6th WORLD URBAN FORUM 2012

YOUTH ASSEMBLY

*Report by the President of the Fondazione Mediterraneo*

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**The Greater Mediterranean: initiatives for youths in urban centres.**

**Youth occupation, entrepreneurship, economic and social responsibility and solidarity.**

Before expressing my ideas on the theme of this round table I would like to ask you to pause to focus your thoughts on all the young people, men and women, who are the victims of the tragic civil war in Syria.

The Mediterranean has been subject to tensions, crises and conflicts for too long, and they have undermined the social fabric that is imperative for pacific and prosperous cohabitation. The repeated outbreaks of terrorism and the risk of a fracture between those who believe in dialogue and others who rant about a “clash of civilizations” require Governments and Civil Society organizations to promote what we in our programme refer to as a “Broad Coalition of values and shared interests” in which young people are its actors so that they can “build our future”.

Yet the numerous initiatives undertaken to build peace and develop the Region, together with the timid policies adopted in favour of young people in their multifarious forms to date have been piecemeal and inadequate. The seasons of hope, initially developed institutionally through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and later under the auspices of the “Union for the Mediterranean” and other fora, have reached a state of deadlock.

Since 1991, the Fondazione Mediterraneo has played a role in building, with a visionary spirit, what is today called the Greater Mediterranean, emphasizing in every organization and using every media - whether at conventions, seminars, appeals and through articles – the need to place youths at the centre of the policies to be developed for urban centres.

The Fondazione Mediterraneo continues to support youths by placing them at the centre of the programmes for its principal activities, as it remains firmly convinced that acceptable results can only be achieved through dialogue and reason. No situation is irretrievable. Each failure to develop solidarity and social economy policies is no more than a postponement. The real enemy, in addition to resignation, is empty complacency that only touches problems superficially and fogs your vision; the real enemy is irresponsible bureaucracy that produces a “democratic dictatorship” that slows down every democratic procedure. The real enemies are those political, economic, cultural and religious groups who pursue particular paltry interests without visions or a sense of life, who are interested exclusively in “love for power” and the sterile “persistence of their own identity”: We have always resisted this and want to transform “love for power” into the “power of love” in the name of youths, dialogue, economic co-development, and peace!

Over the last 20 years, the Fondazione Mediterraneo have been at the forefront of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, especially through its involvement in Civil Society, having organized three Civil Forums, eight Euro-Mediterranean Conferences and more than 2000 events, including 5 International Workshops for Youths, and in May 2007, the establishment of the “Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament” and it has distinguished itself as an organization that is without sterile bureaucracy in which every resource is invested in activities that produce numerous partnership agreements. These initiatives have been of high impact and obtained concrete results, which have endorsed by the evaluations of official assessment reports.

Dialogue, international law, the spirit of equity, respect for diversity and the power of understanding are the instruments with which to transform the third millennium, that began with suffering and misery – into a world of solidarity and justice for youths throughout the whole world.

One of the objective that youths have set themselves in recent decades in the Greater Mediterranean Region has been to develop an alternative inter-Mediterranean culture. Setting up a project of this kind is by no measure a simple objective. A differentiated vision is a less ambitious but nonetheless still difficult to achieve. It requires rethinking worn out ideas about the suburbs and the centre, the meaning of hope, confronting symmetries and asymmetries.

The Cities of the Mediterranean have been given a fundamental role in this sense. Governments will not be able to replace the cities with their “logic of doing things”.

The destiny of the Mediterranean Region belongs to its Cities and their ability to connect with one another. Through this ability they can form networks and involves youths, thus becoming “young cities for young people” with shared interests and determining the development and future of this geographic region.

The Cities of the Mediterranean have a thousand faces, and thousand-year history, history within history with different colours and cultures, degradation, violence, projects, various level of renewal, suburbs that submerge historic centres, institutional weakness of governing bodies. These cities (like any other cities) are born out of the free will of mankind, and like men they grow and flourish, become ill, recover or die.

The Cities of the Mediterranean are almost always afflicted by a serious illness. The “cure” or “challenge” is to pass from an irrational quantitative phase to a qualitative project that rationalizes and regenerates the existing areas keeping youths at the centre of its policies. Unfortunately, many Cities still have the same face: a face devastated by poor governance and total absence of professionalism and city planning. Youths, culture and heritage, quality of life, migration, tourism, transport and communications, economic development strategies, the environment, public health, the fight against drug abuse, civil protection are all issues that contribute to building the destiny of the cities of the Greater Mediterranean Region and the world.

Mayors play a pivotal role. They should be considered as the builders or developers of the cities rather than their custodians. Mayors should operate with this spirit even in difficult situations. The conformism of their predecessors led them to adopt “convenience” policies so that they would not risk exposure to dissent. Now, when they act in public and when they build, they need to take risks and above all be accountable.

The Mediterranean seems to be returning to the times in which Cities played and essential role. We are witnessing the reawakening of a new will in the major cities, which want to become the protagonists of Mediterranean policies. These are challenges that bring about two fundamental results: the recovery of their own identity and the acceleration of cultural integration. In this context, youths are given new opportunities through social responsibility and the development of solidarity and social economy policies, which are particularly required in the countries that have been the protagonists of the “Arab Spring”. Yet if current policies persist the summer will not come and there will be a harsh, long winter in which the values of solidarity and sharing seem to be a dream o chimera.

These policies, as are affirmed by this session, should include the ability to achieve stable governance and growth by involving young people, given that the youth population of cities is increasing and these people represent the best educated sector of society. To summarize, today young people need to be given the opportunity to take control of their cities and realize their dreams to counter the colonization of brains and the way of “reacting” without “acting”.

Social responsibility and solidarity and social economy policies are two instruments with which youths can be involved, on the condition that they are guaranteed fundamental rights – those of the person, employment and health, and on the condition that they respect the law and obligations.

Social responsibility is a pact where each person takes responsibility for helping each other in contributing to the economic and social development of urban centres, as well as in combating the evils of this society, which are ignorance, lack of solidarity, and the absence of the “common good”. Social responsibility automatically requires increasing the skills of young people, enhancing civic responsibilities of people and contributes to the improvement of the quality of life and economic infrastructure of cities.

It involves youths, local authorities, civil society organizations and other partners in a discourse that we are all obliged to listen to and answer to the needs of society with actions aimed social responsibility.

There is a moral duty today to concentrate all our energies on young people and development of solidarity and social economy policies to produce new forms of youth employment and youth entrepreneurship.

There are three essential reasons why the current model is failing: due to the incoherency of the economic system as a whole, the inability to respond to the need for social inclusion, the lack of ethics and justice in governance.

The economic crisis and values crisis will continue to cause an increase in social exclusion in the near future, especially among young people, and this will be manifested in four particular areas throughout the world:

* the crisis of national systems of social protection particularly in health, pensions, unemployment and assistance to the disabled;
* the destabilization of traditional solidarity networks;
* the growing scarcity of public resources allocated to social sectors;
* the impact of the international financial crisis on the extension of areas of poverty with an inevitable increase in social inequalities and youth unemployment.

The current dominant economic model continues to distinguish itself for the proliferation of corruption, criminality and non-ethical behavior solely because it exploits the “violence of money”.

Solidarity and social economy policies, particularly for young people, offer great potential thanks to their enormous reserves and can be transformed into growth and creation of employment by developing new sectors such as the green economic, organic agriculture, green energy, water, health, transport, culture and cultural heritage, and so on.

There is now a need for the “Third Industrial Revolution” based on Energy and ecology. The challenges for young people are essentially:

1. the challenge of knowledge: knowledge of solidarity and social economy policies needs to be disseminated;
2. the challenge of governance: solidarity and social economy policies are a specific economic model that cannot be governed by public bodies or state entities;
3. the strategic challenge: the global economic system needs to be reformed placing youth policies at the centre of the change.

To do this we need to engage in genuine debate on new growth models and on the role to be played by young people in facing these challenges for our economies and our societies in the near future.