

Refugees In Italy, And Benin Refugee Situation, SEPTEMBER 2004

Italy

Italy has become home to many desperate refugees from southern Europe and north Africa, including some of our brethren. A brief visit was made to try to make contact with two North African brethren, an Albanian sister and also to visit our Eritrean brother N, who is appealing for asylum in Rome.

It was a somewhat frustrating visit, as our brethren are living semi-legally in Italy, living in great squalor in refugee areas of the big cities. We gave assistance as we could, encouraging them to appeal to the UNHCR, although given the large numbers arriving daily on the shores of Italy and Sicily each day on refugee ships, the chances of being granted asylum in a Western country appear remote- humanly speaking. Please do pray for our brethren.

The highlight of the visit was to see our dear brother N again. He fled Eritrea to Sudan, and then made the hazardous journey over the Sahara on the back of an overcrowded truck, to Libya. On the way, several died, including a sister whom he had baptized. We were able to visit him in Libya, baptize another one of his contacts, and give him funds to get on a ship which released him on the shores of southern Italy. From thence he made his way to Rome, where he was living on the embankment of a railway station with many other such refugees. Br Chris Tarry described the awful situation there in a previous carelink. On a stretch of land covered with garbage, abandoned shopping trollies etc, the refugees live and sleep as best they can. The taxi driver who took us there didn't want to even go near the place, saying that this is a total no-go area for the Police. We went at night, and took a few photos which simply don't do justice to the squalor and desperation there. Bro. N had been stabbed there, and thanks to the brotherhood's support he has moved to an apartment.



Photo: Bro. N showing his stab wound



Photo: Our brother's makeshift bed in the open air on the railway embankment

Whilst living there, he had spread the Gospel in his enthusiastic manner, and it was a great pleasure to watch Bro. N baptize TESHAY at sunset on a beach near Rome. Teshay is another Eritrean refugee. He has quit trusting in the arm of flesh and devoted his life to Bible study and the life of faith in Christ, waiting in Hope for the Lord's return. Teshay is still living on the railway embankment. He sleeps on a makeshift bed in the open air. There is a building there which the refugees have taken over, with a tap and sink which serves around 100 men. All the UNHCR have done is provide some metal cubicle toilets.



Photo: Tap and sink in the building the refugees took over



Photo: Our two brethren kneeling to pray on the beach [after dark] after the baptism

Both Tesfay and Bro. N recounted their hazardous journeys across the Mediterranean from Libya. They each travelled [separately] on overcrowded small boats. The one Br. N had intended travelling on had no space for him, and capsized in a storm, with the loss of all on board. Tesfay explained how his boat ran into a storm near Malta, and all of them desperately prayed to God to deliver them. It reminded him of course of the experience of Paul, and he feels his prayers then were answered by meeting Br N and learning the Truth, culminating in his baptism.

Both our brethren are in the UNHCR process and we need to pray earnestly for a positive result for them, so that they will be able to live a more peaceable life in a tolerant country.

Whilst writing of refugees, we would remind you of the continued desperate plight of Br Abed and his family in Benin. They have asked us to appeal to the brotherhood for any ecclesia especially in Canada who would sponsor them.



Photo: Br Abed and his family in the refugee camp

Please contact us for further information.