

UPF chapters of Israel and San Marino invite a joint Arab-Jewish soccer team to play in Turin, Italy

Hod Ben-Zvi
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UPF Israel, Hod Ben Zvi, Turin, Italy, 19. – 26. March 2015: A joint Arab-Jewish soccer team, consisting of fourteen 11-year-old kids, visited Turin, Italy from 19 to 26 March, 2015. The above project was conceived by the UPF chapters of Israel and San Marino, developed and carried out as a joint project with the key role of WFWP Turin, Italy, and the active support of UPF Italy, the municipality of Turin, Italy and the municipalities of Afula and Iksal in Israel. In addition several Italian organizations and individuals were of great help, most notably the famous soccer clubs of Juventus FC and Torino FC.

The delegation setting forth towards Turin consisted of 7 Arab & 7 Jewish 11-year-old school boys accompanied by two sports teachers, the Arab school headmaster and the president of UPF Israel leading the group. The kids' soccer team was named "Peace Dreamers" by the feminine part of the Italian organizers and was formed for friendly soccer matches with Italian children's teams. In preparation, the kids met for ice-breaking games and orientations along with their parents four times.

Boarding the plane, all in their new blue sport outfits (donated by "City Free from Violence" association in Israel) the group drew much attention. Arriving in Turin, we were met by our tour organizer, planner and coordinator – Mrs. Maria Gabriella Mieli, Vice-president of WFWP Italy, supported by her husband. Another key player in guiding the group and providing beautiful photos was Mr. Sergio Coscia, UPF representative for Turin. We were hosted at the "Cascina Marchesa", a very special hostel located in a vast park dedicated to the Turin Marathon race.

On the first day the team visited the famous automobile National museum that was quite fascinating for the boys, who experienced their first trip outside the country.

The first challenges over the weekend were not on the field but rather dealing with the complexity of providing both Kosher and Halal food as well as keeping the Shabbat... The goodwill and the benevolence of the Italian hosts were the key for overcoming those obstacles. Since day 1, the parents followed every move of their children "live" via a WhatsApp group and constant feedback by the accompanying teachers.

The 2nd day, was down to "business". The team was invited to the famous Juventus facility and all the children participated in a soccer tournament dedicated to fight racism and discrimination. The Juventus team of coaches organized a most professional set of games with mixed teams of Italian, Jewish and Arab kids. It was great fun for everyone and at the end trophies and awards were given to all the children by the joint hosts: Juventus FC, WFWP and UNESCO.

The 3rd day began with a soccer tournament at the Turin FC club, one of the top league clubs in Italy. This time the "Peace Dreamers" were a bit more challenged as the Italian kids were trained players in the

club. The rain was pouring however it didn't prevent them from conducting friendly games throughout the morning.



Mr. Giorgio Gasperoni, the President of UPF San Marino, who was instrumental in the realization of the project, joined the event along with his son David. All children were able to keep the full set of the Turin FC club's uniforms they used for the games and a ball!

In the afternoon, after a long wait in the rain and cold, the gates opened for yet another highlight: the Juventus vs Genoa game – the real thing! The kids were shivering from both cold and excitement and didn't pass up the opportunity of buying overpriced items of the winning team, Juventus, of course, who offered the tickets as a donation.

The 4th day provided an opportunity of visiting the UN campus and meeting shortly with the UNESCO representative as well as the director and principals of UNICRI. Next was a visit to the Moslem community, which numbers around 50,000 people in Turin. At the Mosque, the Imam gave the group an orientation and the kids were treated with traditional Arabic sweets.

Right after, we visited the Jewish highly secure area. The community embraced the kids on short notice, providing lunch which was followed by a spontaneous soccer game with almost the entire school... The visit concluded with going through the impressive synagogue that serves as a miniature museum for Jewish history.

In the late afternoon the team had the opportunity of playing with the children of another local reality "Antico Borgoretto" for the "Palio dei Quartieri". The families of the children in Borgoretto prepared a wonderful welcome and cakes and salads especially for the Peace Dreamers. The parents in this area are aware of the fact that a good relationship among children, families and teachers/coaches makes a difference in the education of the future protagonists of our society. Day by day the Arab and Jewish kids grew closer, sharing games on their cell phones and getting scolded together when too much energy was exerted...

On our 5th day the team travelled to the lovely village of Bruzolo, Province of Turin in the Piedmont region. Just beside the snowy Alps, down in the valley a warm community welcomed our delegation. The mayor and a teacher of Italian literature showed the delegation around the two-storey building which serves as both the city hall and the primary school... The local kids were very excited to see us and had a list of questions written in English. The Q&A session had of course to go through Hebrew and Arabic as well. The family restaurant served vegetarian food, the closest solution to kosher food, eating together with all the dignitaries in town... Finally the big moment came and the soccer tournament with the Italian kids began. Despite the rain and bitter cold wind from the mountains, everyone played enthusiastically devouring the home made pizzas and cookies offered at the end of the games.

The 6th and last day of the visit, provided yet another highlight. The kids were treated to an exclusive peek at the training session of the famous players of Torino FC. They even managed to get a few photos

together. Next was a visit to the sport museum at the Olympic stadium, followed by a special soccer tournament organized by the youth department of Torino FC, named CIT TURIN.

The Hon. Dr. Piero Fassino, Mayor of Turin came down to the field and opened the games, together with Dr. Giovanni Maria Ferraris, Sports Councilor for the Piedmont Region. In attendance were also UPF Italy President, Mr. Carlo Zonato and his wife, whose support of the project was essential.

The four mixed teams did their best despite the drizzling rain and everyone joined in the closing ceremony. Mrs. Sabrina Gonzatto, the key coordinator with the Italian teams choked in tears receiving a Peace Ambassador award prior to delivering the medals and trophies to the enthusiastic children.

The day ended with a farewell party prepared by students for the kids. Fun and games went well into the night, leaving the children with little time to pack all the presents they had received and take a short nap prior to their journey back home. Upon their return the teachers decided to continue the friendships created between the children and schedule successive meetings.



Maria Gabriella Mieli, Vice-President WFWP Italy, President of WFWP Torino (member of UNESCO Centre of Turin and member of SIOI, the Italian UN Association): The first act of this project was played last September 22nd when I decided to meet the Mayor of Turin with a small delegation from Israel composed, among others, of Dr. Hod Ben Zvi and Dr. Glaubach, from UPF Israel and Giorgio Gasperoni, UPF San Marino. It was decided in that moment to present the project to the Mayor who immediately accepted to sponsor the idea, considering also that Turin had been chosen as the European Capital of Sport 2015.

The Mayor himself asked us to host the peace delegation in March 2015. At that time I had no idea of what the project would be like in terms of time, people involved and especially money, but we were aware of a big investment by the local members of our realities. Despite the fact that a project involving football is usually considered under UPF, for our reality in Turin most of the contacts with the institutions and local government were made in the name of WFWP, so we decided to go forward with that name opening the new chapter of WFWP Turin. New contacts of WFWP, including Dr. Maria Paola Azzario, President of the UNESCO Turin Centre and President of all the Italian UNESCO Clubs, and other important ladies involved in different areas of society were immediately informed about the possibility of being part of an important peace project related to the Middle East and the Mediterranean. It took about 5 months in order to be sure about the realization of the project due to the slowness of the sports Councilor in the Torino Municipality and uncertainty about the money necessary for the project. At this moment, at 2 weeks from the departure of the "Peace Dreamers" we still had no idea of the total cost of the entire project. I had to be honest with myself and the others, because I felt it was like a personal challenge to realize the project. I can affirm that everything was solved during the last 40 days before the arrival of the delegation.

The Municipality of Turin offered the bus for transportation during the 8 days of the project, the free entrance at the National Automobile Museum, the National Cinema Museum and the National Sports Museum, including the visit to and use of the press room of the Olympic Stadium of Turin and played the main role for both hospitality and meeting with the management of the Juventus FC.

Juventus FC, Torino FC, Union Valle di Susa FC, Palio dei Quartieri and CIT TURIN each offered a full

set of equipment for each child. Furthermore Juventus offered 25 tickets for the Juventus – Genoa match. The Turin Marathon offered hospitality for the 18 members of the delegation from Israel with half board. Naturando, FFWPU Turin and Milan, UPF San Marino, UPF Ticino offered the air tickets.

Since 2009 Juventus FC and the UNESCO Center of Turin have developed an initiative called “A Kick Against Racism” aimed at schools and young people from the region and not only, with the granting of scholarships for projects in favor of integration and whose program was integrated in 2012 with “Play with me” for children from 7 to 10 years old. This initiative was nominated by UNESCO as the best project in 2014 for its originality and effectiveness.



This year Juventus FC and the UNESCO Centre of Turin included our project “Football for Peace” in their event hosting our Peace Dreamers in their program thanks to the Mayor of Turin and giving us their Patronage for the initiative also because I’m a member of the UNESCO Center. Torino FC, the other city team playing in the main league, gave us the opportunity of meeting with children of the same age and furthermore gave us the unique opportunity of participating in the training behind closed doors of the major team with Mr. Ventura, the coach/Mister.

Thanks to one of our Blessed Families (Mauro Bergamaschi is a member of the city council) living close to the Alps French border, we were able to organize the beautiful day in Bruzolo with the children of Union Valle di Susa FC whose director, Mr. Paolo Anselmo, of the football school is part of FIGC and the Vice-President of Italian Coaches for Youths.

However, my personal desire was to involve the UN Campus in some way, and try to insert some interfaith events in the program. Everything was decided during the last week, even with the delegation already in Turin.

Without knowing anybody I was able to fix a meeting with the local director of the Union of the Islamic Communities in Italy just half an hour before meeting with the Jewish Community, whose board of directors changed recently. And it was amazing how we were received and taken care of.

One of the most exciting and quite spontaneous events organized was in the UN Campus with 2 organizations: UNESCO Turin Centre and especially UNICRI. I contacted UNICRI in 2008 for our European WFWP conference in Vienna, and we have been in touch since that time. The person in charge of Media and Communication, Dr. Marina Mazzini asked me to organize a small meeting with Dr. Hod Ben Zvi, myself, herself and the Deputy Director Dr. Leif Villadsen for a future program involving Palestine and other cities in the Middle East area.

During that meeting it was suggested to use the soccer field for the Peace Dreamers during their stay in Turin in some way.

Three days later the suggestion was put into practice for around 20 minutes followed upon the invitation of the Director of UNICRI, Dr. Jonathan Lucas, to meet the delegation and this also gave us the possibility of using the UNICRI room With the presence of UNESCO Centre's President asking the children to write down or to paint something about peace.

Another important issue is related to the press coverage. Thanks to the new WFWP contact, Dr. Sabrina Gonzatto, writer and journalist, we had the opportunity of being in touch with the owners (two ladies) of the press office MAYBE who offered their support free of charge, doing an incredible job. Every day we were called by local and national radios. We were interviewed by local TV channels and by journalists of the local and national newspapers and magazines.

This experience gave all of us the opportunity to understand cultural differences better and the preciousness of our essence as human beings caring for our brothers and sisters around the world as part of the same big family under God, following the example of our Beloved True Parents.