

Ufficio Stampa della Provincia autonoma di Trento

Piazza Dante 15, 38122 Trento

Tel. 0461 494614 - Fax 0461 494615

uff.stampa@provincia.tn.it

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Medical care and human right by Gino Strada

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. World famed Gino Strada, surgeon and founder of Emergency (an humanitarian NGO established in Milan on 1994), has dedicated all his life to medical care and human right, building hospital in war zones and extremely disadvantaged country. To the Trento Economics Festival Gino Strada brings his unique experiences as well as the stories of war and poverty victims in an interview with Roberto Satolli, MD and scientific editor.

“My first experience as a war surgeon was in Pakistan at the borders with Afghanistan – tells **Gino Strada** in an over crowded Teatro Sociale (hundreds of people who cannot enter the theatre followed the event open air in the Piazza Duomo) – and my aim was to set up an hospital where taking care of local fighters and their relatives. It was not easy at all but step by step we achieved the respect and the confidence of local population”.

Then the experience in Africa and the campaign against mines. “At that time, Italy was the 3rd world producer of mines (with US and China ahead) – remembers Strada – and I was deeply impressed by the terrible amputation mines caused to civil victims so, as Emergency, we decide to start a campaign with crude images of mines victims. That campaign had an unexpected appeal and to the President of the Italian Republic arrived some 1.5 million petition asking the ban of mines”. After that it was not possible anymore to turn a blind eye and mines were banned, first in Italy then worldwide (with a couple of exception).

Africa is a main concern in Gino Strada mission. “When I was about to arrange a cardio-surgery in Sudan – explains Strada - somebody was used to tell me: why are you doing so? That is too much for Africa. I was completely amazed for such a cynical statement and my answer was: why such a difference in human right?”. Anyway the Sudanese cardio-surgery became a success, with about 7,000 operations in 7 years, with people coming there from 28 African countries. “Our next project in Africa – confides Strada – will be a paediatric surgery in Uganda, with a project of the hospital designed by archistar Renzo Piano”.

Among all his experience worldwide Gino Strada like to remember his activity in Iraq too. In such a war theatre the Emergency activities went over the traditional “core business” of medical care. “Though after surgery we arranged a service of prosthesis and physiotherapy for war wounded – points out the founder of Emergency – we thought we are not doing enough. So we organized training courses destined to set up handcrafted activities and after that we create small cooperative composed former patients, helping them in starting the business”. The result was some 300 cooperative established.

Telling his story, Gino Strada take also the occasion to provide a touching tribute to his wife – and cofounder of Emergency – Teresa Sarti, died in 2009. And finally he has a couple of words for two currents events too. Concerning a question on US president he replies: “I am sorry, I am ignorant in psychiatry”. While on vaccination protesters, the so-called “No Vax”, Strada says: “I would like that people fighting against vaccination could visit the remaining two third of the world where vaccination are not available”.

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