

PEACEKEEPING IN LEBANON.

THIRD ITALIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION'S MASTER TO UNITE THE COUNTRY.

by Sveva Borla

The Italian Development Cooperation, through the **University Cooperation's Coordination**, has developed a program aimed at promoting the integration of cultures and religions in Lebanon. There are two Lebanese universities involved: the Lebanese State University (LU), a strong



expression of Muslim, and the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (**USEK**), Christian Maronite. Both of them see teachers and students working together on important issues for the country's peace processes and development such as international law, economics and environment, water resources and public health, international university cooperation for peace and human rights.

The **Master in Cooperation for Peace and Development**, now in its third year, is sponsored by the Italian Development Cooperation and is coordinated by the **University of Rome La Sapienza**, in collaboration with the **Universities of Pavia and Palermo**. A massive assistance is given also by the military mission of **UNIFIL**, which provides support for all the education activities focused on security and international cooperation issues, in aid of all the activities promoted by the Southern Lebanon University and to the advantage of people.

As **Professor Massimo Caneva** (head of the University Cooperation's Coordination at the General Directorate for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) says, «*in several countries, Italy promotes education initiatives and masters aimed at including young graduates in stability and integration processes. Especially in those countries which suffer traumatic consequences of internal conflicts we have to bet on young people because they are going to be the main actors of a future dialogue*».

Peace, what a valuable asset. Becoming peace promoters means to break down heavy and entrenched barriers that segment our society, especially when these are built for religion reasons. The deep meaning of this Master is embedded in its innovative cultural approach offered to young students: the opportunity to attend a joint training program, to work together and to make true the human sense of being part of the same society, from which no one should feel excluded. An academic course that teaches how to recognize and build peace and solidarity, values which must be protected in a world pervaded by great uncertainty, thus, extremely changeable.

So this Master aims to provide an in-depth expertise in peacekeeping and development issues, in order to train professionals who will be able to fight corruption, to promote social justice and to use the acquired knowledge, making it available to a Nation that needs a wide participation of young people with a genuine sense of belonging to their Country and which may contribute enthusiastically to the reconstruction of the latter.

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As one student has said, *«well, you have given us the light and showed us the path. Now it is our turn to promise you to take the light and walk down the road not taken»*.

This initiative is quite unique, due to its multicultural and multidisciplinary approach that allows students with different backgrounds to gain a broader view of the concepts of peace and cooperation.



The partnership with United Nation Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which also saw the deployment of Italian troops, is the added value of the project. As explained by **Major General Paolo Serra**, *«for over sixty years, United Nation peace operations have been seeking to achieve one of the most important aspirations set out in the United Nations charter, namely “to maintain international peace and security”. Peacekeeping operations have proved to be one of the most effective tools in assisting countries in post-conflict reconstruction. The Security Council established UNIFIL in 1978 in*

order to reach such goal. Nearly six years following the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), we are witnessing the most peaceful period Southern Lebanon has seen in many years. Much of this is due to UNIFIL’s close collaboration with the Lebanese Armed Force as well as the Government and Lebanese people. The youth of today have an important role to play in this regard. Youth, peace and development are closely interlinked: peace enables development, which is critical in providing opportunities for young people. Healthy and educated youth are, in turn, crucial to peace and sustainable development ».

Cooperation between Universities and other civil and military institutions demonstrates the increased value of the initiative fielded by the Master: it becomes an important sign and obvious promotion of a culture of peace in Lebanon; it also attempts to prepare a new generation of men and women able to highlight the importance of the integration and of the synergies between different actors.

Also the **Italian Ambassador in Lebanon, Giuseppe Morabito**, at the opening ceremony of the third edition of the Master for Peace and Development, (Beirut November 12 2012), has emphasized the importance of the commitment of the University in initiatives aimed at preserving peace and stability: *«the main reason why this program was conceived for Lebanon is our belief that it is a Country that may represent an excellent example of peace and tolerance in the Middle East, a bridge with the Mediterranean»*.

Among others, the event has been attended by the Director of the Local Technical Unit of the Italian Cooperation in Lebanon, Guido Benevento, by the Presidents of the LU and USEK, Professor Adnan El Sayed Hussein and Reverend Father Hady Mahfouz and also by students of previous editions of the program.



One of them has so encouraged younger colleagues: *«in a world of social, political and cultural disagreements, few people have the courage to say No! No to the reasons of war, No to the violent*

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solutions, No to the pain caused by human vengeance. Dear Friends and colleagues, by saying Yes today to this opportunity, you will be committing to say No to the world of destruction and face wisely and academically the engineering of conflicts. Your commitment today will make you much more than university students. With your Yes today, you will be able to get a mission, you will have the responsibility to build up a better future for your society. Finally, your are about to become a peacemaker. From now on, the peace of the world is also your responsibility; join us in building a better future».



Professor Gianni Vaggi (Pro-Rector for International Relations at the University of Pavia) and **Professor Ennio Cardona** (Pro-Rector for Cooperation at the University of Palermo) have given important support to the teaching of the university cooperation program in Lebanon: at the University of Pavia, fostering knowledge in the field of development economics; from the University of Palermo in the field of development cooperation and environmental remediation and promoting the integration of Mediterranean cultures.

Professor Manuel Castello, Academic Coordinator of the Master from the University of Rome La Sapienza, says that it «*promotes long-university cooperation programs in the areas of crisis in favor of peace processes and post-conflict integration, with an important support of the Forces International Peace United Nations, as UNIFIL in Lebanon, UNTSO in Jerusalem and EUFOR, under an EU flag, in Sarajevo. Students become the protagonists of peace, especially through their job placement, after the Master, in state and private structures of the Countries involved. An example: one of our former student is now Vice-Mayor of the city of Sarajevo*».

