

New York: An Example for Rome

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A “tour de force” in New York for Rome’s mayor, Gianni Alemanno. Important meetings with officials, including one with his colleague Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former Mayor Giuliani, as well as a visit to the “Mad Fun Farm,” the first urban garden created by children in New York. And he used the subway system to get around...

“These two cities are unique for different reasons, Rome for its history, and New York from an economic and social point of view.” The mayor of the Eternal City, Gianni Alemanno, could not contain his enthusiasm during his trip to the Big Apple, where his meetings, appointments, and events were often very different from each other.

Throughout his tour de force he tried to feel the pulse of the great metropolis. We might even say that he went right through to its veins. In fact, and this will certainly make news in Italy where VIPs



rarely forgo drivers and cars, he took the subway to meet his colleague Michael Bloomberg at City Hall.

He described his impressions to journalists in this way: "Very efficient, orderly, both the subway stations and cars are clean. I did not see any graffiti; it means that the 'anti-writer' initiative is working. And this is how they combat blight. Either I was just lucky or there is truly a high standard."

The issues that interested him the most and which he discussed at length with Mayor Bloomberg were security, cultural exchange between Rome and New York, as well as exploring the possibility of a partnership in tourism. They also considered the role of educators and the opportunity for student exchanges between schools and universities in both cities.

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Photos by Riccardo Chioni

In East Harlem Gianni Alemanno met with elementary school students that tend the "Mad Fun Farm," the first urban garden created in New York, located on 98th Street and Third Avenue. Among the carrots, peas, squash, and peppers, the mayor of Rome was given a tour by the children themselves. Alemanno, who is also the former Minister of Agriculture, was particularly interested in the young students' project.

New York City Housing Authority Commissioner Margarita López and President of Citizens Committee for New York City Peter Kostmayer explained the idea of creating the first urban garden that covers an area of 10,000 square feet.

Security, respect for the city, and the education of young citizens were recurring themes throughout Alemanno's visit. The connection between these topics was made clear in his discussion with Mayor Bloomberg about security and the young farmers' experiences in Harlem.

The police force of New York works together with citizens who coordinate local volunteer projects. This type of "volunteer citizen" is useful not only for safety measures but for social initiatives as well. The participation of ordinary citizens at an early age is of vital importance in order to improve the image of their own city and to combat urban decay for successive generations. It is important, according to Alemanno, to create a kind of positive influence that can inspire young people. "We must invest in this type of citizenship, which is already present in the U.S. and that fosters a strong spirit of community..."

Alemanno also said that he is ready to implement "volunteer days" in Rome and that he is looking for high-profile participants. "Public figures, politicians, as well as actors and soccer players need to spread this message. This is not propaganda with a political purpose, but a spontaneous movement of citizens. And I will be the first to take part."

During his visit Alemanno also spoke with Rudy Giuliani as a consultant about safety in the city of Rome. For Gianni Alemanno, "it is a genuine concern. We believe that Giuliani can help." Alemanno met with the Italian-American former mayor at his consultancy firm in Times Square. "He explained that he started with an order against homeless camps because people thought they had a right to sleep in the streets. He resorted to drastic measures, zero tolerance. This was not an end in itself but a prerequisite to ensure the welfare of the community." The role of the police was,



according to Alemanno, fundamental to Giuliani's mission as his administration integrated auxiliary volunteers into the police force.

The former mayor New York re-introduced the role of "auxiliary police officers" who patrol the streets as volunteers. It could be a model for the "local area volunteers," a term that Alemanno said he prefers to "making the rounds" or "walking the beat." "I don't like it, just as the overwhelming majority of Romans don't like it because it evokes images of a 'do-it-yourself' justice system."

After he was introduced by Consul General Francesco Maria Talò to the consular community, Alemanno emphasized the importance of his trip which has allowed him to meet Italians all over the world. He also mentioned the need to modify some of the laws relating to voting abroad, votes that undoubtedly represent a major achievement. For Alemanno, it is also important to address the closing of consular offices where Italians and Italian American can re-acquire citizenship. A very large crowd from the consular community was present, including representatives from the CGIE as well as prominent figures in science, culture, and business, and the council member elected by Italians abroad, Berardo Amato.

Speaking of Rome, he said: "We want Italians all over the world to be proud. We want Rome's future to be secure. Rome has the potential to become a great international city: all that is necessary is a means to unite the past along with the future. And in New York we want to focus on the community to ensure that Italy is more well-known and better understood."

Alemanno promised to return again soon and enhance the relationship between New York and Rome through the implementation of specific projects and initiatives.

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