

VIDES European seminar “Volunteering changes the reality or the reality changes volunteering? An open horizon.”

This Saturday we had the pleasure to assist to the VIDES European seminar “Volunteering changes the reality or the reality changes volunteering? An open horizon.” together with several Salesian sisters and representatives from all over the world and VIDES volunteers.

The speakers were Guido Barbera, president of VIDES International, Sr. MariaGrazia Caputo, founder of VIDES and main representative to the UN at the IIMA Human Rights Office in Geneva, Eugenio Melandri, Italian activist and politician, former European parliamentarian, Co-founder of different associations and director of the magazine “Solidarietà Internazionale”, Fabio Attard, Salesian’s international responsible of Youth Ministry, Sr. Runita Borja, Councilor for Youth Ministry and four VIDES volunteers.

Under the thematic “In which world am I living?” Guido Barbera and Sr. MariaGrazia Caputo opened the seminar.

Mr. Barbera strongly criticized modern society and the absence of an active civil society fighting for its fundamental rights. In the same way, he criticized governments who talk about migrants and poverty but do nothing to address these issues. In fact, only 12% of the European countries consider poverty and civil society activities as a priority to invest in.

Sr. MariaGrazia explained how the people who lead the world handle these problems. In particular, she stressed the great importance of the participation of the NGOs in the UN Human Rights Council because they are the ones who speak for those who are not being heard by governments and who address many fundamental issues that otherwise would remain unnoticed.

To introduce the thematic “Which kind of volunteering do we have in this world?” Eugenio Melandri said that the four most important verbs in volunteering are: see, listen, know and act.

First, nowadays thanks to social media, we are reached by many images and news from all across the world. For this reason, we should allow ourselves to be touched, to not remain indifferent but to observe with critical eyes the world, which surround us.

Second, we need to enter the communities and listen to the victims and consequences of what is happening in the world. It is necessary to change our way of listening, we need to see eye to eye with the people affected.

Third, it is not enough to read the statistics, it is necessary to deeply understand and know every situation or as Eugenio said: “It means nothing that the GDP is good if all the population is dead.”

Finally, Eugenio spoke about two different types of volunteering: functional volunteering, which plays according to the rules of the donors without really helping and/or empowering people and real volunteering, which helps people understand and be aware of their situation in order to be able to claim their fundamental rights.

Mr. Melandri concluded with three messages for good volunteering:

1. “When a leaf falls into the river even if it might not seem like that, it changes the course of the river”: Successful volunteering is the one that through educating and proposing good and sustainable life styles in the present changes the future.

2. “We live in a Kafka castle, we can move freely inside it but we don’t have open windows or the possibility to leave it”: Good volunteering is the one that opens the windows of the castle to see what is outside and bring it into the castle. Doing this it helps other people to be aware on what is happening outside their reality.

3. We need to create a “hope movement” for the world to see that we are not working and struggling alone but that there are others who are hoping as we are and working in the same direction.

In the early afternoon, before listening to the next speakers, we had the pleasure to hear the testimony of some former volunteers about their experiences in different VIDES missions. Regardless of their specific work, all volunteers agreed on the fact that their experience changed them, their way to act in the society and to see the world around them completely. While entering the doors of a new culture and becoming an active part of it, they rediscovered fundamental values our modern society has already lost. It was a lesson for life!

The seminar continued with two last speeches.

Fabio Attard discussed the topic “Is there space in this world for our youth?”. At the beginning, he described our “fluid” society, where everything changes fast and people, especially the youth, are losing their fundamental values and their role models. For this reason, the aim of religious communities and volunteering associations is to be a solid role model for the youth, hearing their needs, helping them find their place in this world and showing them that they are loved. In fact, it is just when they are heard that they start listening.

Sr. Runita discussed “The presence of VIDES in the FMA youth ministry”. She reaffirmed the importance of the education to solidarity, gratefulness, justice and peace as a fundamental part of the youth ministry. Furthermore she gave VIDES some advices to continue its work in the youth ministry: Reaffirm the kindness that exist in every youth’s heart, show the importance of being open to Gods message, construct a healthy humanity, persons of God that serve others, for life and peace, learn and grow together, share our mission and promote and enhance vocational life.

All the debates were very interesting and left us with a very important message for our personal life and for the work of VIDES:

- 1) Volunteering does change reality but also reality changes volunteering.
- 2) Volunteering needs to open the world’s eyes to the different situations and realities of our world, which needs the attention of everyone of us.
- 3) Volunteering gives the possibility to everybody to become and active citizen of their community, transforming it into a community of people and values.