

MedChild presentation
(Bruno Musso – Dubai, May 18th 2005)

1. Why and how

The “Istituto Mediterraneo per l’Infanzia – MEDCHILD Institute Foundation” was created¹ to promote throughout the Mediterranean the development and protection of children’s rights, in accordance with the person-oriented approach of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and to ensure monitoring of their actual application.

MedChild’s idea of the Mediterranean is that of a vast area comprising all the countries forming part of the European Union and the European continent as well as the other countries located in the Mediterranean basin in what is commonly known as MENA region (Middle East and North Africa). MedChild chooses this “Mediterranean” as its geographical area of operations, because it is here that cultures, religions and social spheres of the modern world can rediscover themselves and their roots: this is the common cradle, the primary locus from which the common values of civilization originated and in which they will be able to find both an ancient and modern rationale for their development.

The tremendous challenge that all the Mediterranean peoples are now facing is to enhance the many differences as opportunities for reciprocal enrichment instead of reasons for incomprehension and, ultimately, for a clash: we feel that the common care for *each* child and for *all* the children in the Mediterranean is a good approach to favor a better common future.

In his message to the Genoa Conference the past Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini, presently Vice President of the European Commission, underlined the MedChild’s «determination to develop practical action rather than pure and simple scientific debate [and its role] for the qualitative and quantitative growth of Italy’s presence in the Mediterranean area as an innovative experimental initiative in which the Foreign Ministry will be taking a keen interest from this time on». Consistently with the declared keen interest, the Ministry joined MedChild as Institutional Participant, and the present Minister, Gianfranco Fini, has recently expressed his personal commitment in consolidating the medical MedChild division in a virtual but *concrete* “Pediatric Hospital for the Mediterranean”, as will be explained in the following.

2. Towards the Children - our mission

Children’s rights are our institutional reference; confidence in the future generations and constructive commitment to promote optimal conditions for them to grow as persons, with related rights and duties, will be our guidelines.

We make continuous experience of the frequently very serious problems, due to migration, to regional tensions with their repercussions on the child population, to the existing gap between “north” and “south”, and to many other factors: we must face these problems in order to insure satisfaction of children’s rights.

Regarding this argument, I would recall what I said in the opening session: «Children’s rights are a prerequisite of equity and justice, essential for any builder of peace and for any meeting between cultures, peoples and religions. But our commitment goes beyond the level of the rights. In fact, any

¹ It is a non-profit organization created in Genoa, on December 29th 2003, presented to more than 900 Mediterranean representatives and authorities at the beginning of 2004, during the International Conference *Children and the Mediterranean*, and recognized as a foundation of national interest, consistently with Italian law, in the August 2004.

child wants for care and love: this is his main wish and need, but this cannot be strictly considered a “right”, such as love cannot be considered a “duty”. Love is other than rights and duties, and can only be given voluntarily and freely: we will try to obtain this high level of commitment».

In this spirit we conceived MedChild, based on a rigorous analysis of children’s condition in terms of legislations and local realities, and aimed at specific direct or indirect interventions.

3. *A Mediterranean body*

Born in Italy under the Italian law, MedChild is Mediterranean in its essence, really capable to represent the Mediterranean peoples, needs and hopes. This is the reason for which the Institute intends to integrate in itself different qualified actors and entities from the Mediterranean countries for the care of children, or to co-operate with them.

In terms of membership we are happy to mention the Arab Urban Development Institute and the Royal Scientific Society, as well as in terms of co-operation we recall the signed agreements with Jordan, Libya and Morocco. For a brief period of existence, this is certainly a good result. But we need more; so we look for a larger network of institutional alliances and partnerships with bodies coming from deeply different histories but moving towards the same target.

The Mediterranean Institute for Hematology, that has just joined the Fondazione Gaslini as MedChild Founder, will substantially contribute to realize this qualified Mediterranean network as it will be explained after this speech: specially conceived for the cure of hematological diseases, the MIH network will be gradually extended to larger pediatric assistance and, more in general, it will support the MedChild networking in favor of children’s wellbeing.

4. *Analysis*

Before acting or making proposals, we must analyze and, possibly, understand children’s conditions. So we decided from the beginning to prepare some basic tools, such as:

- survey of legislations concerning minors in the Mediterranean
- Map and Index
- sector-based analysis in the framework of the Map.

The legislation survey is yet in its very preliminary phase, and only in the year 2006 we will be in condition to offer some preliminary results.

The first edition of *Charting* and of the *Index*, presented in Genoa in 2004, and the second ones presented here today, are conceived as quite complete and rigorous instruments for knowing the real conditions of children in the Mediterranean area, in order to ameliorate it. Therefore their quality must be as high as necessary for a good understanding. But, once such a level has been reached, we now need to move towards studying specific areas in particular depth, so as to prepare a common consciousness of the situation, thus favoring shared choices.

To realize these Maps with reliable figures and quite deep analysis, MedChild – sponsored in the year 2004 by the Fondazione Gaslini and in the year 2005 by the Compagnia di San Paolo (one of the main Italian financial entities) – established a large network of specialized bodies and research centers in charge to suggest, supply and review figures, data and interpretations.

From now on, due to the quality reached which seems to be near sufficient, a new step is possible. For this reason, I feel that we should agree today, or in any case within a very short time, on new

modalities and instruments (committee, seminar, forum...) to select sectors and indicators which should be seriously considered in the next editions of *Charting* and the *Index*, in order to analyze, detect and define therapies with the broadest consensus of the interested Mediterranean actors.

5. *Between analysis and action*

The Genoa Declaration included «the MedChild's commitment to foster the exchange of useful experiences between countries and organizations working for the defense of children's rights and better lives for children and adolescents in the Mediterranean region. In this connection, MedChild intends to continue close collaboration with the Arab Urban Development Institute and seeks to promote dialogue between mayors and other municipal and provincial authorities responsible for the protection of children».

The *First MedChild Award for Best Practices* that, with the prestigious sponsorship of the Fondazione Cariplo, was assigned yesterday evening, is the first result of this commitment and, I feel, is really "Mediterranean".

The Genoa Declaration also stated: «In addition to public programs and with a view to attracting more resources from the private sector for human development in the poorer nations, the Genoa Conference urges MedChild to focus particular attention both on private and/or public fund-raising initiatives whose direct beneficiaries are private individuals and, in accordance with the above mentioned Plan of Action, on community improvement schemes of benefit to children, such as micro-credit».

This MedChild commitment is not yet fulfilled; so we will project initiatives in this direction, starting probably from the Best Practices that we will recognize in the Mediterranean (the First Award being only the first step): if we successfully identify and support practices inspired by the spirit of the "micro-credit approach", I think that also this goal will soon be achieved.

6. *Action*

In general terms MedChild intends to promote the physical and mental well-being of children in the Mediterranean countries among both institutions and privileged counterparts responsible for guaranteeing this right and by means of action directly in support of children.

As a first priority that means:

- to promote a pediatric network of international co-operation based on transfer of the available clinical and scientific knowledge and know-how, sharing of health technologies, systematic access to vocational training, research activity and its outcomes, e-health networking, reception and admission to cure at Italian facilities for complex cases which could not be differently managed;
- to promote activities aimed at ensuring proper and safe production and use of drugs for children;
- to identify good practices for protecting the psychological and physical well-being of children in the Mediterranean area, from which to develop, possibly, studies and guidelines to be proposed at institutional level.

But, to be more sensitive to the person of the child, it seems necessary as well:

- to introduce medical people involved in those activities to the different Mediterranean cultures, on the obstetrician and pediatric field. The original program is largely based on the existing museum of ethno-medicine at the Genoa University, one of the best in the world;
- to promote children's play, creativity and education with special attention to the arts, fables and toys: all these factors, in fact, are necessary for children's human growth. At the same

time, they are capable to favor mutual understanding between Mediterranean peoples, thanks to their cultural and religious roots and their special attitude, which suggest to children and people close to them the discovery of these roots in the best psychological conditions.

In this view there are activities already started and others ready to start:

- co-operation with the MIH (Mediterranean Institute of Hematology) with a perspective of a significant acceleration in networking;
- pediatric missions on logistic ships of the Italian Navy, with the double purpose of assistance and training. Libya was the first destination in October 2004, Morocco will be the next, delayed at present due to the Italian Navy's involvement in the assistance to the Asian populations after the "tsunami disaster";
- pediatric missions with mobile units specially equipped for tele-assistance. The first mission, defined in agreement with the Ministry of Health of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Italian Hospital of Karak, is ready to start;
- Clinical Trial Office for Pediatric drugs, whose realization begun in October 2004 and whose activity and program will be presented this morning by Prof. Alberto Martini in one of the parallel sessions;
- preliminary program for the Mediterranean fables, plays and toys research.

Based on the experience of this first period, the MedChild Institute and the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs are jointly defining a very ambitious project aiming to develop, organize and consolidate all these activities in a specific Pediatric Center for the Mediterranean, institutionally involving the Italian pediatric scientific institutes members of MedChild (at present: Gaslini, MIH, Bambino Gesù) and provided of a "pediatric ship" specially realized for this purpose, MedChild and the Italian Navy being committed to ensure its handling and management.

General Director for the Mediterranean and the Middle East of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Riccardo Sessa, who at the last minute have had to renounce being here to chair this plenary session, represents the Ministry in our Board of Governors. The Minister has trusted exactly him with this new project and this is our best guarantee of success.

When the initiative will be formally approved, MedChild will consider itself committed to the best definition of the project with the highest level of consensus, the composition of the MedChild International Scientific Committee and Board of Governors offering good opportunity to obtain this.

7. The unique role of the ship in the MedChild enterprise

A wonderful ship, named Mistral as the wind flowing from north-west to south-east in our region, hosted the Genoa Conference and so the public birth of MedChild.

A nice boat – a small ship – hosting a lot of merry children is a sort of MedChild flag.

A military ship hosted the first pediatric MedChild mission.

A new ship seems now to become the basic and most visible pillar of the MedChild activity or, more properly, a sailing head office of the MedChild Institute, capable to host medical assistance as well as international meetings or small exhibitions.

MedChild is an enterprise in the largest sense of the word – like an adventure – and a sea is its natural basin naming the Institute too: what more expressive and emblematic than a MedChild ship?