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COMUNICATO n. 1242 del 05/06/2016

Cities and their potential to answer the humanitarian crisis

The Institute for New Technology's lecture at the Trento Economics Festival featured Paul Romer, professor of economics at NYU's Stern School of Business. Romer was livestreamed to Trento to discuss the transformative role cities could play in turning the humanitarian crisis into an opportunity for development and growth.

Currently in the face of suffering, the world is at a standstill in responding to the crisis and is unable to determine the extent of its moral obligation. Romer compared the crisis to a battlefield, in which there are two key actions and actors; pragmatic, depicted by a medic, and idealistic, depicted by a chaplain.

The responses of the United States and Europe in this situation are either too pragmatic or too idealistic. The United States will not be able to continue its military operations and European democratic institutions will not allow for any more intake of asylum seekers. These pragmatic approaches need to complement their idealist goals. The answer, Romer proposes, lies in scaling down these operations and shifting the focus to the development of self-sufficient cities for refugees and asylum seekers.

Modeled after Hong Kong, these cities would allow safety and economic liberty for asylum seekers. Cities such as these, Romer proposes, could be constructed along the Libyan coast and Western Sahara. Their association with Europe and North America would ensure the zones as new areas of trade opportunity for the West. Romer suggests that with a law enforcement modeled after the West, these cities could eventually see a transition into democracy. Romer stressed the importance of this transition over the long term, as evidenced by recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, short term transitions to democratic elections have further destabilized regions. Over time, Romer proposes, these cities could develop to attract economic activity, create new jobs and infrastructure, and transfer into a democratic form of state.

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