

## Interfaith teens from Israel and local players in Football for Peace tournament

Giorgio Gasperoni

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San Marino, San Marino—An interfaith group of teenage girls from Israel joined local players in a Football for Peace tournament.

The tournament, which was held from August 28 to 31, 2019, was the fifth edition of the tournament and the fourth consecutive one to take place in San Marino.

The 15 girls from Israel represented different faith traditions: Judaism, Islam and the Druze faith. But they were united by a passion for football.

Together with their teachers the girls visited the Parliament of San Marino. There they were greeted by the two heads of state of San Marino, Nicola Selva and Michele Muratori, who told them, "It is with the spirit of sharing a peaceful coexistence between men and peoples that we welcome this initiative, proud of being able to contribute to it."

San Marino Secretary of State Marco Podeschi called the football tournament "an important initiative in the name of interreligious dialogue" and said, "The aim of the project is to convey a message of peace and integration through sport."

This year, two representatives of UPF-Italy, President Carlo Zonato and Secretary General Franco Ravaglioli, were present in this hall. Also present were observers from Serbia, to assess whether the project can be carried out in the Balkan region, and from Italy the president of the Italian Association of Football Coaches Nonprofit, Marcello Mancini.

A representative of the Italian Evangelical Churches, Dora Bognandi, also joined the event.

Giorgio Gasperoni, the president of UPF of San Marino, said: "It is the fourth consecutive year that, through the commitment of the San Marino Federation of Football, this project has been able to develop and grow. The contribution of the federation has been and is fundamental."

“For a project like this, a neutral and welcoming place is essential for all parties involved. San Marino has played this role to the fullest,” Mr. Gasperoni said. “I would like to remind you that what San Marino has done and is doing in supporting this project is truly great!”



Mr. Gasperoni explained that the Football for Peace initiative rests on two pillars: schools and families. More than any other body, he said, these institutions can promote a culture of peace by creating integration between different cultures, ethnic groups and religions.

He pointed out that a headmaster and three teachers had come from Israel with the girls, representing the three faiths of Judaism, Islam and Druze.

Mr. Gasperoni recalled visiting an Arab school headmaster in Israel two years ago, a few months after a Football for Peace tournament. The headmaster told him, “We showed the video to the thousand students of our school, and the spirit, at the end, was really changed.”

Thanks, San Marino.