



2nd International Meeting
Strengthening Mental Health Systems in Low and Middle Income Countries
Rimini, 21-24 April 2009

Welcome Address
by Maurizio Focchi
(President of Cittadinanza)

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to everybody.

My name is Maurizio Focchi and I am President and founder of Cittadinanza, founder together with other people and donors also present here. Particularly, I would like to mention Anita Marini: now she is here as representative of WHO, but for many years she has been working as Director of Cittadinanza and she was a fundamental actor to build Cittadinanza's activities.

I am very happy to be here with all of you today, after a long work to organize this meeting.

Welcome to everybody. Welcome to the representatives of the 15 countries, to the World Health Organization, to the authorities, to the NGOs and the non-profit organizations, to our donors, and to every person here today with us. A warm welcome to all of you!

Our meeting is organized jointly by Cittadinanza and Mental Health Department of WHO, with a strong and important partnership with Emilia Romagna Region.

Two years ago we had the idea of this project: 3 Meetings, one for each year, starting from the needs of the countries, starting - as we did - from the needs assessment in the countries with the WHO/AIMS Reports.

We can say that the 1st edition last year was very successful. This is the second edition and we hope will be also better. After the 3rd edition, next year, we are thinking about a new project to continue along this path:

- implementing mental health in the countries;
- improving exchange of experience among the countries and international organizations.

What is Cittadinanza and why we cooperate with WHO?

Cittadinanza is a non-profit organization founded here in Rimini in 1999, with a clear focus on people who suffer from mental illness and living in poor or disadvantaged countries.

Cittadinanza is an Italian word: its translation in English is *Citizenship*, in Spanish *Ciudadanía*. We chose this name to emphasize that we want to remove, from persons with mental illness, the mask of shame and give them back their identity as 'citizens'.

Practically, we develop and support mental health projects for low income populations. Cittadinanza provides care for adults (like in our project in Thiruporur, India) and for children and adolescents with neuropsychiatric disabilities (as in the projects we implemented in Serbia, India and Albania).

Let me focus on two strategic points on which Cittadinanza's activities have been always based:

I) International Exchange of Experience - We are convinced that exchange of experience in this field, in mental health, is very important. The exchange of experience is not one-way - from rich to poor countries. Poor countries suffer of course from a huge lack of resources, both financial and technical. But this lack sometimes can become an opportunity to develop creative solutions, new ideas, new projects and social cooperation. From which also western countries can benefit.

II) Cooperation with WHO - From the beginning we had a strong relationship with the World Health Organization, that helped Cittadinanza with its institutional frame and scientific support. This meeting is possible here today only through this close and important cooperation. A partnership between a great international organization, WHO, and a small Ngo/non-profit organization, Cittadinanza, with its passion, flexibility and willingness.

Thank you again and welcome to everybody for coming here to Rimini.

I hope that during these four days of hard work you will enjoy your staying together and your staying here in our town, in Rimini.

Maurizio Focchi