

GLOBAL JUNIOR CHALLENGE 2004
Julius Caesar Hall, 19th November 2004

Dear friends and guests, dear boys and girls,

I am very pleased to host you in this Hall, to give you the regards from Rome and to thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for being here, during these days, at the third edition of the *Global Junior Challenge*, that we have promoted in order to chose the best projects using the ICTs in young people education and training.

You have arrived very numerous in Rome, because the projects were many and very interesting: 647 projects coming from more than 70 countries from all around the world. I think it is particularly significant that more than 40% of these projects come from countries which live serious conditions of poverty, of war and social problems. It is important, as well, that many of the projects have been managed by one of the richest countries, in order to cooperate with the developing countries through the ICTs.

From this point of view, what amazed us most is the perfect agreement among the priorities underlined by young people from all around the world as the targets defined by the Millenium Declaration: the eradication of starvation and poverty, a primary education for everybody, the promotion of equal opportunities and of the *empowerment* of women, the reduction of the infant mortality, the fight against Aids, against malaria and other diseases, the preservation of the environment.

Unfortunately, you all know how these targets are far, very far from being achieved. If we can hope to accelerate, to run faster through this necessary path, it is thanks to technology, which - in all your projects -

becomes a powerful tool for inclusion, a kind of “social accelerator” which creates links, reduces distances, establishes alliances and consolidates relationships.

That is how you can think to try to change the sign of a globalisation that, till now, has considered to be wrong the ones who, too optimistically, maintained that the sharing of information, of material and cultural consumptions would have set up – as in a sort of virtuous automatism – justice, harmony and equal opportunities to everybody, at every latitude. It is not like that. The globalisation ruled from above, shaped on the needs of the economics of the most powerful countries, increases, instead of reducing, the gap between rich countries and poor countries. You should only read the results of the ONU report about the human development: in the last decade, in more than 54 developing countries, the medium income decreased instead of increase; in 26 countries, above all the African ones, the underfed people did not decrease, but they increased till 60 millions; and in the Sub-Saharan Africa, school-aged children, deprived of the right to access the primary school, are not less than they were ten years ago: they were 41 millions, today they are 45 millions.

In this context, you can include the *digital divide*: the terrible backwardness in the ICTs field, experimented by billiards of people all around the world, is confirmed by the ONU report on the Human Development: this underlines that, today, less than 10% of the global population access Internet.

It is not difficult to have an idea on the unequal way technology is distributed and used in the world. For instance, you can compare the data

from three countries: in Norway, every 1000 inhabitants, 734 have got a telephone set, and 502 access Internet; in Italy, every 1000 inhabitants, 481 have got a telephone set and 352 access Internet; in Senegal, every 1000 inhabitants, only 22 have got a telephone set and 10 access Internet.

So, that same technology, considered as a tool which can eventually reduce that gap dividing the world into two parts, can represent another element of that divide, 'cause the access to ICT - when this is not a right for everybody, but rather a privilege for few people - becomes an element of discrimination into the same group of people or between two or more different groups of people.

Then, it is in this context as well, that we have to be able to act concretely. In the field of "ICT alphabetisation", that involves everybody regardless of age, profession, individual skills, as showed in the variety of the projects you have presented in these days. This kind of alphabetisation concerns the countries all around the world because it is an unavoidable necessity for an integrated development. It also concerns the field of education and training, which is a decisive one: Carol Bellamy, General Director of UNICEF, is right when she says that "we can hardly hope to reduce poverty, infant mortality, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, if we do not assure that every little girl and every little boy can exercise her/his own right to primary education".

Today, schools can be centres of technological research and of *e-learning* production and experimentation; schools are the places from where we can promote equal opportunities for development, thanks to the ICTs. That's why our target is to promote a process of technological integration that, coming from the bottom, that is from all those institutions which

want to join the project, so that we can assure the biggest involvement and we can defeat, on one hand, the social gap between those who can access ICTs and, consequently, the world of employment and services, and those who are excluded; on the other hand, the eventual risk of a technological colonialism.

Technology does not distinguish, does not discriminate. This is the message coming from the finalist projects at the *Global Junior Challenge*.

You have only to read the titles and the descriptions of the projects in order to realise what equal opportunities to development mean today: from the prevention against AIDS in Namibia, to the support to the children victims of the Middle-eastern conflicts, to the off-training in Bangladesh, to SARS in China, to the preservation of the environment in South Africa. Or, again, projects such as the one born from a dramatic fact, the murder of Iqbal Masih, the Pakistan child who had rebelled against the exploitation of the juvenile work: that's how it was born the cooperation between a school in Rome and a Pakistan village, a cooperation thanks to whom forty children from that country have the chance to have a daily meal, public transport and the didactic tools they need. In the same direction, an encounter between the students of the Liceo Augusto and the Office for Peace in Jerusalem of Comune di Roma produced a project to promote the study of the Middle-eastern history and to create relationships between Italian young people and their peers who live in that area.

Well, the projects of the third edition of the *Global Junior Challenge* are like the letters of an alphabet. All together, they become words,

they become a story. A story shaped on coexistence and dialogue, on inclusion, on a cooperation for the development with the poorest areas in the world. A story that is the sign of our wish to promote the growing of a culture shared from children and adults, from young people and old people. This sharing is our biggest hope for a more equal world, for a future made of development and peace.

Walter Veltroni