Syria: humanitarian emergency, help for children. UNICEF conference at the Farnesina

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“I know I can count on the support of Parliament to confirm the forthcoming ‘Missions Decree’ in law. The decree envisages further funding of 50 million dollars for the humanitarian emergency in Syria”. This was Foreign Minister Emma Bonino’s comment in her speech at the conference at the Farnesina on the UNICEF fund-raising campaign for Syria’s child refugees. Bonino underscored that the decree will arrive in Parliament by the end of September. The solution to the Syrian crisis “is neither military nor humanitarian. But humanitarian aid is, in all cases, ‘worth it’ for each human life saved”, added the Minister.

A generation at risk of disappearing

Syria’s children are a generation at risk of disappearing, crushed by a war that is now in its third year. They are the first victims, because they are the weakest. Victims that UNICEF is trying to help, with a new fund-raising campaign illustrated today, 12 September 2013, at the Farnesina. The money collected, thanks to the generosity of the Italian people, noted Minister Bonino, will be used to build a hospital in Jordan, where some of the Syrian refugees are concentrated.

A million children forced to flee

The figures of Syria’s humanitarian disaster were provided by the President of UNICEF Italia, Giacomo Guerrera. One million children forced to fee to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. And about 740,00 of these young people are under 11 years of age.Four million children and young people, both inside and outside Syria, are being deprived of a home, schooling and affection. They are being annihilated by violence and by the destruction of services and essential supplies resulting from the conflict – a conflict that has killed 7000 of them. To date, UNICEF has allocated about 1.5 million euros to Syria’s children, but much more money is needed. Support is needed for the neighbouring countries that have taken in the refugees and whose villages are “bursting at the seams”. These countries simply cannot meet the demand for water, food and health-care from a population that has tripled.

Italy in the front line: our Development Cooperation has allocated 20 million

Italy is in the front line for the humanitarian emergency in Syria, noted Minister Bonino. She underscored that the solution of the conflict cannot be either military or humanitarian. But humanitarian aid is, in all cases, ‘worth it’ for each human life saved”, she added.In 2013 alone, Italian Development Cooperation has allocated 20 million euros to projects in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. And a further 50 million dollars are in the pipeline, through the forthcoming “Missions Decree”. The UNICEF fund-raising campaign has demonstrated “the generosity of the Italian people, even in these difficult times”, underscored Bonino. The minister added that the new school in the Jordanian refugee camp “will keep children from idleness and, most important, from the effects of the adults’ tensions”.

Coordinated action is needed from governments, NGOs and civil society

A humanitarian catastrophe of these proportions requires coordinated action from governments, NGOs and civil society, observed the Director General for Italian Development Cooperation, Giampaolo Cantini. And the media need to play their part too. “We’re working day in, day out to keep the public informed. And when we’re reporting the work done by UNICEF, that’s one of the times we feel we’re being most useful”, explained the director of the ANSA press agency, Luigi Contu. He pointed out that ANSA has an agreement with UNICEF to promote its campaigns and, he added, “we are happy indeed to help implement these projects”.

Kerry-Lavrov meeting must lead to “Geneva 2”, says Bonino

The humanitarian effort must be conducted in conjunction with the work being done on the diplomatic front if we are to achieve a political solution to the crisis, underscored Minister Bonino. She hoped that the meeting between the American Secretary of State, John Kerry, and the Russian Foreign Minister,Serghei Lavrov, in Geneva today [12 September 2013] would “re-open the uphill road to a political solution” in Syria through a new “Geneva 2” peace conference. Minister Bonino specified that the events of the last few days have “opened a window of opportunity” that must be exploited. “No perfect solution exists, and we must be willing to accept a gradual one”, she concluded.

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