

# **NO JUSTICE WITHOUT LIFE**

1<sup>st</sup> Asia Pacific Dialogue

on

Human Rights and Respect for the Dignity of Life

Manila, October 27-28, 2014

**Prof. Alberto Quattrucci**  
**Secretary General P&R**  
**Community of Sant'Egidio**

I would like, on behalf of the Community of Sant'Egidio, to thank the Government of the Philippines and, in particular, Leila De Lima, Secretary of the Department of Justice, for promoting this important event together with us. I thank also the mayor of Mandaluyong, my dear friend Benjamin Abalos, for his collaboration, so precious. Let me extend my thanks to the European Union, the Embassy of Switzerland and the Italian Embassy who supported and made possible the realization of this "1st Asia Pacific Dialogue" on the theme "Human Rights and Respect for the Dignity of Life." Thank you, thank you very much indeed.

This is, in fact, the first important event of such a large significance involving representatives – at different levels – coming from various countries of the Region, and the Conference – it is really a very significant point - takes place in Manila, in the heart of the Philippines, a Country very dear to us.

For many years we have known and loved your Country, and we have a large and growing confidence in its great human, ethical and cultural energies. These resources – I strongly believe – can be spent generously in the overall picture, although complex and contradictory, of the Asia Pacific Region, in which the Philippines can and are called today to play a key role in reaffirming the value of life, and of life for all.

Let me say this, also in view of the historic and courageous event that involved me personally, as a representative of the Community of Sant'Egidio, member of ICG. I refer to the important signing of the last March 26<sup>th</sup> at Malacañan of the autonomy of the Bangsamoro in the island of Mindanao. This act highlighted even more the capacity of the Philippine to emphasize the human dimension, so necessary to any development, whether social or economic, if it is to be recognized as true.

At the Opening of this Conference on Human Rights and respect for the Dignity of Life, I would like to spend a few words on the complexity of the world we live in, a world where a number of violent and dramatic events are spawning, out of any possible control - I consider especially the more recent years of our history. Let us consider the proliferation of wars and their nature: it is a deterioration compared to

the same mode of warfare laid down in the Geneva conventions on prisoners and wounded people. We are doubtless faced with the most inhuman wars. This can be seen in the exhibition of acts of cruelty, until yesterday hidden by those who committed them, and instead used today as a weapon in a global time: to massacre and to show horror (women and men, humiliated, forced from their homes, stripped, shot or worse) this is real terrorism. And this is the worship of violence, that terrorizes and conquers. The execution of the other, exhibited dramatically as a form of "death penalty", now pretends to become full of meanings and messages – in the case of the Islamic State messages against the West.

If then it is still true, as we have repeatedly emphasized, that no one has the right to take the life of another man, even for reasons allegedly "right", much less a state can do so - there is no justice without life - I would say today is one more reason against the death penalty. In front of this new type of barbarism that seeks a value in the gruesome execution of human beings, can a State continue to do the same - albeit with methods seemingly more "educated" or "modern"? Is the not, perhaps, one additional reason to distance oneself from such inhuman practices or, at least, to seriously re-examine the issue of the death penalty?

We feel an urgent need for the debate to be continued with courage.

One could argue that for the Philippines something, or maybe a lot, already has been done, with the "suspension" of the capital punishment. But I would say that this is not enough. And I am not alone.

This was stated not so long ago, on October 9<sup>th</sup>, by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Ivan Simonovic, assistant secretary-general and former Croatian minister of justice "As long as there is the death penalty you will need to fight to abolish it. "He then observed that, even in abolitionist countries, it is necessary to continue the fight against the death penalty. It is true that "in 1948 only 14 countries had abolished the death penalty, the majority in South America," said Simonovic while today there are 160 nations of the world, which by law or in fact no longer runs. Recently, Equatorial Guinea, Pakistan and in the United States the states of Washington, Maryland and Connecticut have imposed the moratorium last April while El Salvador, Gabon and Poland acceded to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which aims at abolition. It is 'also true that there are not only successes: some states have reinstated the death penalty, others have re-introduced it for certain particularly serious offenses .... For these reasons, we must not let our guard down!

In a globalized world such as ours - but globalization does not mean justice – contradictions and inequalities can actually increase. For this reason there is an increasing need for constructive dialogue and of courageous solidarity, a strong call of collaboration in defense of life, at all levels. Our proposal continues to be that of building more "bridges" of dialogue and constructive cooperation, at the legislative, political, cultural and social level, between the Philippines and the entire Region. The

presence of personalities from different countries in this Symposium states and proposes precisely this commitment that I would call a "new synergy."

The Community of Sant'Egidio wants to put at the service of this cause its own energy and its own 20 years' experience in the field of the battle for human rights and the abolition of the death penalty in the world.

Indeed, in the second half of the 1990's the fight against capital punishment became one of the spheres of global engagement and a priority for the Community of Sant'Egidio. Over the years the Community has become a leading player in the battle for a universal moratorium and the abolition of the death penalty all over the world. But never has the Community of Sant'Egidio planned its action at a theoretical or ideological level: the members of the Community have started their commitment with their own concrete approach to the death row inmates, through visits, correspondence, legal defense and the humanization of prison conditions.

We have walked for years in prison corridors and death rows. Relations of friendship, experiences of visits and exchange of letters between us and people sentenced to death started. From the 90s until today around 50 countries - we have worked together with other actors - have abolished the death penalty. Everything started with a dream ... but the dream continues: we dream of a truly human world, a world without the death penalty!

In the framework of this dream, which then turns every day into a meticulous and constant action, the Conference of these days in Manila takes place. It will develop, after the Assembly this evening, in two sessions: the first with the different countries of the Asia Pacific Region; the second with the voices of the mayors and governors. Then, following a special session with the youth in the afternoon, the Closing Ceremony will take place outdoors, with the Proclamation of the common Statement "Manila 2014". That is the program, but it all started with a dream.

Today, 51 years after 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1963, when hundreds of thousands were in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington: today we too have a dream! As Martin Luther King at the end of that great manifestation said: "... now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children!", and he proclaimed again, at the end of that historic speech: "... let freedom ring".

I believe that the time has come to let freedom ring even more in every part of the world, also in this Asia Pacific Region. I have great confidence in all your splendid peoples, so full of great energies of life, certainly contrary, deep down, to the death penalty. Let freedom ring then, tonight and forever, together saying that "there is no justice without life." Thank you.