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THE GENFEST: For 45 years a worldwide appointment for Focolare Youth

What is the Genfest?

As the name implies, the Genfest is a festival for youth, the new "**GEN-eration**" that looks ahead while contributing towards a better future for the whole world.

"Beyond all borders" is the title of the 2018 edition of Genfest, which will take place in Manila; it is the first time that this event is taking place outside Europe. Since this event was started 45 years ago, its frequency has been variable, but it has always attracted tens of thousands of young people from all over the world, while millions follow it via satellite or internet. The Genfest participants are youth, **aged 18 to 30 years**, that come from different nations, ethnic groups, cultures, convictions and religious beliefs, but they have a common dream that has become their programme: **they want to build a united world**. During these 45 years, this goal has been passed on from generation to generation and they have contributed towards it while facing history and the drama and needs of their peoples.

Does it still make sense to talk about a united world today?

Youth for a United World, the promoters of the Genfest, claim: "Instinctively, we may conclude that we have never been so far away from unity between individuals, peoples or cultures, as we are today. Fragmentation that flourishes a bit everywhere through exasperated forms of nationalism, tells us one thing: we live in a world delimited by walls. Yet, we need to be aware of the fact that for the first time in history our different peoples have the tools they require to be able to look, speak and influence. Human mobility with its tragic contradictions and technology compel peoples and diversities to interact. And here lies the challenge we would like to grasp and propose to everyone: **let us make the diversities of knots become strengths. We do not believe in clashes between civilizations; on the contrary we work so that individuals and peoples may look at one another in the face, recognize each other's values, create a network between them without renouncing to their own identity**".

United, but how?

United in the multiform variety of peoples that inhabit our planet, each with its own traditions and sensibilities.

United in the peaceful and hardworking coexistence of different religions, and of political ideals with different inspirations.

United in the respect for diversity.

United in solidarity, without barriers, walls or borders, but builders of bridges that favour encounter, reception and alliance, so that we can walk along the path of dialogue and participation.

Instruments: mutual love and dialogue

The Genfest aims at being a testing ground, a laboratory where, even though for a few days, one can try a model of coexistence that can be repeated in one's personal life, in the family, at school, at work and also in broader structures of society.

It is mutual love that leads to brotherhood, the "law" that inspires and directs each person's behaviour towards unity. And the so-called "Golden Rule" (Do to others what you want others to do unto you) is the common ground on which the encounter between diverse sensibilities can be achieved.

History

The Genfest originated from an intuition of Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, that is present in almost 200 countries worldwide and with more than two million followers who share in its life and work. The first Genfest was held in **1973**, at the international Centre of Loppiano, near Florence. The 8 thousand young people present came from all over Europe, and they were already an expression of different ethnicities, cultures and religions. Its title was: "**Man-world beyond all barriers**".

— **1975** – "**Unity is possible**" was the theme of the second edition held at the Palaeur in Rome. 20,000 young people participated, and it was the first time that they came from all the five continents. When Pope Paul VI welcomed the participants, he exclaimed: "A new world is born!"

1980 – In the midst of the cold war, 40,000 young people gathered at the Flaminio Stadium in Rome; they set their goal: "**For a United World**".

1985 – The 4th Genfest, held at the Palaeur in Rome, was marked a very significant moment: The Youth for a United World Movement was born. This Movement is animated by the "Gen", the young members of the Focolari. The title of this Genfest was "**Many ways towards a united world**". Thousands of young people, from America to Australia, followed the event through a telephone link-up.

1987 - 120,000 youth in 40 countries in the five continents took part in national Genfests to see about the "disunity in their respective countries and start concrete and targeted actions".

1990 – "**A United World – an ideal that makes history**": the collapse of the walls between East and West seemed to accelerate the times. After the fall of the Berlin wall, young people from Eastern Europe could at last be present for the Genfest held at the Palaeur. They were welcomed by the one who contributed so much to this fall: John Paul II. The event was transmitted to every corner of the earth through a video link-up, via satellite.

1993 – 130,000 young people participated in 56 national Genfest that aimed at unity of peoples.

— **1995** – The Genfest was once more held at Palaeur and its title was "**Let's show a united world**". The strong media coverage conveyed the Genfest message to millions of people via 4 satellite stations, more than 400 national television stations, and the live internet. The initiative known as "United World Week" kicked off.

2000 - Flaminio Stadium. The Genfest was an event of the World Youth Day in Rome.

2012 – The 10th edition of the Genfest, the first one outside Italy was held in Budapest, the capital city of Hungary. In city characterized by so many bridges, the theme "**Let's Bridge**" was chosen to promote the importance of building bridges between people of different cultures and nationalities.

2018 – The 11th edition of the Genfest, with the theme "**Beyond all Borders**", takes place at the World Trade Centre in Manila, the Philippines. It is the first time that this event is being held outside Europe.