

**Prof. Marco Impagliazzo, president of the Community of Sant'Egidio**

**Address at the opening session of the International Conference**

**Indonesia - Italia**

**Unity in diversity: The power of dialogue for peaceful cohabitation in a pluralistic society**

Jakarta April 23th, 2012

**Honourable ministers, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,**

**It is a great honour for me to introduce this International Conference "Unity in Diversity: The power of dialogue for peaceful cohabitation in a pluralistic society."**

**This event, organized together by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and Italy, and the Community of Sant'Egidio, in the framework of the bilateral talks between our two countries, intends to continue the path of dialogue initiated in Rome in 2009, upon the visit of the Minister of Foreign affairs of Indonesia to Italy.**

**On that first occasion, men and women of religion, together with scholars and political representatives from both countries, got together to share their commitment for a society – and a civilization – where ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity may represent not an obstacle, but a chance for peaceful cohabitation. This first dialogue offered not only the chance to deepen our mutual knowledge and understanding, making us aware of the seed of peace rooted in each religious and cultural tradition. Moreover, it constituted a unique occasion of integration between religions and public institutions, aimed to work together for the good of our societies. It is actually highly meaningful that this happened between Italy and Indonesia, two countries both with deep religious traditions, and both strongly oriented to be pluralistic and democratic countries.**

**Unity in diversity, the motto that Indonesia has made the foundation of the nation, was taken not only as a title but, in a sense, as the program of these our gatherings. And more: I think it could be an example for our globalized world today.**

**The cultural relevance of that event is stressed also by the outcome of a book: "Unity in diversity: the Indonesian model for a society of coexistence", that collected all the contributions to our dialogue.**

**In a world often polluted by divisions and particularism, it has appeared clear to us that "Indonesia, with its ideology of Panchasila, - as Andrea Riccardi said on that occasion - represents a resource for the cultural and relevant political ecology of contemporary world, a great laboratory of cohabitation and development in the framework of democracy and modernity".**

**Diversity, in fact, is not at all a decree of impossibility of living together. It's fear and contempt for those who are different to build walls, to inflame conflicts. On the contrary, we believe we must cultivate the art of meeting and dialogue, which is respect for diversity, and pushes us to look for what unites more than emphasizing what separates us – as in the words of the great Pope John XXIII.**

**The Community of Sant'Egidio, which was born in Rome, but is now worldwide spread, has taken since its beginning the task to break down the walls of misunderstanding and contempt with the moral force of dialogue.**

**In fact, in the globalized world, where distances are shorter, people of different faith, ethnic groups, cultures, coexist in the same city, in the same scenarios and national horizons. But we have to admit that this closeness has not given rise to a more united world. On the contrary, it often fostered ethnic particularism, juxtapositions which not infrequently resulted in mutual mistrust and even conflicts. Their own religious identities were used to emphasize the differences, to foment opposition. Particularly in the past decade, a spirit of distrust and antagonism among peoples has grown, while exchanges and markets were turning globalized. Religions have been too often used to fuel these conflict, not to estinguish them.**

**Yet religions are a true source of peace in our society. In the very depth of each religious tradition the word “peace” is deeply impressed. Descending into the depths of our religions teaches us to be men and women of peace who can play a role in educating to love and to the art of living together.**

**Over the years, the Community of Sant'Egidio has learned that living together is the most valuable asset any human being, family, nation, or people can have.**

**For this reason, the promotion of dialogue and peace is a commitment that the Community has taken on a global level, promoting for over 25 years, in the wake of the work undertaken by the great Pope John Paul II at Assisi, getting together year after year - through International Meetings of dialogue - the representatives of world religions. On this path for peace, prominent Indonesian religious leaders, both Muslims and Christians, who are also here today, have joined us. To them I extend my greetings, and I express my deep gratitude for their friendship and their commitment.**

**Dialogue is not in fact a mere exercise of academics, but a commitment that permeates the daily lives of individuals and communities. Religions, with their spiritual message, have to nourish our coexistence, and contribute to "the civilization of living together."**

**In this sense, the Community of Sant'Egidio, in Italy, Indonesia and in 70 countries around the world, works every day at ground level promoting a culture of dialogue, openness, and**

**solidarity, in the daily closeness to marginalized people, and educating younger generations to live together peacefully.**

**This dialogue of life is the way to peace. We consider it, as the title of this conference, a powerful tool for building a more just, open, pluralistic society.**

**Yes, my dear friends, we strongly believe there is a power of dialogue. And, as men and women of faith, we want to make best use of it, for our countries and for the world.**

**Over the years, we could see the fruits. It is a joyful – and perhaps meaningful - coincidence that right this year we celebrate twenty years since the signing of the peace treaty that gave an end to war in Mozambique. That peace treaty was achieved thanks to the commitment of the Community of Sant'Egidio, which hosted and facilitated the dialogue between the parts in conflicts for two long years.**

**Dialogue is a process, a path. It is not an outcome or an event. It needs faithfulness and time. This is why it is relevant that the interreligious Conference held in Rome in 2009 today has a following here in Jakarta.**

**Being here today is the sign of a shared commitment – States, religious communities, civil society representatives, individuals - to continue on the path of dialogue and cooperation, weaving this network day by day.**

**In conclusion, let me take the chance to renew my appreciation for the decision to place this encounter of religious communities within the bilateral meeting between our governments. It is an important sign of appreciation of the crucial role religious communities can play in our societies and the acknowledgement of the necessary synergy between the different components of our society.**

**We are aware of the role we can and must play to build a peaceful and united society, in respect of diversity. And we will not rest until there is peace all around us and all over the world.**

**Thank you.**