

Rimini Meeting Takes Message of Friendship to UN

100 Gather to Listen to Experiences of True Dialogue

ROME, MAY 24, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The annual Rimini Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples, which has taken place for the last 30 years in Italy, took its message of true dialogue, peace and freedom to the United Nations last week.

Some 100 delegates, U.N. senior officials, personalities from the American cultural and entrepreneurial world, gathered May 19 at the U.N. headquarters in New York for an event organized by the Rimini Meeting Foundation, in conjunction with the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations.

Ambassador Antonio Bernardini of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations said in the opening address that aspects of the Rimini Meeting "are especially important for our work at the United Nations: curiosity, dialogue and friendship," and "those that are the heart of the Meeting -- the hundreds of persons who work for free in the organization of this event."

Jewish jurist Joseph Weiler testified that the Meeting is characterized by "uniqueness, intellectual opening, life, youth, family, gravitas, gratuitousness."

He added that the experience of the Meeting is different from that of the United Nations, as it is "not a political organization or a structure for political lobbying": "It's human experience, it's the realization, at the private level, of the most profound ideals of the United Nations: United Nations, United Peoples."

Weiler also stated that he didn't know "any political, religious, or spiritual organization that is so faithful, so involved in the search of truth and that does not feel the need to protect its adherents from opposite positions, from criticism, and skepticism. The depth that I find here is admirable. It is an event in which Reason reigns."

Emilia Garnieri, president of the Rimini Meeting Foundation, recalled that often what is said to describe the Rimini experience is that "we have invested in man's heart."

She continued: "We feel defined by our confidence in man, which is not identified with the irrational optimism of one who is not aware of violence, of wars, of the evil that surrounds us and is within us."

"In daily life and over these 30 years of the Meeting we have seen many examples of beauty, of solidarity, of greatness, of hope, of construction, of work. We have seen Muslims embrace Jews and

sing together in the Shabbat supper, prisoners who have come to the Meeting to talk about their own change of direction.

"These are examples that document that man's heart is able to desire goodness and beauty and that he is also able to spend his life to build it. The Meeting is a place of liberty, in which it is possible to know oneself, to look seriously at one's neighbor, learning more about ourselves and about others."

Faith in change

Wael Farouq, a professor of the Muslim tradition, described the latest developments of an off-shoot of the Rimini Meeting he helped organize in Cairo, Egypt last October. Some 150 Christians and Muslims took part in that first meeting.

"This small group of persons has committed itself to the Egyptian reality," he said. "After the attacks on the Church of Alexandria we have picked up the weapons of beauty and art in the face of violence. When the revolution began, the group of the Cairo Meeting was on the front line and took part in all the manifestations."

Farouq said that the greatest result of the group formed from the meeting was a conference held earlier in May -- this time attended by 5,000 -- that sought to "build a liberal front that would ensure the civilization of the Egyptian country and coordination between liberal parties and the political powers in a parliament for the imminent presidential elections."

"This is what the group has done and the very existence of this group is no more than the result of the experience we lived in the Rimini Meeting: an experience of liberation from stereotypes and prejudices," Farouq said.

Pointing out the importance of the dialogue, the Muslim professor added that this "should be founded on an encounter, given that it is in an encounter where the person makes room, in his life, for another person and begins to discover him or her."

"True dialogue is a constant for the building of oneself and of the world," he concluded. "Difference is the foundation of knowledge and dialogue is one of the instruments for obtaining it, because the elimination of difference in dialoguing with the other is no less aberrant than the elimination of the other because of his difference."