

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a honor for me to have the opportunity to speak to you and to speak in particular about something that happened in my city: Palermo, Sicily.

I want to start telling you a number: in 1988 in Palermo we had 240 murders, that is nearly a murder a day.

Last year in Palermo there were only 7 murders. I know, even 7 is too much... but without any doubt it is much better than 240.

What happened? A true revolution, a revolution made possible thanks to the sacrifice of heroes such as magistrates, policemen, political leaders, but also and especially thanks to the commitment of the whole population of the city.

A population that decided that it was not possible any longer to pretend that there was nothing to see, nothing to not to hear, nothing to speak about, but it was time to take back dignity and courage, and to build a new community based on a new culture of lawfulness.

That is why I can tell you that the low murder number I mentioned before is not an occasional event, but indicates that a true process of rebirth is underway.

Palermo was like a bottle of champagne, where the cork finally exploded, and when the cork exploded it was possible for the citizens to taste, to appreciate, the flavor of our city.

The cork was the cultural hegemony of the Mafia, the cultural hegemony of illegality. Mafia has not completely disappeared in Palermo, but Mafia does not control any longer the minds of the citizens: a great chance, a concrete hope to win.

We fought against mafia with all the instruments of law enforcement, with laws, police and prosecutors, but we also added a cultural fight, because we believed that to reach a real victory we needed these two approaches together: such as the two wheels of a cart: law enforcement and cultural struggle against illegality are together necessary for the cart to go ahead. If we have just one of them the risk is that the cart stays where it is, and spins around.

The results that we managed to achieve in Palermo are now studied and observed by several international experts, such as political, trade union,, cultural and media leaders.

Let me just read you what Wole Soyinka, Nigerians Nobel prize for literature, said in a recent meeting at the IMF in Washington: "*How was the miracle of Palermo achieved? ... The summative word is renewal, and renewal most especially in cultural domain, that is the complete transformation of the mentality of defeatism in the older generation, side by side with the nurturing of a new generation in the principles of creativity and democracy*".

Let me also quote the First Lady of the United States of America, Ms, Hillary Rodham Clinton, who, in Palermo, said "*Palermo provides us a model of citizenship, its lessons are there for all to learn and follow. Its message of hope is one that should light our way in to the next century*".

We believe that this experience, our experience, can become an occasion of exchange and confrontation with other experiences around the world.

It is already happening, for example with the cities of Tijuana in Mexico as well as with the city of San Diego in California, and it would be extraordinary if the United Nations would take the lead in this process of exchange of information and experience. We can say that local experiences are a richness for global action.

It would really mark this new century if we all could decide, that, the United Nations, together with the culture of peace, the culture of human rights and the culture human development, will promote also a new and fundamental culture: the culture of lawfulness. The culture of lawfulness as the new culture of the next century, as a new pillar of the international action.

Thank you and I expect you all in Palermo at the end of this year on the occasion of the signing ceremony of the UN convention against transnational crime.