



## **COMUNITÀ PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII ASSOCIATION**

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**OPERAZIONE COLOMBA**  
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**OPERATION DOVE**  
**Non-violent Peace Corps**

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### **THE ASSOCIATION 'COMUNITÀ PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII'**

The Association 'Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII' (Association Pope John XXIII) is an International Lay Association of Pontifical Right recognised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1998. The Association was recognised by the Italian Government on July 5<sup>th</sup> 1972 (D.P.R. n.596 05/07/72). It is also recognised as an ONLUS (Non Profit Organisation of Social Utility), with reference to its social and health assistance activities. The Association is made up of people of different ages and states of life who share their life directly with the poor and the least. The members are also committed to removing the causes of poverty and marginalisation and to being the voice of the voiceless through non-violent action and means. They work on a volunteer basis. The Association is present in Italy and throughout the world in: Albania, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Congo, Croatia, India, Kenya, Russia, San Marino, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Venezuela and Zambia.

The history of the Association began in 1968 as a result of time spent with young people and disabled people in schools and holiday camps. This, and other experiences, led to the awareness of a need to spend time and share life with all those who are marginalised and in need. In 1973 the first 'family homes' were born. These are large families where single people or couples, helped by volunteers, become mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers of people with disabilities, unmarried mothers, ex prisoners, alcoholics, recovering drug addicts, women/girls set free from prostitution. At present there are approximately two hundred such family homes in Italy and more throughout the world. The Association also offers different forms of help to families outside the Association who are open to foster care. This includes periodical training and self-support groups.

Living with the poor and the least throughout the world has also given rise to the development of: Emergency shelters; open families; houses of prayer; houses of fraternity; co-operatives and day-centres; therapeutic communities for drug-addicts; centres for alcoholics; different ways of sharing life with children, adolescents, young people in trouble, disabled people, prisoners, gypsies, drug addicts, alcoholics, homeless people, immigrants, the elderly, victims of AIDS, mothers in trouble, women/girls forced into prostitution; a commitment to developing new social and economic models; a commitment to supporting and promoting peace and conscientious objection; Operation Dove (a non-violent presence in both fronts in war-zones); missionary action; editorial activity; theatrical and musical activities and events.

The President and Legal Representative of the Association is Father Oreste Benzi

# **OPERATION DOVE – NONVIOLENT PEACE CORPS**

## **HOW IT STARTED**

Operation Dove started in 1992 during the war in Yugoslavia. We wanted to try to live in a nonviolent way in the midst of war areas and share our life with all those who were forced to undergo violence as a result of conflict and war. We lived on different fronts, helping families to be reunited and protecting ethnic minorities with our presence. We made dialogue possible between the fighting parts and amongst different churches. We helped to recreate an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. Since 1995 we have ‘exported’ this way of ‘entering into wars’ into Albania, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Congo, Chiapas (Mexico), Chechnya (Russia), Israel and Palestine.

More than 1,500 people from different parts of Italy have been involved in the initiatives and have carried out projects of Operation Dove. We cooperate and have cooperated with many international organisations (e.g. UNHCR and OSCE), centres for the protection of human rights, local and international NGOs, church leaders, associations and local groups.

We firmly believe that, by living with the victims of war, unexpected paths towards peace can start.

## **WHO WE ARE**

We are people committed to nonviolence and to finding nonviolent solutions to conflicts and war. Some of us dedicate our whole life to the realisation of this dream; some give a medium/long term availability while some others join our activities and actions occasionally or for short periods of time, e.g. in participating to specific campaigns, public demonstrations and actions of popular mobilisation. Our organisation is simple and essential, so that we are ready to move promptly into different situations of conflict and war. Locally, we are organised into support groups called ‘quilombos’ – the name of Brazilian resistance groups who fought against their slavery. Through these ‘quilombos’ we raise awareness about our activities, organise peace education and initiatives and collect funds. We also try to make ourselves, and nonviolence, known to institutions, churches and local groups.

The White Helmets (conscientious objectors to military service, who are serving civil service instead), according to Italian law no 230/1998 art.9, can take part in the humanitarian and peace actions of ‘Operation Dove’.

The activities and projects of the Operation Dove are for believers and non-believers, united to build a more just society.

## **OUR AIMS**

Violence and weapons cannot be a solution to conflict. We want to substitute the use of weapons with a patient and far-sighted search for peace. It is time to make nonviolence a normal and everyday procedure, that is, make it become a way of being and a practical answer to violence and conflict. Only through nonviolence can we walk the path towards the realisation of justice and peace for everybody. This is also a fundamental and inherent human right. Through our projects, we aim to:

- live as and with people who are forced to undergo wars, in both the opposing fronts, regardless of race, nationality, religion and political beliefs;
- help the victims of war to meet their daily needs, e.g. food, transport through dangerous areas, compliance with administrative procedures, reunion with their relatives etc.;
- help secure the safety of these people through our presence, which serves also as a deterrent against the violence they may undergo;
- promote and create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation between the fighting parts, trying to

involve the local community, authorities, associations and political and religious institutions;

- build nonviolent alternatives to conflict;
- find a solution to the problems of coexistence through concrete and practical proposals;
- help refugees reach their homeland safely, sometimes taking them home personally;
- be a link between the victims of war and the international organisations we cooperate with, e.g UN, UNHCR, NATO, OSCE, EU;
- advocate on behalf of the victims and report violations of human rights to the relevant authorities.

In all our projects, we want to ‘heal wounds and build bridges’. We want to become a **civilian peace corps**, an unarmed ‘army’ opened to everybody, which intervenes effectively in both armed and social conflict.