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dei Caduti

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The Voice of Maria Dolens

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Monthly newsletter from the Peace Bell Foundation

Centenary of the Bell

Mattarella at the Bell

On 19 July, the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, visited the Colle di Miravalle to take part in the centenary celebrations of Maria Dolens. His speech can be found below, followed by the welcome given to the Head of State by the President of the Foundation, Marco Marsilli, and excerpts from the speech by the Mayor of Rovereto, Giulia Robol.

I would like to greet everyone present, beginning with the President of the Province of Trento. I am especially grateful to the Mayor of Rovereto and the President of the Foundation for their welcome and for the invitation. This invitation had been extended to me several times by the unforgettable Alberto Robol.

Standing here on the Colle di Miravalle, beside Maria Dolens, my thoughts turn immediately to the remarkable vision of Don Antonio Rossaro. He was inspired to create a sound that would speak of peace and unity, from weapons that had taken lives on many of Europe's frontlines.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, MARCO MARSILLI, TO THE
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, SERGIO MATTARELLA

An extraordinary source of inspiration

Mr President,
On behalf of the Council of Regency, the staff of the Campana dei Caduti Foundation and myself, I would like to offer you and the distinguished delegation accompanying you our warmest welcome to the Colle di Miravalle, on a day that will remain long in our collective memory.

In truth, as has already been mentioned, “welcome” may not be the most accurate word. “Welcome back” is more fitting, as we are fully aware of your previous, much-appreciated visits to this place of reflection.

We are especially proud to welcome you again, this time as the highest authority of the Republic, and in the context of the joint centenary celebrations of Maria Dolens and Rovereto as City of Peace.

Today marks the most significant and solemn moment of our commemorations. I would also like to extend a warm greeting to the President of the Au-

tonomous Province of Trento, to the Mayor of Rovereto – a city we feel deeply connected to – to the many civil, military and religious authorities present, and to everyone who has joined us in sharing this extraordinary occasion.

Just a few moments ago, you had the opportunity to visit the exhibition *The Myth of Maria Dolens*, which offers an overview of the Campana dei Caduti and the work of the Foundation that bears its name. Since the beginning, two key “souls” have lived side by side within this institution. By working in close interaction, they have strengthened one another. One is rooted in the local identity of Trentino. The other reflects an outward-looking international spirit, which I would now like to briefly highlight.

Exactly one hundred years ago, as is well known, Don Antonio Rossaro had the visionary idea of transforming the weapons that had brought death and



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destruction to Europe during the First World War into instruments of peace. These were melted down to forge the original Bell. Since then, every evening at dusk, Maria Dolens has sounded one hundred solemn tolls – which we will soon hear – in memory of all the fallen and all victims of war, without distinction of nation, faith, religion or ethnicity.

Over the years, the desire to build partnerships with a wide range of countries has led us to welcome 106 flags to our headquarters, most of them representing states or multilateral organisations. Among them, the Council of Europe and the United Nations have granted the Foundation formal recognition. There are also flags representing unrecognised territories (such as Palestine and Tibet), ethnic groups that have endured severe discrimination (such as the Sinti and Roma), and leading humanitarian organisations (such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent).

Mr President, as I move towards the conclusion of my remarks, I would like to underline how much, in our dealings with the wider world, it means to be able to draw on your wisdom as a point of reference. At a time that is arguably



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The President of the Autonomous Province of Trento, Maurizio Fugatti, in conversation with the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella.



the most complex and challenging since the Second World War, your leadership has been an extraordinary source of inspiration.

Through the powerful presence of Maria Dolens, the message that continues to be sent daily from the Colle di Miravalle is a clear and responsible appeal for a future shaped by peace, justice, democracy and freedom.

This message resonates not only in Europe, with which we feel a close affinity and where shared values are often easier to recognise, but across the entire international community.

For your guidance and for your tireless commitment to showing us, at every moment and on every occasion, the right path to follow, please accept, Mr President, our most sincere and heartfelt thanks.



A WELCOME FROM THE MAYOR OF ROVERETO, GIULIA ROBOL, TO
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, SERGIO MATTARELLA

A city that embraces hospitality

Mr President of the Republic, the Honourable Sergio Mattarella,

It is with immense honour and deep emotion that I welcome you today on behalf of the entire community of Rovereto and Trentino, on behalf of all the authorities, and of every citizen.

Your presence here at the Colle di Miravalle is not simply a courteous visit, but the highest and most prestigious institutional recognition. It reaffirms the value and significance that Maria Dolens holds as part of our international heritage and as a symbol of peace.

This occasion, Mr President, is a source of great pride for our city and for our region. It strengthens what we consider our most deeply held and widely recognised identity: that of being a City of Peace. This title is not merely honorary but is enshrined in national Law No. 103 of 2006. It is a responsibility we work to fulfil each day by respecting human rights, promoting solidarity, supporting volunteering and encouraging international cooperation.

This year is a special year. Maria Dolens is celebrating its centenary: one hundred years, one hundred tolls that echo into the evening air, carrying a message of unity through sound cast in bronze. As the inscription conceived by Don Antonio Rossaro reminds us: *dum aere jungo populos*. (...)

The history of Rovereto and Trentino was profoundly shaped by the Great War. Our land was a brutal frontline, a border region marked by devastation and unspeakable suffering. Our cities and valleys were destroyed, our people scattered and forced to evacuate. The last century saw countless local and global conflicts, radical upheavals, the fall of empires, shifting borders, persecution, torture and the extermination of entire communities.

The sleep of reason produces monsters, Mr President, but from those ruins and from that pain, our region rose again with extraordinary strength and resilience.





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The end of war marked the beginning of a new path. Through a long and difficult process of reconciliation, scars were transformed into a living example of peaceful coexistence. This land became a place of special autonomy and a champion of peace. It was the fruit of a far-sighted, profoundly European vision, shaped by founding figures such as our own President Alcide De Gasperi. He and others paved the way for a united Europe, a true bulwark of peace and democracy, where borders no longer divide but connect. That vision has made our region a place of dialogue and peaceful development.

Yet the global situation today is deeply uncertain and changing rapidly. We are witnessing violent conflict and growing instability in many parts of the world. War is no longer far away. It is inside Europe, it is in the Middle East, and the violence continues to escalate. (...)



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The message of Maria Dolens is therefore more relevant and more necessary than ever. Every evening, its one hundred tolls ring out over the city and speak to the world. They commemorate the victims of all wars, warn against hatred, and call each of us to take individual and collective responsibility for building a future of peace. Maria Dolens tolls for everyone, with no exceptions. It does not judge or decide. It tolls to remind us of the spirit of life. It speaks to the heart of men and women with a deeply human emotion.

The Bell of Peace, Mr President, together with the War Museum (MITAG) and the Ossuary of Castel Dante, are powerful symbols of our culture of peace and remembrance. Rovereto has taken on a leading role in turning what began as a commemorative project into a civic and cultural mission. Here, borders are not barriers. Diversity is seen as a source of richness and learning. Our European home is built on inclusion, freedom and a shared vision for the future. Through our daily actions, in our social engagement, in education, volunteering and sport, we work to nurture a spirit of welcome that is rooted in justice and human dignity. (...)

Thank you, Mr President, for choosing to be with us on this deeply meaningful day. Your presence is a great honour. It gives us renewed courage and confirms that the path we are on, though challenging, is the right one. It is the only path that can leave a lasting mark and offer hope to future generations. May the sound of Maria Dolens continue to be a voice – a lasting call to fraternity among peoples, a message that rings out from Rovereto to the entire world.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF A HISTORIC EVENT

As required by protocol

Inviting the President of the Italian Republic to an event is always a captivating prospect. It's the kind of dream people talk about without really knowing what it would mean if it ever came true. And in most cases, it doesn't. Everything begins with a letter to the Quirinale. Months pass. People stop thinking about it, or at least stop mentioning it. There is no room for assumptions, and it's pointless to speculate. But then, sometimes, a brief yet invaluable message arrives: the event is confirmed. That is when you begin to grasp the scale of it all and become familiar with a phrase that starts to appear everywhere: "as required by protocol."

At events like this, what is visible from the outside is only a fraction of what is actually happening. Everything in front of the cameras unfolds with apparent ease. Behind the scenes, however, things are far more tense, governed by strict rules that must be followed to the letter.

On the day the Campana dei Caduti had the honour of hosting President Sergio Mattarella, the Colle di Miravalle filled with professionals in dark suits. Clear and precise in all communication, they are used to saying things once and saying them with a firm politeness that leaves no room for negotiation. Sometimes they admit that what they are about to say may sound obvious, but they

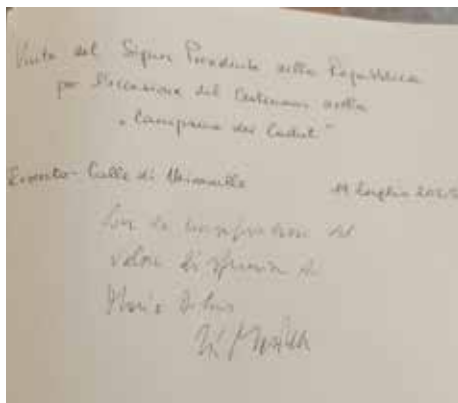


The President signs the Visitors' Book

are keen to avoid any doubt. "No one may walk in front of the President," they remind you, "and no one may approach the Head of State." They say it with a smile, and that is enough.

A few hours before the ceremony, the Viale delle Bandiere opens — the only entrance available to the public. Meanwhile, the venue interiors are manned by people with discreet earpieces. Even if you cannot see them, you always have the sense that someone is watching. Outside, there is constant movement. Hundreds of people have booked their place on the Colle di Miravalle through the Foundation's website, submitting all the necessary documents. They have queued for shuttle buses from the city centre and endured sweltering heat. But there is one more step. Everyone has to stretch out their arms and pass through a metal detector. They do it all smiling, fully aware that they are participating in a historic event.





The page where President Mattarella wrote: "With full awareness of the hope represented by Maria Dolens."

Visitors are not expected to know the finer details of the procedure, and it is perfectly normal for someone to have scheduled a visit to the Foundation or the Centenary exhibition before the President's arrival. This is when a phrase we normally associate with crime dramas slips into reality: "the area has been secured." That is why access is no longer possible, even if some people are already inside. It's not a matter of good or bad; it's simply about avoiding risks. If you are in the restricted area, you may find yourself face-to-face with two tall guys in unmistakable uniforms. Everyone knows the Corazzieri are tall, but standing underneath them unexpectedly forces you to rethink the meaning of the word "height". They don't act superior, but stepping aside comes naturally.

Time passes slowly. Almost three hours have gone by since the first shuttle arrived at 7:45 am, yet the key moment still seems a long way off. The President is scheduled to arrive at 12:30 pm, although it could happen a little earlier or a little later. "Always allow 15 minutes either side" is another phrase that circulates among staff.

By now, half the open-air theatre overlooking the Bell is full. Everyone is wearing the commemo-

rative cap handed out on arrival, along with a bottle of water bearing an image of the Bell and the city's logo. The sun is beating down, and there is plenty of time to fill. Under Maria Dolens, the Minicoro di Rovereto and the Sant'Ilario Choir begin to take their places.

The children sing of peace, as they often do at Maria Dolens events, but this time feels different. They have been rehearsing the national anthem all week, even though they already knew it well. They will begin singing at exactly the right moment, without anyone announcing it. To keep the audience engaged, the younger children take turns with older singers who are just as enthusiastic. The repertoire includes songs about valleys, mountains, the soldiers who returned from war, and those who did not. It is a love letter to a land that gave so much to build a world where peace could be sung, and which has entrusted its children with the task of singing it.

A well-known journalist has come from Rome to host the event. Maria Concetta Mattei, a famil-

iar face on television, calmly explains the meaning of the day and guides the schedule. She is composed and professional, aware that there is still a long way to go. Suddenly, however, time begins to accelerate. What had been moving slowly is now unfolding quickly. The singing stops and is replaced by polite but firm announcements. "We kindly ask all guests to take their seats and ensure that mobile phones are switched off."

The President arrives. Local authorities greet him at the entrance. After the official photos, he steps into the Foundation atrium, where the President welcomes him with a selection of symbolic gifts, including a miniature of the Bell. A short video plays, condensing one hundred years of Maria Dolens into ninety seconds. Finished. Then it is time to visit *The Myth of the Bell – One Hundred Years of Maria Dolens*.

The curator, Chiara Moser, has just one minute to present the exhibition, but it is not enough. President Mattarella is curious. He wants to know the details.





He wants to know why these particular works were chosen, what they mean in the Bell's history. A few moments later, he signs the Visitors' Book, writing a brief but meaningful phrase: "With full awareness of the hope represented by Maria Dolens." And then it is time to move again. The final moment, almost private, is a walk along the Viale delle Bandiere. There are 106 flags, some representing recognised states and multilateral organisations, others representing unrecognised territories, persecuted eth-

nic groups or humanitarian organisations. There is no time to reflect on the moral commitment to the values promoted by the Foundation, as represented by the countries whose colours fly over the Colle di Miravalle. Nearly a thousand people are waiting to greet the President and show their admiration and affection. And there is no more time to write either. We have to get to the Bell before the President arrives. Once he is there, no one else will be allowed in. As required by protocol.







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On the occasion of Maria Dolens' centenary, that vision remains a particularly powerful point of reference.

Being here again is deeply meaningful, especially at this moment in international affairs, when shadows we thought had disappeared are once again emerging. This goes against the wishes, hopes and expectations of people across every continent and in every part of the world. There are those who wish to revive wars of territorial conquest, which we believed belonged to a darker chapter of history. There are those who seek to reassert the dominance of the strong over the weak, or who believe it acceptable to bomb civilians in their homes, even massacring young people simply gathered to celebrate and listen to music.

We are witnessing violence that no longer even targets opposing soldiers. Shots are fired, and lives taken, in places of worship, in areas where

water is distributed to the thirsty, or where bread is handed out to the hungry. Those who try to help the wounded are also being attacked.

All of this stands in stark contrast to humanity's shared expectations and risks fuelling a cycle of resentment, hatred and conflict, which in turn gives rise to further violence.

This is why returning to Maria Dolens is so important.

The current situation urges us to renew the message that first rang out from here one hundred years ago.

There is a longing for hope that runs through humanity, and it must prevail over what we are now witnessing, despite the sadness and concern it causes us.

The present moment is also one of confusion, not only in international relations but in the daily lives of many people.

For this reason, this return is more valuable than ever. The chimes of Maria Dolens are not only a renewed ex-

pression of sorrow in the face of today's tragedies. Above all, they send out a message of peace and hope, which we continue to believe in.



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