

Palermo Città

CIVIL SOCIETY/
DEMOCRACY BUILDING

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

**United States
Information
Agency**

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file Palermo, Italy
Cento
Office of the Director



USIA

March 5, 1999

Ms. Melanne Verveer
Assistant to the President
and Chief of Staff to the First Lady
The White House

Dear Melanne:

I would like to thank you for meeting with me and Mayor Leoluca Orlando of Palermo, Italy last Friday. We believe that the CIVITAS World Congress scheduled for June 18-21, 1999 in Palermo offers a unique opportunity for the First Lady to highlight the crucial links between civil society, education, grassroots activism and the culture of lawfulness.

As you heard from Mayor Orlando, ordinary citizens transformed their Mafia-plagued city. The wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of Palermo sparked a democratic movement when, outraged by yet another Mafia assassination, they painted "Basta!"--Enough!--on bed sheets and hung the sheets from balconies. The citizens of Palermo now give their children an education that goes beyond math and grammar and stresses the democratic and ethical concepts that students must understand to become citizens. These are the values that Mrs. Clinton has tirelessly promoted and pursued during her tenure as First Lady, and the Congress participants would certainly value the opportunity to hear her speak.

We anticipate an international gathering of educators, activists and law enforcement officials, including John Hume, Federico Mayor of UNESCO and the Under Secretary General of the United Nations. As more speakers and participants are confirmed we will forward the names to you.

We look forward to working with you on this event.

Sincerely,

Penn Kemble

Penn Kemble
Acting Director

THE PALERMO RENAISSANCE

The media and entertainment industries have made Sicily a world-wide metaphor for violence and organized crime. In truth, it once was so. During the 1980s thousands of people were killed in Sicily — three times as many as died in all twenty-five years of terrorism in Northern Ireland. A region whose architectural beauty and cultural richness once awed travelers from around the world had sunk into sullen decay.

But the Mafia went too far. Beginning in the late 1980s, two brave prosecutors had begun to unravel the Mafia's mysteries: Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. They and others with them were assassinated by bombs in 1992. But these murders did not terrify the public; to the contrary, they provoked outrage. Bed sheets with anti-Mafia slogans were hung from windows throughout Palermo. Vigils, demonstrations and placards appeared everywhere. Housewives and shopkeepers joined youth groups and religious congregations in the streets.

Educators were at the heart of the new citizens' movement against corruption. Teachers, parents and students rallied to demand that money pocketed by dishonest officials be used for new schools.



Classes of students "adopted" architectural and cultural monuments, and demanded that they be restored

and opened to the public. Priests called on their parishioners to cooperate with law enforcement; journalists exposed tainted dealing;

community leaders demanded transparency and performance from government; judges and prosecutors went after the crime bosses. At last, stiff sentences began to be handed down against the Mafia.

"Exciting and safe,"

that's how the BBC recently described Palermo.

Businesses and tourists are coming back. In the first six months of 1998 there were only three murders in Palermo, compared to 200 in all of 1992. The number of car thefts in 1997 was half what it had been in 1994. Pickpocketing complaints went from 1,230 in 1995 to 284 in the first half of 1998. The Teatro Massimo Opera—the biggest classical stage in Europe—is now open after 23 years. The city's fountains are being rebuilt, its holy places restored, its palazzi reopened. A reform leader, Leoluca Orlando, was elected Mayor.

The citizens of Palermo proved something, and the world is taking note: the struggle against crime need not take generations, or the imposition of a police state. It is most effectively waged when citizens themselves understand the issues, stand up, expose abuses, and make the institutions of democracy work.



CIVITAS INTERNATIONAL

Democracy takes more than electoral processes, more than institutions such as parliaments and courts. Democracy requires citizens: members of society who exercise their rights and accept their responsibilities. Good citizens have clear values, adequate knowledge, and practical skills.

The schools can be laboratories of democratic citizenship. But in many established democracies, schools have neglected this responsibility. In many of the new democracies, schools have yet to take it up.

CIVITAS International is a global network of civic educators and their supporters that works to strengthen the contribution schools make to the culture of democracy, and to encourage national governments and international organizations to provide adequate resources for this task.

CIVITAS International is based in Strasbourg, France, and has affiliated projects and organizations in more than 50 countries.

THE CIVITAS PALERMO WORLD CONGRESS

This Congress, June 18-22, 1999, will involve hundreds of educators and civic leaders from around the world. Participants will hear distinguished speakers from politics, business, law enforcement, intellectual life and the arts. Workshops will be held to demonstrate new strategies to encourage civic engagement, and new techniques and materials for civic education. Members of CIVITAS International will discuss the Education for Democracy Advocacy Campaign planned for the coming year, and will vote for CIVITAS officers and members of their steering committee.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON CIVITAS
INTERNATIONAL OR THE
CIVITAS PALERMO WORLD
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City of Palermo, Italy
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Education



BUILDING CIVIC RESISTANCE TO CRIME

CIVITAS International invites civic educators and their supporters from around the world to Palermo from June 18 to 22 for its Second International Congress. Join us to celebrate the example of the Palermo citizens' movement, and to study the role of educators and civil society in strengthening a culture of democracy and lawfulness.



A CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY... A CULTURE OF LAWFULNESS



NEW THREATS TO FREEDOM

The wave of democracy and economic dynamism that swept in at the close of our century is today being slowed and sometimes driven back by undercurrents of crime and corruption.

Around the world, precious ground won from dictatorship and poverty is being lost again — this time to killers, thieves, drug peddlers, bribe-takers and embezzlers.

Law enforcement institutions have been unable by themselves to resist these powerful forces of lawlessness and greed.

NEW WAYS TO FIGHT BACK

But during the past decade, Italy's "Clean Hands" movement — leaders of civil society, educators, journalists, religious figures, women's groups and progressive law enforcement officials — have joined to mobilize citizens in a courageous fight against their country's crime and corruption. And they have been winning.

In Palermo, Sicily — a city synonymous with the word "Mafia" — students and educators helped lead their communities in a campaign against evils that were strangling democracy and progress.

The story of Palermo is one of remarkable courage and civic imagination that has not been widely told. But it is a story that can inspire people all over the world.