

**Address by Gianni Vaggi at the Graduation Ceremony of the
first cohort of graduates from the
MICAD-Master International Cooperation and Development-program
Bethlehem University
27 October 2007**

Your Excellency the Minister of the Economy Hassouneh, your Excellency Archbishop Twal, Vice Chancellor Brother Daniel, colleagues and friends of Bethlehem University, students I bring to you the warmest congratulations on this remarkable achievement of the Rector of the University of Pavia, Professor Angiolino Stella. As you know the University of Pavia has generated a second prestigious academic institution, the University Institute of Advanced Study-IUSS, among whose activities there is the Master in Cooperation and Development, which has been active since 1997 and which has offered its expertise to MICAD. The Director of IUSS, Professor Roberto Schmid, who has been here at Bethlehem in 2005, joins Rector Stella in wishing MICAD and BU a successful continuation of its academic activities in the very difficult conditions they operate.

Dear colleagues of BU I can assure that both the University of Pavia and IUSS -and I should say all the European academic community- are fully aware of the extremely difficult conditions in which Palestinian universities operate. The incredible difficulties lasting now since 2001 would have been dramatic for any higher education institution in any high income economy. It goes to the credit of Palestinian universities and of BU that they are still capable of working along their regular program and even to start new ones. The University of Pavia and IUSS are aware that they also benefit from the collaboration with BU and Palestinian higher education institutions; in terms of exchange of students and staff and in terms of internships. This collaboration greatly enriches our academic institutions. But I also have to recall here that apart from the sister program in Pavia MICAD has another sister across the Atlantic in Cartagena de Indias in Colombia there is the Latin American School in International Cooperation and Development, which is running a master program similar to MICAD since 2003; thus MICAD is part of a Cooperation and Development Network.

Monsignor Piergiuseppe Vacchelli Chairman of the Committee for the support of Third World Countries of the Italian Bishops' Conference, CEI, cannot be with us today, but will visit BU next January, but he asked me to present to all of you the deepest appreciation for the work that BU is doing with MICAD. A most relevant task in favour to the people of Palestine, of her youth in particular and indeed in favour of not only of human development, but also of dialogue and peace.

Let me now add some personal recollections of this MICAD experience. In her address on behalf of the students Lubna Iskandar mentioned how MICAD helped her to realise the dream of attending an international master program. Dear Lubna I guess I should say that back in winter 1999, back in spring 2000, many of us had a dream. It was a dream by a group of Palestinian and European universities which being part of the PEACE Program-Palestinian European Academic Cooperation in Education- though of offering to the Palestinian students three coordinated master programs in the field of international relations. I recall the first meetings we had at the Ministry of Higher Education in Ramallah, where I met Dr. Fadi Kattan, the man to whom most of us owe MICAD. Birzeit and An-Najah were part of the initiative under the guidance of the ministry and of PEACE.

But then came the second *intifada*, and the re-occupation; the years 2001 and 2002 saw increasing difficulties; the dream was fading away, it was at risk of becoming pure fantasy. It was thanks to the CEI and to VIS but in particular to the determination of the BU that it was possible to re-start part of the program. Thus the view of MICAD took form, important European universities joined their efforts, Radboud University at Nijmegen, University College Dublin, together with Pavia and IUSS;

these universities received support from the Tempus-Meda program of the European Commission. Thanks to EU, CEI, VIS and the Italian Cooperation, through the Ministry of the University and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs MICAD opened in 2005. This achievement is first of all to the benefit of Palestinian students and young people, both Christian and Muslims, in the hope that they will be able to come to Bethlehem from all over Palestine, but also that other academic institutions will be able to collaborate and take benefit from MICAD experience.

Therefore Lubna and students this first cohort is the result of your own efforts and dreams, but you are also the offsprings of the dream of older people like many of us on this stage today, and of several institutions, first of all BU. This might probably put a bit more of a burden on your shoulders as the first MICAD graduates, because MICAD is the outcome of a sincere and deep international cooperation of many different institutions: NGOs, Universities, Religious realities, the EU, Governments, the PEACE Program. However his burden will be 'light weight': all these institutions, will be with you; their success in cooperating notwithstanding all the difficulties shows that international cooperation can be effective; you are that dream which has come through.

A final point; the success of MICAD owes enormously to its Director Dr. Fadi Kattan, to its Coordinator Andrea Merli a student of the master program in Pavia who came here for his internship four years ago, and to all the BU professors and staff. Dear colleagues it is an honour to be in the staff of MICAD and of BU; dear students it has been a pleasure to be your teacher. But I feel I have to conclude by remembering two colleagues and friends who have been working as members of the Scientific Committee of MICAD. Manuel Hassasian formerly President of the PEACE Program and Acting Academic Vice President of BU, now Ambassador to London for the Palestinian National Authority and Brother Fergus McArdle now in Dublin. We owe to them too if our common dream has come through.