

Cécile Kyenge Has a Dream

Giulia Madron (September 12, 2013)



On the eve of the 12th anniversary of 9/11, Cécile Kyenge, Italy’s Minister for Integration, arrived at the Italian Consulate of New York, and talked to the Italian Community about the program she intends to follow during her mandate.

Her trip was an odyssey but she made it! After three hours of flight delay, finally Cécile Kyenge, Italy’s Minister for Integration, arrived at the [Italian Consulate of New York](#) [2], on the eve of the 12th anniversary of 9/11. Warmly received by the Consul General Natalia Quintavalle and various exponents of New York’s Italian and Italian-American community, Kyenge explained briefly the program she intends to follow during her mandate.

As the first African-Italian Minister, Dr. Kyenge (she is indeed a medical doctor, an ophthalmologist) is very interested to meet the Italian community abroad—broadly made of people who, for one reason or another and under different circumstances, have emigrated or are descendants of emigrants. Indeed, one of the objectives she intends to pursue during her mandate is “to create a



network” of connections in Italy and abroad in order “to meet each other and enrich ourselves.” That is why, continues Kyenge, “I’d like talking about interaction rather than integration. It’s about meeting other cultures.”

After this brief introduction, Minister Kyenge illustrated the different goals of her Ministry. “The first one concerns the International Adoption Commission,” she said. Italy is the second country in the world when it comes to adopting children. We want to reinforce the Commission and help it to better meet the needs of the families in juridical and economic terms.” From the point of view of her Ministry the integration of adopted children is very important—not only inside the family but also outside: at school and in the society at large. Family, school and education are in fact “essential factors that can facilitate integration.”

The second goal of her Ministry is “the dialogue between different religions as a means of integration.” With the crisis that Italy is suffering, explains Kyenge, many people are falling apart and there are more and more poor families. The different communities with the help of state institutions have to act locally and come together in order to find new answers and try to redress the situation. Since many local communities today in Italy are made of immigrants, the inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue is pivotal to create the necessary networks of solidarity and mutual assistance.

“The third goal regards an important emergency in Italy,” said the Minister, “that of the children who immigrate into our Country without parents. Taking care of them is the responsibility of Regional governments. Fortunately, there are also many organizations that welcome these children and help providing them with the right upbringing and education”.

In addition to this important theme, Kyenge threw light on the Romanian community in Italy and in Europe, highlighting the importance of their integration in schools, workplaces, and the health system, something that she will discuss later on this month in a meeting with regional officials.

Italy’s Integration Minister concluded her speech with one goal she considers very important: the fight against racism, xenophobia and many different types of discrimination. “I am not telling you anything new if I say that episodes of racism have increased, also after my election,” she said outlining her program on this subject. Originally from Congo, Kyenge came to Italy to study medicine and decided to stay in the country, eventually becoming an Italian citizen. “We are trying to facilitate the process. Italy is dealing with a lot of changes. There are more than 5 millions immigrants and now many of them, like me, already have Italian citizenship.” And again, she continued, “despite all the provocations and insults I received, we must look towards the future and promote cultural change. For this reason I must thank Prime Minister Enrico Letta, who accelerated the development of our three-year plan against racism and towards integration.”

Interestingly, Ms. Kyenge’s fight against racism also focuses on sport: “Sport must be a passion,” she underlined, “not the occasion for the explosion of violence. I chose sports, work, school, and communication as the means to fight all discriminations.”

Communication here is of particular importance of course, since a correct communication is essential to further greater integration and eliminate the stereotypes attached to different peoples.

“Differences,” concludes the Minister, “are not a weakness, but the main resource and strength of a country.”

Ms Kyenge ended her speech by saying that she will also work in order to help Italians who live abroad to regain Italian citizenship in most cases when they, for different reasons, lost it. In short, her speech was one entirely looking to the future, a future based on peaceful coexistence and equal opportunities for our young generations. And speaking about young generations, after her speech, Ms. Kyenge received as a gift the t-shirts from a group of young citizens who participated to Italy’s Youth Games organized by the [CONI \(Italian National Olympic Committee\)](#) [3] at the event with US representative Mico Delianova Licastro.

No wonder that the morning after, Cécile Kyenge attended the “Table of Silence” at the Lincoln Center of New York, the annual event in remembrance of the victims of September 11. Then, Italy’s Integration Minister went to the [United Nations](#) [4] to participate to a debate on the RtoP (Responsibility to Protect).



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