



World Organization of the Scout Movement
Organisation Mondiale du Mouvement Scout

1 April 2004: Dr. Missoni has just taken up his new responsibilities, and will provide a new interview in the near future. Meanwhile, he asked the World Scout Bureau to provide a translation of the following interview. Any quotation of this information should make it clear that this interview was conducted before he became Secretary General.

A few words with Eduardo Missoni, newly appointed Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement

**An interview published in *Avventura*, November 2003
a magazine of the
Association of Italian Catholic Guides and Scouts**

On 27th October 2003, Eduardo Missoni was named the new Secretary General of The World Organization of Scout Movement. He will assume the role on 1st April 2004, replacing the retiring Secretary General, Dr. Jacques Moreillon, who has held the position since 1988.

On 7th November we interviewed him in Milan, where he teaches Development Cooperation Management and Global Strategies for Health at the prestigious Bocconi University. We wanted to get to know him and ask him what future he sees for himself and World Scouting.

Q. On your web site it is possible to find a great deal of information about you, your professional and social life: you are 49, you are a medical doctor as well as a great expert in international cooperation and development; you have held important responsibilities in public administration, you are also a citizen who is very involved in political and social affairs... Now, tell us something about you and your experience in Scouting...

A. Like many others, my first experience of Scouting was when I joined a Scout group. In 1964, I was ten and every day I saw a child who would return home to my building from outings with the Scouts, wearing the uniform and the patrol pennant of his Scout troop. I became curious and asked him about it, and I then ended up joining his group, Rome 49. Soon after I moved to another district and joined a new group, Rome 24, founded a year before and it was in this group that I grew up and became a leader. I have remained in touch with this group, which will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year. The group has expanded and from it other groups have been born such as Rome 23 and Rome 25 - one of the groups in Rome that has successfully grown and developed.

What was your training and your involvement in the association?

In 1973, I was a young medical student. My experience as a leader began in this period when I became the leader of an explorer unit. I was a troop leader when AGESCI (Association of Italian Catholic Guides and Scouts) was founded, so I had first-hand experience

of its new programme, which was open to boys and girls. I was a Troop leader for four years, then I became a Rover Crew leader, which was a profound learning experience.

Later I formed a Rover Clan and lead it for three years until 1979. One of the main items of discussion with those young people was "What do we want to do when we are older?". Years later a few of these friends and I founded the community "Il Tetto" (The Roof), which today is very actively involved in foster care of children in difficulty, and issues facing marginalized youth.

Why did you decide to become an international volunteer and work in Nicaragua, a choice that would determine the path of your professional and humanitarian life?

Scouting has certainly played a part in my decision to become a medical doctor. At that time my troop leader was studying medicine and our group was named after Albert Schweitzer. I used to think of his experience as a doctor in Africa, and medicine seemed to me the only way to help people and do good. My experience as a volunteer doctor in developing countries allowed me to combine my pacifist beliefs as a conscientious objector, with my desire to become a doctor. I chose service and non-violence, which reflects my Scouting background.

What contact have you had with Scouting since 1979?

I left my Scout group in 1979 to go to Nicaragua as a volunteer. Since that time, I have never lost touch with Scouting, especially through my friends and the people working at "Il Tetto". However, since the beginning of the early 80's I wasn't actively involved in Scouting any more. Of course, Scouting has always influenced my life and my choices, even when I stopped wearing my scarf.

How did you come to be chosen for as Secretary General of WOSM?

For 16 years I worked for the Italian government's health, development and cooperation programmes in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, up until 2002 when I

resigned. At the end of 2002, Bocconi University invited me to work for them and I began to teach and to lead some very interesting projects. The idea to become Secretary General of WOSM arrived unexpectedly. I certainly had not planned it.

Early in July 2003 I received an email from the agency coordinating the worldwide search for candidates through the 81 countries in its network. I would have deleted the email if I hadn't seen the word 'Scout' in the subject. They had been given my name by UNICEF, with which I had collaborated for many years teaching their Development Education Programs throughout Italy.

At the beginning of September the agency informed me that I was in the top 150 candidates, then in the top 9; at this point, I began the selection process directly with WOSM. On 20th October I had an interview with the selection committee in Geneva. I had to talk about my professional experience, to answer their questions and explain my project on the involvement of young people in the decision making process and the formation of democratic leadership. Later I discovered that it was one of the strategic priorities adopted by the World Scout Conference. Of course, the selection process was conducted very professionally, as is understandable given the importance and the responsibility of WOSM.

You have really changed direction, returning to Scouting again after all these years...

Yes, of course. However, I have learned to interpret and accept these unexpected changes in my life as 'signs'. Therefore, this nomination is certainly an important challenge and a real change of direction for me. It is, above all, a sign of God in my life. Moreover, I recognise the similarity between my work in education last year and my current position: now I feel my vocation has led me to work with a new generation, to stimulate democratic participation, a greater awareness of society and active citizenship.

What are the tasks of the Secretary General of WOSM?

Essentially, there are two. The first one is representative and diplomatic. I will be an ambassador and promoter of the Scout Movement to world leaders. Secondly, I will be the manager of the World Scout Bureau that supports the Movement, through six regions with staff in a dozen countries. Fundraising is very much part of this job.

World Scouting differs from country to country. For example, Italian Scouting has a specifically educational basis. Scouting in Anglophone countries, especially in the United States, seems to be educational, but with more of a recreational image. What is the relationship between the different approaches?

It is true, Scouting does vary from country to country. I believe that more experience, and the culture of education and social action which is typical of Italian Scouting, will constitute an added value in my new job, especially when I'm working alongside different types of Scouting. For this reason, my background in

AGESCI, a confessional association, could be considered by some to be an obstacle. However spiritual education is a profound and fundamental aspect of Scouting, and it requires a respect for all beliefs.

What are the challenges for the future of World Scouting?

Scouting has great potential to take action in society. We must highlight the concept of "leaving the world a little better than you found it". This means I have some goals regarding the affirmation of human rights, the attainment of social justice, democratic participation, and the humanization of globalization.

In this sense I believe that Scouting has a winning characteristic that some people call "glo-cal" (synchronization of global and local): it integrates into all local communities and social networks, and also manages at the same time to belong to the global dimension of the greatest world youth movement.

Besides the local social action, Scouting should affirm its own role in the construction of sound relationships between the North and the South of the world, between different cultures and also involving non-Scout youth. In addition, it can play an extraordinary role in society, such as in Africa, where it can promote local development and contribute in the war against AIDS.

So Scouting is going to play a very "political" role...

Scouting is an educational movement, but the choice of the education is not a neutral choice, separated from social reality. We aim to educate our girls and our boys, until they reach adulthood, to be citizens of the world, and therefore we have to help them to deal with the law and political life. After all, the values of the Scout Law are not neutral at all!

Today our children want to take an active part in the global problems of society. A Scout, through his or her global movement, should be able to make a better world more easily than through a non-global group.

That is why our characteristics, such as non-violence, a respect for nature, dialogue among cultures, must be cultivated and put forward with courage. At world level, Scouting in countries at war, for example, will have to tackle the problem of compatibility between being "a friend to everybody and a brother to every other Scout and Guide" and the conflict between their countries.

If we consider that more than 300 million Promises have been made worldwide, we should then wonder how many of those promises have been kept faithfully and renewed year by year. It is not enough to make the Promise. I believe that what makes the difference is leading your life according to the Promise. In this sense, all leaders and Scouts, who have chosen to make this Promise, have an enormous responsibility to promote change.

Are you optimistic about the future of Scouting?

The young people with whom we work are like fertile ground. Let us sow this ground and we will reap the benefits.