

STRONG FAMILIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES.

The Enrichment of Family Relationships for the Common Good

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First of all I would like to thank all the authorities here gathered, and all the institutions that contributed to the realization of this meeting. They have been long months of hard work, sometimes frantic, often complicated, in order to realize an encounter which from its very starting has been an efficacious network of collaboration to support the family.

1. Indeed, **“network” is the word** I would like to stress while opening this meeting: network as a dynamic of encounter, exchange, debate among different subjects, coming from different countries, belonging to various disciplines. Also ICCFR (*International Commission on Couple and Family Relations*), whom this 63rd International Conference belongs to, is a network whose aim is to link at an international level experts and centers supporting families and their relationships. It is enough to read through the list of the participants to understand that these days will be first of all a very good chance to build a network; to know each other; to exchange knowledge, methodologies, maybe even business cards or e-mail and social (network!) addresses.

2. The planning itself of this meeting has been the fruitful outcome of the different specializations of the institutions promoting it, and it has generated a multifaceted path, composed of insights, fields of knowledge and experiences very heterogeneous. But, everything has been unified by the beneficiary: the family. So, the structure of this Conference is confirming the idea that **the family is a multidimensional experience and “social object”**. Therefore it is not possible to understand it relying upon a unique discipline or upon a single viewpoint. In order both of understanding and of working with the family, scholars and experts need a lot of humility, since family's world exceeds any specialization. Family is a question of heart, relationship, affection, but it also concerns laws and policies, work, money, one's wellbeing and life style. That is why this Conference presents at least three different ways of interpreting the family, all relevant and interesting, but none able alone to fulfill the whole significance of the “familial”. So, Saturday morning we will hear a sociological approach by professor Pierpaolo Donati and a legal one by professor Carlo Rimini, while Sunday morning professor Sabine Walper will propose a psycho-pedagogic approach. They are all important and strategic fields of knowledge, that will enlighten us about specific aspects, but in the end each of us will ought to bring together the pieces of that complicated and exciting puzzle which the family - and its support, promotion and care - really is.

3. Also the **exchange among different professions** has a lot to do with net-working, most of all at the ground level. Locally, in fact, different institutions as well as various professionals collaborate and are obliged to interact: legal and social workers, psychologists, public administrators, entrepreneurs, teachers, family counselors, family associations' members, volunteers... and it is surely needed that each of them should be well qualified in its profession. But, in the same time it is

opportune to reflect on the need – if they are in a network – that everyone should know how to talk and listen to the other languages. Even more, if we think to the everyday professional experience of many of us, we should admit that it is indeed the discussion between the various institutions and the different disciplines the critical point of our everyday work. Anyone who works in an inter-professional team, or in the protection of children, can easily confirm it. That is why one of the principal aims of this Conference is to promote this sort of permeability among disciplines, through a free exchange of different points of view, a real ability of listening, mutual legitimization, and shared planning among all the different workers supporting family. That is why I am particularly happy that many professional organizations have granted some training credits to their members participating to this Conference, which is not essentially “specialized” but an “inter-cultural” space. On the contrary, let me tell you, I have been rather disappointed by the reason that some other organizations have invoked not to grant their credits, that is “*there is too little of our profession*”. A legitimate choice, because “being able of doing always better one’s job” is certain a good stance. But, it shows also a lack of awareness about the fact that today the very border of each profession and of its efficacy is the ability of making a network, in synergy and alliance with all the other professionals. This is particularly true when in front of us we have a family, with its complexity and its multi-dimension character. Since I noted this fact not only for this Conference, maybe it should be useful for every profession to ask themselves about the value of having “*open doors and windows*” onto other disciplines and functions.

4. Another relevant aspect of this Conference, together with what I have already said, is the **great value given to the participants’ contribution** and practical experience, through the wide space reserved to discussion groups and workshops. A choice that has been strongly requested exactly by ICCFR, as if it were its “trade mark”, but that has been immediately shared by the Italian partners. We are therefore expecting this Conference to be a **relational event**, where each one could have the curiosity to know better who is sitting next to him, to discuss about the key speeches even during coffee breaks, to tell others one’s own insights or difficulties, positive experiences or failures, with a certainty: this relational circle could give birth to a reciprocal enrichment.

5. In the end, a last reference to the general issue of this Conference, whose aim is to give value to the **close link between people’s and families’ good in their relationships and the common good family can generate for the whole society**. It is an issue that as Cisf we have been studying for many years, and I would like to invite you not to read it in a unidirectional way, but as an exchange of reciprocity. It is true that the title can be read as “*the strength of families is also the strength of society*”, or even “*a community is strong if families are strong*”. This is surely important, in order to come out of a vision of the family as the “big patient” of the contemporary age and remember that family is still the first creator of social capital and common good. But this is not enough: our title can also carry on the idea that a close society is able to better support the life projects of families: “*a strong community can also strengthen families*”, in an alliance of pro-social values strengthening one another.

That’s why it is not by chance that this meeting is taking place in the area of Trentino, where the development of the community comes along with the development of the family, and where family policies are a strategic instrument for the development of the whole social and economic system. It is time to come out of the juxtaposition between an increasingly privatized family and a public sphere more and more far away from families’ needs and projects.

6. Of course, a Conference will not surely be enough to solve the everyday problems of families, or the difficulties faced by the professionals working every day side by side with strained families, trying to support and enhance them. But the chance to discuss all together about our practices, our experiences and some new interpreting paradigm will be a precious support to our work. The wish I would like to express in the end of my opening address is therefore that for each of us this Conference could be a chance to grow in our skills, in our creativity, in the hope to create common good. I wish that every one of us could come back home having in mind one or two new key words, and maybe the face of two or three persons whom we would like to keep in touch with. In this case, we could say: *"They have been worthwhile days!"*.