

Press release n. 74

XXXIV EDITION
MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES
THE HUMAN PERSON: A STATE OF EMERGENCY
AUGUST 18-24 2013 - RIMINI FIERA

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Safety and education in peace missions

Giving the chance to live

Rimini, August 21 2013 - "It is in a man's responsibility to interpose, to get in the middle, to prevent massacres." Mario Mauro, Italian Defense Minister, summed up the sense of the peace missions of our soldiers: "It's worth staying in Afghanistan on a peace mission to ensure the freedom and the reconstruction of that country." The meeting was scheduled at 11.15 in the Neri room, many people were standing. Monica Maggioni, director of Rai News, introduced the testimonies, made by soldiers engaged in distant countries and different from our own. Situations that the media often present are different from what is actually happening.

Major Giuseppe Amato lived its last mission in Kabul. Afghanistan is a land "that is considered to be abandoned by both men and God." In that land, the Army was committed to carrying out reconstruction projects; to reviving Afghanistan. "Among the many memories, there is one of a boy voting for the first time in free elections. He thanked me for the chance that we gave him". Amato talks about the Italian method, born in our culture: empathy to understand reality, sharing and closeness, big respect for tradition you come across.

There is also one who has left a leg in Afghanistan. It is Monica Contrafatto, a Sicilian woman from Gela, a bersagliere (member of rifle regiment in Italian army) decorated with the cross of honor. She tells us that even as a child she wanted to go into the bersaglieri. She succeeded, and in 2009, she flew in Afghanistan "to help a needy and unknown population." She is moved every time she remembers the children's muddy faces, the sky full of stars, the dawn announced by the prayers of the people. In March 2012, the ambush at Gulistan: Sergeant Michele Silvestri died and Contrafatto had her leg destroyed from the knee down. "I would like to go back as soon as possible to continue to help, to give my heart to those who have nothing. Having a smile returned is the best thing that happened to me".

"Afghanistan," confirms General Luciano Portolano, chief of the Operational Division at the Joint Operational Command - is a tricky mission, that had been accepted to rebuild a nation which today is starting to live in a safer country". As a soldier and man he feels connected to a land that welcomed the last breath of so many Italian soldiers. He worked

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shoulder to shoulder with Italian, multinational, Afghan forces and with the population; they built schools, field hospitals, roads, wells. Working to respect the freedom of others was not easy where fanaticism, extremism and violence live together. "At the beginning our presence was not accepted, and some people still don't want it today. Many talks were required to explain that our missions, wanted by the UN, and authorized by the Government, are meant to bring suitable living conditions for every human being." Beyond communication, we shared daily life and needs with the people. At the beginning, no Afghan would have thought to warn our soldiers that some devices had been placed along the roads. The trucks used to pass and explode. Time was required to win the trust of the people. One day an elder from a close village, warned us of a threat which had been placed along the road. It was not an isolated event. The other elders imitated him. "Our goal is not to win, but conquer the hearts of the population. In the future our children will meet the Afghan children, our boys will meet the Afghans boys. If they meet as friends or fighters it will depend on what we are able to do through the international missions".

Fifty-three soldiers came back from Afghanistan with the national flag draping over their coffin, and many others wounded. Western press often challenged and criticized peace missions. Monica Maggioni asks the Minister of Defense: why is it important that they continue to exist? "Nothing is worth the life of a man, and if it is worth, that is the question I ask myself. - Answers Mario Mauro – I am aware of the Western objection that freedom and democracy are not made for Muslims. But I also remember the Srebrenica massacre when we watched with arms crossed. We need someone so responsible to get in the way." If we don't get in the way, we create the conditions for chaos. He mentions Syria, Egypt. We need to go armed, he explains, because when you do interposition is reasonable not to be the weaker. He recalls Giuseppe La Rosa, the soldier killed in Farah. A grenade was thrown inside the tank where he was travelling with his comrades. He threw himself over it to prevent the explosion from killing everyone. He greets Nazifa, a 12 years old girl from Herat, who is in the room. She is in Italy for treatment. And he responds that yes, it is worth.

(C.C.)

Portavoce e capo ufficio stampa: Stefano Pichi Sermolli
Ufficio stampa: Valentina Gravaghi
Tel. 0541-783100
Mail press@meetingrimini.org

Fondazione Meeting per l'amicizia fra i popoli
www.meetingrimini.org
Twitter @meetingrimini
[Facebook.com/meetingrimini](https://www.facebook.com/meetingrimini)