

SAMER (in Arabic): *At first the war was new to us. Of course, we were shocked. Then we realized that it was going to last a long time and that we had to get on with our lives. Things have progressed. Nothing has stopped. Those who had to go to university or to work kept going. People think you need to be strong to go out with friends in a similar situation. In reality we went out to see each other and strengthen one another.*

*(Music and applause)*

## **7. SYRIA - HOMS**

Stefania: *We left Damascus for Homs, which is about a three hours' drive away. I have to say that was perhaps the most difficult stage, the hardest of our journey, where we were able to go into what 'had been' people's homes, to hear their testimony as to how they had survived the war.*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*(Footage)*

WAEL in Arabic: *the war started in Homs in 2011 and caused great destruction. Entire districts have been destroyed, like this one: see, the people are gone.*

*There was a time when there were terrorist attacks, car bombs. Many people were killed.  
(Music)*

*All these neighbourhoods were full of people, full of life, of children playing. This was a big supermarket. Here was the general hospital, it was very big. It was completely destroyed. I worked there. Now there's nothing left. They took everything away. (Music)*

Eqilde Veri (voice over): *Wael never left Homs. The war did not only begin here, but it lasted longer here than anywhere else. Almost half the city is reduced to rubble and empty buildings.*

Eqilde (in Arabic without translation): *Was it a bomb?*

WAEL (in Arabic): *Here yes, it must have been a mortar. (Music)*

*Look, people have come back to live in this building. They fixed a few things and come back to live there in spite of everything. This shows that life wants to carry on. (Music)*

*Be careful Zena, I'm afraid there might still be mines here.*

MARCO: *Where? In here?*

WAEL (in Arabic): *We don't know. (Music)*

*This house belongs to this man. They want to come back and live here because they have no other choice. They'll put up some tents because they don't have the money to rebuild it.*

Eqilde: *It was really nice...*

WAEL (in Arabic): *He is saying that it was a beautiful house. With your family living here it will be even more beautiful. Let's go. Thank you. (Music)*

Eqilde (voice over) *One day, Sandra came to the neighbourhood where Wael lives. She had run away from a nearby village. Sandra and Wael got married at a time when the war hit Homs the hardest.*

SANDRA (in Arabic): *On the day of our wedding there were many bombings in Homs and the hotel where we were going to stay was hit by a mortar; when we arrived we saw blood. (Music)*

*We didn't know what would happen to us. I found the right person at the wrong time.  
(Music)*

*Then I got pregnant. We were afraid, but while I was expecting the baby I didn't feel afraid because she was in my womb and I could protect her. After she was born, the real fear began. Love for her made me want to emigrate. (Music)*

WAEL (in Arabic): *Can you see Paula? Show us where Paula is. Show her again (laughter-music)*

*This is Sandra's team at school, in her project. (Music and footage)*

Eqilde (voice over): *Like Paula, many of the children in Homs were born and raised during the war. Many have hardly been to school and are marked by fear. When Sandra became a mother, she had an idea:*

SANDRA (in Arabic): *Hello*

TEACHER AND CHILDREN (in Arabic): *Welcome.*

Eqilde (voice over): *---to start an after-school activity for them.*

SANDRA (in Arabic): *This is a grade 2 class. The lesson has started. Miss Maraha has been with them all day. Has school finished?*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

CHILD (in Arabic): Term ends on Wednesday.

CHILD (in Arabic): Ours ends later.

SANDRA (in Arabic): They come from different schools. Some have already closed for the holidays, others not. Bye everyone!

CHILDREN (in Arabic): Bye.

Egilde (voice over): The children go over the subjects they have studied in school. They have English lessons. They have psychological help and a speech therapist helps the ones who stammer because of the trauma or are dyslexic. (Music)

SANDRA (in Arabic): In this neighbourhood most people are Sunni, but there are also Alawites, and Christians of many denominations. They interact with each other and love one another.

I am very happy when here in this centre we can at least make these children smile. (Music)

Egilde (voice over): These roads were ISIS territory for a long time. The people who lived here were expelled by the militia or fled before they arrived. They tell me that the ISIS soldiers occupied their homes, slept in their beds and took away everything they had. Samer's house is one of these.

SAMER (In Arabic): I don't like coming in here. (footage) This was the kitchen, but as you can see there is nothing left, but there was ... (music and footage) Here was the living room. (Footage and music) This was a bedroom, the bathroom ..., the kitchen ..., another bedroom.

(Music and footage ...writing on the wall: GOD IS THE GREATEST. ABU ABDU, THE KING OF THE MACHINE GUN, BUT THE POWER IS GOD'S.)

We lived here. Our life was very beautiful. Suddenly there was war. After a year of war we were forced to leave this house. We came back after two and a half years. I remember when I got here. I was holding the keys to open the door. I got here and saw there was no need for keys because there were no doors, no windows, no furniture, and no memories. It was a huge shock. But at the same time I ran to see if there was anything on the floor that reminded me of the past: a photo, an object from when I was young. I found some things and even if they were partly burned I kept them. (Footage)

Egilde: What is the most important thing that the war took from you?

SAMER (in Arabic): It took everything. But when I came home and saw this destruction, I said to myself: we are alive and we can rebuild. In the midst of this destruction I always think that there will be a resurrection. We suffered a crucifixion, but I believe we must now experience the joy of resurrection. (Footage and music)

Egilde (voice over): One day, a short distance from here, Samer met a man. His house was less damaged and he wanted to rebuild it, but he didn't have enough money. Samer told him about the United World Association project. (Music) It offers financial support to people who want to rebuild, and a willing workforce too. (Music) I went to talk to the project manager to see how things are going.

PLUMBER (in Arabic): Here you can see the young people at work. Butros and Farid. These young people started with a two-month apprenticeship. Bit by bit they have improved, they learned their skills and now they are doing this work for free. (Music and footage)

This is a water heater. This is a hot water tank that also works with electricity. Here Fadi is installing the mixer in the kitchen sink. Meanwhile Farid and Abud are installing the toilet.

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

Eqilde (voice over): *In short, these young men are learning a trade and as they do it they are helping people to rebuild.*

PLUMBER: *There are eight apprentices. Most of them are university students. We think that if they can't find jobs in their degree subjects, they will be able to earn a living through this profession. (Music and footage)*

Young plumber: *I'm a university student. I study economics and marketing. This is voluntary work. I liked the idea and wanted to help the people in the association. (Music and footage - applause)*

Stefania: *I think I can speak for all of us who were there: we are unlikely to forget these people, this young people that you have seen and who with their work witness to a life that wants to be reborn, where even fixing a tap has meaning.*

## 9) SYRIA ALEPPO

Stefania: *The last stage of our journey took us from Homs to Aleppo. We spent the afternoon and a festive evening with many people in our community, in the focolare, and listened to their stories.*

(Music and footage)

Eqilde (voice over): *I'm on my way to Aleppo. The bus is on a minor road. The war in Syria is not over and there is still fighting in the main road. I took this photo 14 years ago from the Fort, the highest point in Aleppo. As soon as we arrived, I asked Zena to take me there.*

ZENA: *This is the historic part of Aleppo, the oldest and most beautiful part. [Noise of a bomb] Did you hear the sound of a bomb? That smoke comes from a bomb, can you see?*

Eqilde: *There, that smokes...*

ZENA: *Yes*

Eqilde: *Is there fighting over there.*

ZENA: *Yes, over there, it's the Idlib area.*

Eqilde: *We're not far away.*

ZENA: *No.*

Eqilde (voice over): *In front of us is the souk, Aleppo's market. I remember the very extensive arcades, the crowds, the shops full of goods.*

JALAL (in Arabic): *Here we are, this is where the souk in the old city starts.*

Eqilde (voice over): *I'm going back there today with Jalal. In the souk he had a fabric shop.*

JALAL (in Arabic): *I walked down this road every day. Every day I went into the souk from here to go to my shop. We are walking in the most important souk in Aleppo and perhaps the most important one in the world for its historical value. Food, clothes, gold and furnishings were sold here. (Footage)*

*There were not only the most important shops, but the most expensive ones in Aleppo. (Footage)*

*This is my shop! It's one of the most damaged shops in the city.*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*Each archway was a shop. Our shop was one of these, but now it's under the rubble.  
(Music)*

*Look at this. It's an accounts book. What's written here is the type of fabric, the number of rolls of that fabric, customers' names, the accounts, the prices, and the people who paid. This is the last entry before the bombing. (Music)*

*The last time I came to the souk was in 2013. I took some fabrics, some registers and we went out this way. We wanted to go out of the souk onto the main road, but there were rebels on that side and they started shooting at us. I ran and hid there until they stopped shooting. I will never forget that moment because I might not have reached home alive.  
(Music)*

*How did they manage to destroy all this? My God. (Music)*

*My shop was in the tailors' area.*

G. *(in Arabic) What is your family name?*

JALAL *(in Arabic) Zerez I went in with them and said, "My God, how did this roof fall in?"*

G. *(in Arabic) They blew it up...*

JALAL *(in Arabic) They laid dynamite...*

JALAL *And this shop too, what a pity.*

G. *Here they dug from below...*

JALAL *(in Arabic) They are rebuilding the women's souk. Who will rebuild our souk? The United Nations should come (music)*

*These are the safes the traders used. They've opened them all. How did they open them?  
(Reads an inscription) "Made in Aleppo". (Music)*

*I'm thinking of this city, how it was and how it is now. Something so painful it makes you weep. It's a big loss, beyond repair. I'm thinking about how much we've lost, how much I've lost, all that Aleppo has lost, all that Syria has lost. We have all lost in this war. I don't know if anyone has gained anything. Surely not. (Music and footage)*

*We are going into the focolare. This house has always welcomed us. It was a refuge for us, a source of joy throughout the war. It was the light for all members of the movement.*

Eqilde *(voice over): The focolare never left Aleppo. It stayed even in the darkest times of the war. Eight very long years.*

FREDY: *The rebels were quite near. Once they reached that garden out there. Yes, of course, we were afraid like everyone else, we hid in the bathroom, but thank God they didn't stay long. (Music)*

*There was a time when the situation did not improve, every day there were bombs and in the morning you say, you don't want to wake up, but inside you say, there are people who are drawing strength from us too, this also helps us to say: no I want to start again, I want to be strong because this helps other people to be strong too. (Music)*

YOUNG MAN *(in Arabic): When the war was very bad and the bombings very frequent, there were times when we felt we were suffocating, always shut in at home, afraid that something might happen to us. We came here to the focolare, the children played and we talked with the focolarini and this dialogue gave us peace once more. When we felt suffocated, all we had to do was come to the focolare. (Music)*

Eqilde *(voice over): Do you ever recover from war? I don't know. One day the houses, the streets and markets will be back again. But maybe the ruins in people will remain. (Music)*

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

*I saw Syria's wounds, but I also saw the strength with which together they're trying to heal each other. (Music and applause)*

## **10) TALK WITH EMMAUS**

**Stefania:** We are coming to the end. Emmaus, we have heard the stories, and on your recent journey you saw these places and met these people...

**Jean Paul:** I am reflecting now after seeing all this, the terrible suffering, it was too strong. But you see that the people are strong, they manage to smile, to sing. I remembered that the Focolare Movement began during a war. Great hope for the world began just when everything was crumbling.

**Emmaus:** That's it. That's it. First I want to say thank you for being able to see these places again, to see the people again. Perhaps they are watching, listening and so I greet you again.

What can I say? Yes, that is how it was. Chiara told us: you cannot do anything that is worthwhile without the cross. This is very clear for me; you cannot do anything good without the cross. What it means though is that if you love this cross, if you manage to live this cross in love, with love, looking at one another as brothers and sisters, you can do good, something very good. This is what I take with me as a lesson from having met these people, having visited these places, from this journey to Syria. This vision of hope, of life which is always the best, which always wins. All the children who continue to play in the rubble, who go on playing in the rubble, but they are full of joy and happiness, they are alive. Or those who were setting up shop again perhaps in a house that no longer existed, in a room that no longer existed, there was no door but in the meantime they put out something to sell.

I said: here there is life, here there is life, here there is life.

This is the lesson I take away from this journey: there is a resurrection. You pass, yes, from the crucifixion like the young person said, you pass through the crucifixion but there is a resurrection and the resurrection is something good which is born from the cross, that something more that can come from the cross. So I have a great hope and a great lesson.

Each one of us, all around the world, has to face small and big sufferings, not just in Syria, not just in Lebanon, but if we make these sufferings an opportunity to grow in that loving gaze towards one another, a new world could be born, a new society, new life which is born out of death.

This is what I take with me.

**Jean Paul:** Thank you (applause)

Before we conclude, and since you have often visited Lebanon, I would like to go back to my Lebanon (laughs) with a final question. We know that Pope John Paul II said that Lebanon is not only a country but also a message. What message can Lebanon give the world today?

**Emmaus:** It is a message of unity, a message that unity is possible beyond the diversity. This is the message. And it is even more so because we saw it there. When we were there we would be with a group of people and be very much at ease with them, there would be

(Translation of the transcript of video 2476 – length 68')

a great harmony among all, a great serenity, and a great mutual love. Afterwards we would discover that one belonged to one community, another to another, someone had lived a positive experience, another a negative one, one had suffered, another had suffered less but there was this relationship among them that bound them in a strong way. This is where you see the message that Lebanon can give.

Then there is a strong presence of the Church, a Church which is very ancient, a Church which has always lived in that country and so it has planted its roots in a way that no adversity can destroy it. This message means that one can continue to live in this situation, a country which has risen up again after a war, a country which is flourishing, a country which has a lot of potential to offer and to give also to its neighbours, to Syria which is suffering at this time, I see the possibility of saying to the world: hate can transform brothers and sisters into enemies, but love can transform enemies into brothers and sisters. And this is the greatest thing on earth.

So this is the message, and it is possible we have lived it, we saw it. They say to the world: we managed, it's possible. And this is truly what Lebanon and the whole Middle East can give as a lesson and how it can help the world to build unity everywhere, beyond all the difficulties.

Jean-Paul: Thank you, thank you (applause)

## **10. CONCLUSION**

Stefania: Thank you Emmaus, thank you. We have come to the end of this link up. We want to give an announcement before we go. Some people had a problem with the transmission especially at the beginning. In about an hour, it will be possible to playback on the website Collegamento CH, so you can see it again.

So we will meet on 28<sup>th</sup> September at 8.00 p.m. Italian time for the next CH appointment. Greetings. Greetings to all.

Thank you. Ciao

Jean Paul: Bye! (Greeting in Lebanese)