

Thank you and Good morning Everybody.

Starting from what has been said so far, I would like, first of all, to highlight the best practice emerged through the work that, since 2010, Operazione Colomba is carrying on in Albania, alongside the victims of the blood feud phenomenon. Consequently, I will report some suggestions to foster the Albanian institutions' efforts, meant to defeat this practice.

As best practice, I start mentioning the direct sharing of volunteers' life with the one of the blood feud's victims which means to visit families, involved in this practice, standing by them. Direct sharing, on one hand, helps volunteers to understand the human rights' violations these people suffered in order to implement effective intervention's strategies; and, on the other hand, allowed volunteers to build a trustworthy relationship with the ones, involved in a feud, to carry out mediation processes, with particular features, such as:

- 1) problem-solving type of mediation, which can help the parties thinking about the negative impact of vendetta compared with the positive impact of leaving the plan to take revenge behind, in some cases even choosing to forgive and to reconcile with the other family;
- 2) narrative type of mediation, that implies recognizing the history of pain, but also the history of hope, which accompany the conflict's narrative told by the victims, in order to help the parties to take the necessary steps aimed at transforming their hope - consisting in their desire to end the hostility - into reality;
- 3) transformative type of mediation, which involves *empowerment*, aimed at enabling people to understand their ability to manage problems constructively, and *recognition*, that promotes the development of empathy and mutual understanding among the parties.

All these kind of mediation practices require active listening, "putting yourself in somebody else's shoes", dialogue, equal proximity to all sides in conflict and a particular attention to the bereaved families in order to: first of all, help the families to heal their emotional wounds, through managing their emotions constructively and channelling the anger they feel in a positive direction; secondly, to support the offender's family in the accomplishment of confidence building gestures, designed to lower the tension and to rebuild trust for a possible rapprochement with the victim's family; moreover, to protect the privacy of the victims of blood feuds for the purpose of preventing any escalation of the conflict; finally, to use a positive social pressure to discourage vendetta and, where it is possible, to foster the adoption of the traditional local culture's positive elements, such as forgiveness and reconciliation, which, in some cases, they may need to be adapted to the contemporary context.

In this way, even though the mediation does not lead to an official reconciliation between the parties, it does reduce the tension between them and enables the victims of the dispute to continue

to lead their lives and get back to normality. The bereaved can start planning their futures. The relatives of the offender can leave fear of vendetta behind.

Another best practice I would like to mention is unarmed accompaniment, civilian escorts made by Italian volunteers in a disarmed and nonviolent way, which allow the freedom of movement for those involved in blood feud.

Finally, I mention demonstrations to denounce the human rights violations due to this social plague, training on nonviolent conflict management and awareness raising campaign of the phenomenon where authoritative and charismatic figures, such as intellectuals, village elders, religious or institutional representatives, testimonials, and those who decided to forgive the killing of a relative or to accept reconciliation with the other side can send messages of Peace. These activities enable civil society to defeat the marginalization of those involved in feuds and the mentality that honor is more important than life. By these means, the social environment (neighbours, school mates, work mates, etc.) can constructively influence the decisions of the families in conflict, using a positive social pressure.

The results of these best practice can be caught in the words of some persons, involved in the phenomenon, who took part to our women and youth groups' activities. A woman stated: "My life has changed a lot since I met the volunteers from Operazione Colomba. I have opened myself up to the world and to life. Your work is really precious, your visits give hope and fill us with joy. The fact of having people like you who have listened to my problems and my outbursts, has given me calmness and greater serenity even in my heart. I changed completely, I started to explain my problems and discuss them with others. I have received so much help, but the fact that you gave me trust has allowed me to gain confidence in myself, confidence that has enabled me to look for a job. Because of our meeting, I felt considered and valued".

Another young man said: "Your work is both beautiful and offered freely and very few people do it because it is difficult and risky at the same time. We, thanks to your presence, feel free especially because you are people who work to change, to a certain extent, ideas and negative opinions. In fact, the activities done together, have changed me profoundly, they helped me so much to overcome the anger and the pain I felt. I also understood our mentality much more, thanks to you. Your activities have really influenced the mentality of my family. Mentally their situation has changed a lot. Before we had closed minds, thanks to your presence we have opened our mind to the world. I believe that also the situation of vendetta within my family has changed, thanks to you. It will take time. We therefore consider you as family friends, friends in the sense also of family counsellors".

At the conclusion of this speech, I would like to offer institutions some suggestions, based on Operazione Colomba's experience, to go on promoting the elimination of blood feuds in Albania by

involving civil society and feuding families. These suggestions are aimed at supporting the protection of the right to life, the fight against the phenomenon's deep-rooted causes and the development of a national joint strategy to tackle this practice, all over Albania.

Operazione Colomba identifies 4 categories of recommendations:

1. Victims' protection:

- Take steps to ensure the safety of Albanians, who are victims of vendetta, and to ensure they are able to access basic services (hospitals, places of work, schools, etc.).
- Set up a compensation and support fund for families who are bereaved as a result of vendetta.
- Create a social State dedicated to dealing with the structural factors that enable the phenomenon to exist and to contributing to the economic and cultural development of society and to the delivery of services.

2. Legal and Justice:

- Reform the State justice system through: fight against corruption; pre-trial detention for anyone committing an offence connected with a blood feud; ensure sentences are served; ensure justice is the same for all.
- Amend and implement law 9389 of 4th May 2005 to set up a Coordination Council on blood feuds.
- Within the Police, improve the emergency services aimed at handling blood feud's cases with an *ad hoc* freephone number.
 - Improve standard criteria for identifying families involved in blood feuds, continuously protecting their privacy, and for the publication of official data on the actual extent of blood feuds.

3. Mediation:

- Support mediation between families who are the victims of a blood feud and the creation of a national reconciliation process through restorative justice and mediation counselling.
- Introduce legal and institutional instruments, such as the law on the civil mediation of disputes (Law 10385 of 24.02.2011), that promote the eradication of the phenomenon and recognize and fight anything that can cause or prolong vendetta.

4. Education:

- Systematically introduce educational and cultural programmes based on the nonviolent management of disputes, education in peace, reconciliation and respect for human rights in schools, places of work, meeting places, youth center in the most highly populated towns.
 - Introduce and implement special prison programmes and associated re-education and reintegration plans for prisoners who have committed blood feud offences.

It is on these aspects that we wish to call upon the Albanian institutions of which we appreciate the efforts undertaken in recent years to counter the blood feud phenomenon and to which we continue to offer our collaboration to implement all the necessary legal, institutional, economic and social measures to eradicate this practice.

Thank you for your attention.