

Youth and Agenda 2030 in Italy

Rome, May 22, 2018

Meeting with the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Youth,

Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake

Thank you Jayathma for your presence here with us today.

Thank you Dr. Cimino and the Institution you represent for supporting all these processes and thanks finally to the friends of SIOI for your invitation, for inviting so many students, and for hosting this noteworthy initiative.

I'm honoured to speak today on behalf of the Italian network for "Youth, Peace and Security". We are a very recent, yet promising network of young women and men who want to help young people to become agents of peace. Both youth representing associations and young individuals who share our mission, vision and values can join us. Adults who are interested and want to support us are most welcomed in this network, but decision-making remains up to youth.

I'm not a professor of Contemporary History, nor am I here to teach Jayathma the fascinating but sometimes complicated history of our country. However, I would like to share with you all one historical fact. One hundred years ago, thousands of Italian young people died in a bloody war fought to enlarge national borders. Exactly one hundred years ago, hundreds of thousands of young people across Europe killed each other in the last act of a 5 five years long World War. Youth knew no peace for years. Security was but a military goal. Young peace agents had no voice in the public debate. Youth freedoms and even access to higher education were curtailed. War was the only job available.

One hundred years later, young people study and travel across Europe, learn foreign languages and cultures, are free to live and work in a different European country, thanks to decades of efforts within the so-called process of European integration. The UN contributed to this process too. May we not forget the past. Or we risk to underestimate the opportunities of our present time. Peace and security are at the hands of many young people here today. This time we want their call for peace to be heard loud.

However, peace is not just the mere absence of war. Positive peace needs our daily active contribution, both in Italy and Europe. We are still facing many challenges, but it would be a mistake to perceive all of them as threats. Within our network, for instance, when we talk about "security" it is clear to all of us that we are talking about "human security", as described by the UN Development Programme. We are young women and men from different religions and beliefs, but we all agree that youth, if adequately educated and included, can develop the full potential of nonviolent conflict transformation.

The first group of young people who took the initiative to create this network was inspired by the adoption of the Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security by the UN Security Council on December 9, 2015. As many of you may already know, this Resolution, inspired by the success of the Resolution 1325 of 2000 on “Women, Peace and Security”, aims at promoting the participation of youth in peacebuilding processes and in the prevention of violence, calling for their protection when conflicts emerge, fostering youth partnerships for peace, and supporting the disengagement and reintegration of young ex-combatants. We believe that this Resolution is very much intertwined with the 2030 Agenda, especially as far as the SDG 4 (target 4.7) and 16 are concerned. But many more SDGs could be properly mentioned.

What we did, as a first step, was to start mainstreaming the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in Italy. One year ago, we provided online the first Italian version of the Res. 2250. Today we are glad to announce that we have just published online, on the website of the association I represent in the network, the Centro Studi Difesa Civile, the first Italian version of the Progress Study on the youth’s positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, requested by the UNSC in the final lines of the Res. 2250. One month ago, we organised a first public event here in Rome in order to present our network, together with many of our friends who are present today.

We are now seeking ways to mainstream all this information to young people in schools, universities, associations, all over the country and abroad, wherever Italian young agents of peace are at work. In fact, many of us, and I’m honoured to be able to count me in, have been involved in the training of the first group of Civilian Peace Corps. These are young girls and boys who are involved, through different civil society organizations, in a pilot project sponsored by the Italian Government. This project aims at giving young people the opportunity to be agents of civilian peacebuilding in conflict zones of foreign countries. Dozens of Italian girls and boys are currently at work for peace in over ten different countries across Africa, America, Asia and Middle East. Even if this is still just a pilot project, we believe that this is a best practice from Italy in this field. We hope next Government would support this approach. There is still much to do for peace and security in many Italian cities, where young people are victims of the organized crime.

We are therefore grateful for your visit today, Jayathma. We need your support. We need the help of the UN Youth Envoy and all the UN system to create sustainable partnerships for youth, peace and security. We believe that all this is key to the full achievement of Agenda 2030. We hope that our grassroots network will be actively involved soon in national and regional plans of action in this field. We are eager to give our contribution and collaborate with national and international institutions. We also invite the students who are present today to get in contact with the network. We need your ideas and enthusiasm. Thank you once again Jayathma. We need the UN to remember Member States, such as Italy, that they must look at their own young people as an opportunity and a resource. With your careful and brilliant testimony, we know that we are not alone.

Renato Cursi

Italian network for “Youth, Peace and Security” - Spokesperson