

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament, allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude for the great honour and responsibility involved in the task of presiding over the work of this House. I should like, first of all, on behalf of the entire House, to salute with respect and gratitude the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, who is a scrupulous guardian of the unity of this country and of the values of our republican Constitution.

I should also like to convey my greeting to the President of the Constitutional Court and the President of the Council of Ministers. To all you here, especially the youngest members of this House and those sitting here for the first time, I wish the very best in your work.

At this difficult moment for our country, I am sure that, together, we shall be able to accomplish our extraordinary task of embodying, to the best of our ability, the institutions of the Republic. I take this opportunity to acknowledge my predecessor, Mr Gianfranco Fini, who carried out his institutional duties with a high sense of responsibility.

I take up this office after having spent many years defending and representing the rights of the least and the weakest, both in Italy and in the farthest reaches of the world. That experience shall constantly inform my action, and as of today I shall be putting it at the service of this House. And I shall ensure that this institution is a place of citizenship for those whose needs are greatest.

My thoughts go out to those who have lost confidence and hope. We must all work together to restore full dignity to each and every right. We must take up battle against poverty, not against the poor. This is the Chamber in which the universal rights of our Constitution, the finest in the world, were written. The accountability of this institution will also be measured against its capacity to represent and guarantee each and every one of those enshrined rights. This House must learn to listen to the social suffering of a generation that has become lost, trapped in existential precariousness and forced to take its talents outside Italy.

We must also address the humiliation of the women who suffer violence disguised as love. From the very first day we entrust this task to political action and to Parliament. We must be close to those who have fallen and cannot find the strength or help to raise themselves up again, and to the many detainees now living in inhumane and degrading conditions, as officially denounced by the European Court of Human Rights of Strasbourg.

We must shape policies for those who have lost their jobs or never found employment, for those who now risk losing their last redundancy fund benefits, for the income-deprived retirees, whom we have not forgotten. We must shape policies for the entrepreneurs, who are essential to the Italian economy but are now being crushed by the weight of the crisis, just as we must help the victims of the earthquake and those who every day suffer the effects of our failure to protect the environment. We must endeavour to restore faith among pensioners who have spent their life working, but now cannot make ends meet.

We must learn to see the world through the open eyes of those arriving from faraway places, with the intensity and astonishment of children, and with the unexplored inner richness of the disabled.

These rights were written in Parliament, but they were built outside these walls when Italy and Italians were liberated from fascism.

Let us recall the sacrifice of those who died for the institutions of state and for our democracy. In this spirit, we join all those who are commemorating today in Florence, along with Luigi Ciotti, all the people murdered by the Mafia. Each one of us and Italy as a whole owe much to their sacrifice. We all owe a great deal, a very great deal, to the sacrifice of Aldo Moro and the men of his security escort whom we remember with emotion on this day, the anniversary of their murder.

This is a Parliament that has been considerably renewed. Let us make no delay in according full dignity to our institution so that it may reclaim the central importance and responsibility that properly belongs to it. Let us make this Chamber of Deputies home to good politics, let us make Parliament and our work transparent, let us show restraint and sobriety to the Italian people.

I will be the President of everyone, including those who did not vote for me. I will strive to ensure that I serve as a guarantor for each of you, and for the country as a whole.

Italy is one of the founding members of the process of European integration. We must commit ourselves to making Italian citizens feel they have a stake in this challenge and are participants in a project to restore the original and far-sighted vision and mission of Altiero Spinelli. Let us work to ensure that Europe once again becomes a great dream, a crossroads of peoples and cultures, a permanent anchor for human rights, a place of freedom, brotherhood and peace.

Spiritual and religious leaders are also urging us on, and it is a source of joy for us to be able to acknowledge the gestures and words of the new Pope who, symbolically, comes from the edge of the world. We send our hope-filled greetings to Pope Francis.

I wish also to acknowledge the international institutions, associations and agencies of the United Nations in which I worked for 24 years and, if you will allow me, as until today this has been my life's commitment, I should like to spend a moment to recall the many, the far too many, nameless dead in our Mediterranean Sea. A Sea that must, rather, become a bridge to other places, cultures and religions.

I heed the authoritative appeal of the President of the Republic for unity. It is an appeal that this House is called upon to embrace in full and with conviction. Politics must once again become a source of hope, a service and a passion.

We are embarking upon a journey that begins today. With the help of every one of you, I shall seek, with care and humility, to bring into being the change that all Italians, especially our children, are demanding of the political world. Thank you.