

## **UNIMED 2017 General Assembly**

**Paris, 30-31 October 2017**

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, authorities,

Dear friends,

Many of you already know me. I represent the University of Sassari, an ancient university based in Sardinia, at the very heart of the Mediterranean Sea.

It is a great honour for me to be here and I wish to pay tribute to UNIMED whose commitment to international cooperation has built a bridge between two extremely diverse continents.

We are all gathered here today because each of us has made internationalization a basic pillar of our own agendas.

We are all concerned about the difficult challenges that the EU has to face, but we are also aware that the key to solving global challenges lies in the hands of our strong cooperation with our North African partners.

I believe the positions of the University of Sassari and our friends who are based in the islands of the Mediterranean Basin, are extremely interesting.

We play a pivotal role in the management of migration flows, in particular when we successfully turn migrants into a resource for the local development of our territories.

Inclusion is the buzz-word. A word that tells a story of challenges, collaborations and interactions with institutions and super-national organizations.

Universities can play an unprecedented role in this process, driven by education and research. We can develop an immune system where young students can secure a safe and sound future for generations to come. Through education and research, our young citizens will develop skills and become more competitive in the world labour markets, and the students coming from North African countries can BE the change that their countries have been waiting for.

But how do we help them develop these skills? How can we contribute to make change happen?

I believe that education and research should focus on the challenges that our countries and our partner countries have to face. We can be useful only if we focus on the social and economic development of our target territories.

Migration can become an added value if we work together and become destinations of students who want to acquire new skills. Let us not be just the last stop of a dangerous journey leading to the unknown.

Europe will embrace migration and European people will understand the value of exchange if we help migrants develop skills that are useful for them and that can contribute to the development also of the hosting territories.

I come from a region that is underdeveloped in terms of infrastructures and skills. In a way, we share several challenges with our neighbours. However, our population is growing older and older and we need young people and skilled workers and professionals.

For a long time, Italian Universities were funded based on how much they costed. Now they are funded based on how many regular students they enrol.

Therefore, boosting enrolment is not only a moral responsibility but also an economic challenge for all of us.

Some colleagues from my University have always been engaged in international cooperation.

Our Research Center for Desertification has always had major international collaborations; and is a Desertnet International hub, being a member of a network that includes over 300 researchers.

In the field of medical microbiology, much has been accomplished in the eradication of tropical diseases and the great effort and number of publications by our colleagues prompted the launch of the “Journal of Infection in Development Countries”, one of the most renowned and accredited scientific journals in the field of medical microbiology.

In the field of archaeology, we made good use of our expertise and experience to start collaborations with North African partners. Archaeological sites proved to be a perfect ground to develop dialogue and to bring cultures together. The University of Sassari has several decades of experience in this field and we have held annual conferences since 1982 on the presence of Roman findings in Tunisian and Moroccan sites.

Step by step, Sassari has become a hub for international collaborations.

We now have over 500 agreements with other Universities and research centers in a wide range of fields, including medicine, water and land management, sustainable agriculture, conflict mediation, veterinary medicine, just to mention a few.

We are very grateful to all our partners based in Africa (such as, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Ghana), in the Americas, in Asia (such as, China and Vietnam) for giving us the opportunity to benefit from a balanced exchange: our effort to support the growth and development of our partners, has also had a positive effect in our own environment.

I wish to spend a few words on a capacity building project that is but an example of how positive our collaboration is: we are participating in a project aiming at the modernization of Egyptian Universities. Basically we are developing a Master's Degree together with the Universities of El Cairo, Alexandria, Zagazig and Damanhour. We are focusing on a specific sector (sustainable land management) that is a core issue for both our partners and Sardinia.

The results of this course will be beneficial for everyone.

In Vietnam we are part of a great project named after Carlo Urbani, an Italian microbiologist who worked on (and died from) a medical condition known as SARS - Severe acute respiratory syndrome. We are working on a two-year Master's Degree in Medical Bio Technology in collaboration with the Hué University of Medicine and Pharmacy. We are helping developing skills abroad, but we are also focusing on the needs of our people.

During the last two years we have worked hard to support the FORMED programme developed in collaboration with *Fondazione Sardegna*, UNIMED and some Universities who are well represented today. We have now 43 students coming from North Africa and we hope we can develop this project even more.

Together with my colleagues we have also developed a course that is already making a difference in our island. We now have a course in Security and International Cooperation, enrolling 120 students. The course was launched last year to develop operator with a comprehensive set of skills, who will be able to support and develop projects with their technical expertise and management abilities. The course was first intended to help former soldiers develop additional (or redevelop) skills and eventually go back to the civil society,

but unexpectedly we saw that also a wide range of different profiles are now interested and enrolling in our course. These students will shape a new way to develop and implement cooperation and they will steer the cooperation policies in our country and our partner countries.

Let me thank again UNIMED for paving the way to develop these important actions and facilitate dialogue and convergence in this diverse, yet shared space that we call the Mediterranean Sea.

Thank you.

Massimo Carpinelli