



1<sup>st</sup> International Meeting  
**Strengthening Mental Health Systems in Low and Middle Income Countries**  
*A Cittadinanza initiative in collaboration with WHO*  
*Rimini, 15-18 April 2008*

**Welcome Address**  
by Maurizio Focchi  
(President of Cittadinanza,)

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Maurizio Focchi and I am the President and the founder of Cittadinanza. I am very happy to be here with you today, after our efforts and hard work to organize this meeting.

First of all, I would like to welcome 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. A warm welcome to all of you!

Our meeting is organized jointly by Cittadinanza and the WHO Department of Mental Health and in strong partnership with Regione Emilia Romagna.

I would like to spend a few words on Cittadinanza, its activities and its cooperation with WHO. Cittadinanza is an Italian non-profit organization founded here in Rimini in 1999, with a clear focus on people suffering from mental illness and living in poor and disadvantaged countries.

Cittadinanza is an Italian word: its translation in English is *Citizenship*. 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'.

We develop and support mental health projects for most vulnerable groups in low income countries. Cittadinanza therefore provides care for adults (like in our projects in India) and for children and adolescents with neuropsychiatric disabilities (like in our projects in Serbia and Albania).

Cittadinanza's activities have always been based on two main strategic points:

I) International exchange of experiences - We are convinced that in the field of mental health, international exchange of experiences is extremely important. It is not a one-way relationship, from rich countries to developing countries. Though poor countries suffer chronically from a huge lack of resources, both financial and technical, they can often teach a lot in terms of best practices, creativity and social cooperation.

II) Cooperation with WHO - The World Health Organization always helped Cittadinanza with its institutional frame and scientific support. This meeting was made possible only by this close cooperation, this strong partnership between a great international organization like WHO and its Department for Mental Health, with its undisputed institutional and scientific authority, and a small non-profit organization like Cittadinanza, with its passion and its will to help and support people suffering from mental illness.

Thank you again for coming here. I wish you enjoy your stay during these next four days of hard work, hoping that fruitful cooperation and partnerships can be established here and grow successfully in the near future.

**Maurizio Focchi**