

## Massimo Cacciari

Mayor of Venice



The Master's Programme on Human Rights has already reached a level of excellence among the didactic, cultural, and scientific activities of the City of Venice. It is with great satisfaction that I have followed its progress over these past years. In the name of the City of Venice, I fervently hope and wish that this progress continue with the full support of the Parliamentary Commission, as well as that of all the European institutions.

If the theme of Human Rights was already central at the beginning of the Master's Programme, now it has become truly necessary. After the Balkan wars, September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the wars in Afghanistan and Irak, it is evident to everyone that an authentic politics of peace can only be founded upon the meaning and the value of Human Rights, if there is agreement among all states, and above all, among all the cultural and religious traditions. This is a great problem and a far from simple task.

It is in fact clear that the theme of Human Rights has a precise historical-political genesis: it represents without a doubt one of the highest expressions of the Western humanist tradition. Therefore, how may we effectively harmonize the theme of Human Rights within other traditions, languages, and cultures? There is no doubt that even in these we can find proof of these rights, but always or often in very different terms and contexts from those that have led to its affirmations in the West! This indicates the need for an inter-cultural work of communication and of reciprocal comprehension which will require our best intellectual energies over the next decades. Intellectual energies which will continue to evolve thanks to this Master's Programme.

The second order of problems is with regards to the actual establishment of Human Rights. If we do not want them to be simply a vain declaration, it is necessary to reinforce those international organisations that can produce sanctions without any prejudice and with transparent impartiality. It is evident that we are a long way from such a situation. It is evident that the effectiveness of Human Rights becomes evanescent to the point of disappearing before the "Great Powers" and this produces an effect of bitter disillusion upon the weakest. We must not permit that Human Rights find application only with regard to those who have already been conquered by force of political arms, or, even more often, by force of war.

The students and teachers of the Master's Programme work within this perspective. The City of Venice has been working for years towards this end. Our collaboration was born from this, and we must reinforce it more and more.

-----