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AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MIGRANT & REFUGEE OFFICE

News

The official newsletter of the Australian Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office

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Archbishop Antonio Vegliò, President of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People and Fr. Gabriele Bentoglio, under-secretary of the same Council will visit Australia in May on the invitation of the late Bishop Joseph Grech (former Bishops Delegate for the Pastoral care of Migrants and Refugees).

The visit will take place from May 2 to May 14, 2011 and is hosted by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO).

This visit is the first visit of its kind to take place and will aim to encourage migrant chaplains and communities living and working in Australia.

Fr Maurizio Pettenà of the ACMRO hopes that the visit will contribute greatly to sharing Australia's experience of pastoral care to migrants and refugees with the Holy See.

"We wish this visit to be pastoral in nature, to exhibit the wonderful work of migrant chaplains around Australia to these representatives of the Holy See", said Fr Maurizio.

"We hope that the visit will have an impact on the wider community in Australia to showcase the pastoral care of the Catholic Church to Migrants and Refugees in the broader context of the Church's teaching on this matter", he said.

Archbishop Vegliò will address the Plenary of the Australian Bishops at Mary MacKillop place on May 11, and will meet with migrant chaplains and pastoral workers in various parts of the country.

New ACMRO Website coming soon!

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE



It is the hope of Archbishop Vegliò and Fr Bentoglio that they might better understand the system in Australia regarding the provision of pastoral care to migrant and refugees.

This visit will happen just a few months before the Bishops of Australia take part in the Ad Limina visit to the Holy Father and to the heads of the various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

During the Ad Limina visit, the Australian Bishops will visit the headquarters of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant people, highlighting the importance the Australian Church places on migrant and refugee issues.



Archbishop Vegliò

Theology and Migration

Last year, on the 28 April, Archbishop Vegliò gave an address on Theology and Migration to the European Migration Congress in Spain. The following quotes are taken from the address,

“the phenomenon of migrations has always accompanied the history of humanity, but in the past years it has taken on almost universal dimensions and ever more complex meanings. Every continent and all governments are called upon to tackle it and the new aspects that accompany it in our time. Motivations and causes have been the object of countless studies and congresses, which often note and document mainly the dramatic ways in which many migrations take place, but they have not been able to reduce their human and social cost.”

“In the 27 countries of the Union, it is estimated that there are 24 million immigrants at present, mostly from the countries that belong to the Union. Two-thirds of the foreigners present are hosted by Germany, France and the United Kingdom, even though the Mediterranean countries are recording constant increases. On the other hand, it is difficult to obtain precise figures regarding the irregular immigrants, but according to recent evaluations, they could be between 4.5 and 8 million, with an estimated increase of between 350,000 and 500,000 a year.”

“all the European countries, albeit in different ways, experience the paradox of increasingly closed or selective borders, and, at the same time, inflows of irregular migrants. The same can really be said about the other continents: ***a political attitude of rejecting immigrants is growing, whereas the economies still need to hire them.*** It is obvious to everyone that we are before the tendency of many countries to entrench themselves, to close in on themselves, to ensure the level of well-being attained within their walls, but without paying sufficient attention to the needs of those outside the walls with a grave omission of the principle of solidarity.”

"In recent times, the so-called "armored communities" have been growing, and we may be about to witness the birth of "armored continents", with Europe and North America in the front line. We will probably see new iron curtains fall soon, with tightened border controls and new coastal defence measures. Some venture to say that the reinforcement of the borders does not serve only or in first place to stop the migratory movements - which in fact continue - but to define the migrants that cross them as illegal, thereby giving them an identity that puts them in a position of inferiority and a lack of rights: ***an army of invisible people who can be blackmailed and exploited.***"

Archbishop Vegliò also spoke about the Dialectics of Migration,

"The sense of insecurity which the European citizens feel today is caused, on the one hand, by the inevitable generational changes and, on the other, by an economic globalisation without rules. Therefore, shifting the blame for the instability on the migrants – rather than facing realistically the problems that have roots elsewhere – appears to help create in public opinion the image of a State that is vigilant and concerned about its citizens' security, and this fuels the fear of others and of migrants in particular. In the current situation of crisis of the State-Nation institution, while the political and cultural entity of the European Union is becoming consolidated, it is claimed that security can be offered by reinforcing the national identital sense more, without evaluating the fact sufficiently that the European societies have already become multicultural, multi-ethnic and pluri-religious, and that social, cultural and political integration policies for the migratory component present in a structural way in our societies need to be tackled with courage and foresight."

"We have to reaffirm, in fact, that the diversity brought by the migrations is not a given: there are different things, individuals and cultures. Often, throughout history, these differences have been used to dominate or discriminate and their value was rarely enhanced. ***Instead, to conceive of diversity as a value means to develop a pluralistic view of reality where recognition, respect and promotion of diversity is possible and hopeful.***"

"Today's migrations are characterized by a great complexity of factors. It should not be forgotten that the migrants themselves do not play a passive role; on the contrary, they are the immediate protagonists both from the standpoint of protecting their fundamental human rights and observing their duties. They are driven by grave needs to leave or, in some cases, to flee from their countries; but they also make choices and move in order to fulfill individual or family projects to improve their living conditions, often with courage and determination. These are choices that all of us would make if we were in the same situations."

"Emigration, in almost every case, is not a pleasure but a necessity...by preventing it a sacred human right is violated, by abandoning it to itself it is made ineffective...it is the sincere expression of a permanent state of things:"[4] Giovanni Battista Scalabrini wrote this in 1887. "Migrations, therefore, are a structural reality of our time. It is everyone's task to look after it for the common good, also by stressing respect for the norms, traditions and customs of the countries that welcome the migrants."

For the full transcript of Archbishop Vegliò address please see <http://www.zenit.org/article-29067?l=english>



Reflections of Christmas Island

On a headland overlooking Flying Fish Cove, the only relatively safe haven for boats to land at Christmas Island, is a small cairn of rocks surrounded at its base by river stones. Who placed the cairn here is unknown but for anyone on the Island it is a heartfelt and lasting tribute to those aboard SIEV X, the flimsy overcrowded craft that sank in the deep waters between Indonesia and Australia in October 2002, claiming the lives of 353 asylum seekers.

Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel or SIEV, is the acronym used for any unauthorised boat entering Australian waters. The number following, in this case X, is the tracking number used by Australian surveillance authorities. SIEV X would later become known as "A Certain Maritime Incident," the name of the Senate Inquiry that followed and later adopted as the title for Tony Kevin's powerful book on the tragedy.

Of the 400 aboard the vessel that night in October, only 47 survived. Among the dead were 146 children, 142 women and 65 men. Few bodies were recovered and of the four reportedly picked up by an Indonesian fishing boat and taken to Indonesia, where they were buried or even if they were buried remains a mystery.

But in this small makeshift memorial of rocks and stones on Christmas Island's headland, the dead of that terrible night are remembered. The names and ages of the children who lost their lives are printed in indelible ink on each of the small river stones that surround the base of the cairn.



From late January to Easter last year, I spent nine weeks on Christmas Island providing pastoral service to the asylum seekers held at the Detention Centre as well to the small enthusiastic Catholic local community.

Each day throughout the time I was there, **I would pass the simple memorial to SIEV X on my early morning walk.** Almost always, I stopped to offer a silent prayer, as I picked up the stones around the base and read aloud the names and ages written there: "Ali, 4"...."Alyla 6"...."Mohammed, 10..."

As I prayed, I'd look out to sea and try to imagine the terror these children and all the others on board must have felt as they desperately fought to survive in the darkness as their vessel sank far from land in unforgiving seas. There would have been screams and cries for help and then later, as one after another sank beneath the waves, a cruel and terrible silence.

Last week, I recalled the cairn and the plight of those aboard SIEV X as eight victims of another shipwreck tragedy off Christmas Island were laid to rest in Sydney. **This time the children and adults mourned by family and relatives had lost their lives when SIEV 221,** a wooden fishing boat carrying as many as 100 asylum seekers, broke up in violent turbulent seas off the needle sharp limestone rocks of the Island.

Within sight of the cairn on the headland above, the craft was dashed against the rocks and broke up tossing men, women and children into the roiling water and crashing waves. Despite heroic attempts by local residents and later by crews on a customs vessel and naval boat, more than 50 lost their lives.

Few who saw the dramatic footage of the 15 December shipwreck and watched in horror as the boat broke up in huge seas off aptly-named Rocky Point, will ever forget those gut-wrenching scenes. **Nor will they forget the frantic efforts by local people who clambered down treacherous cliffs to throw life jackets into the raging waters, and their frustration at not being able to do more to rescue survivors.** Nor will anyone forget the courage of the Navy personnel who launched inflatables into the massive seas to risk their lives to save those of 41 men, women and children and to recover the bodies of 30 of the 50 to 60 estimated to have lost their lives.

Of the bodies retrieved 13 are still awaiting formal identification by the Australian Federal Police and have not yet been released by the WA coroner. Identification has taken many weeks and it wasn't until 15 February this year, exactly two months after the tragedy, that 17 of the bodies were finally released for burial. Which is when 21 survivors of the tragedy and relatives of victims, were briefly released from detention on Christmas Island and flown to Sydney for the funeral services for eight of those drowned. The remaining nine bodies of those released at the request of their families, were returned to villages in Iraq or Iran for burial there.

Much of the media attention that day went to the three buried in the Muslim section of Rookwood Cemetery. Indelibly etched in all our minds of that day was the grief-stricken face of eight-year-old Iranian boy, Seena who lost his father, mother and brother in the tragedy. Held in detention ever since, he broke down as his father's coffin was lowered into the ground.



The boy's tears were for all he had lost. But so far only the body of his father has been found.

That day at Rookwood two other equally heart-breaking funerals were held. **One was for an eight-month-old baby, the other for a four-year-old child.**



As these funerals were taking place, on the other side of the city at Rouse Hill's Castlebrook Memorial Park, Christian families and survivors of the shipwreck were holding services for five other victims of SIEV 221. Typically the media gave little coverage to these funerals, focussing instead on the Rookwood Cemetery burials, adding to Australia's ongoing false and unfair stereotyping of boat people as "Muslims" and "possible terrorist."

I attended the funerals at Castlebrook Memorial Park, which were conducted in the Chapel attached to the cemetery, by a young Anglican pastor.

The victims at these funerals were Protestant Christians, and like all Christians in Iraq, had undergone persecution, religiously-motivated attacks from extremists which had escalated since the US-led Coalition's invasion in 2003. Churches have been bombed, with many priests and clergy as well as their congregations killed.

Little wonder, Christians are fleeing war-torn Iraq in greater and greater numbers.

Those mourning their dead that day comprised just eight adults and a four year old girl. All were either survivors or family of the victims. And all were detainees kept incarcerated on Christmas Island.

The child was dressed in purple but everyone else was in black. Sitting quietly in the front row of the chapel, the grieving relatives, who were also detainees flown in from Christmas Island, shared their pew with Department of Immigration personnel. While outside carefully keeping watch were the ever-present guards from SERCO, which operate the detention camps on Christmas Island, APF officers and a sprinkling of press.

A translator had been employed so the grieving family members could understand the young Anglican pastor. But there were unfamiliar terms and he struggled with readings such as the 23rd Psalm and what seemed to me, to be an overly long sermon. But throughout this, although obviously only comprehending less than half of what was taking place, **the Iraqi relatives of the dead, remained silent and dignified, their eyes seldom leaving the five coffins draped in white pall**s, each with a small metal plaque giving the date of death and a tag number as identification.

During the service, one of the survivors was invited to play the piano. He played with great skill and feeling and the haunting music he chose resonated with the other mourners connecting their faith to past memories and their lives in Iraq.

The relatives' deep grief finally broke as the coffins were carried to the hearse and taken by three hearses into the cemetery itself where an exclusion Zone had been set up by AFP and SERCO to keep the press at bay.

Unnervingly special frames had been set up over the graves and using these, the five coffins in unison were slowly lowered into the ground. Rose petals were handed to the mourners to sprinkle on the coffins after they had reached their last resting place.

The little girl in purple gathered a handful and with childlike solemnity went from grave to grave releasing brilliant red and pink petals.

Then with the formal part of the service over, the survivor who had played piano inside the chapel, brought out a guitar and began singing hymns in his and his fellow detainees' own language. For more than 15 minutes the mourners raised their voices in song, turning to God as they sought understanding for the tragedy as well as consolation.

But as yet there is no memorial to those who died on 15 December in the relentless seas off Rocky Point. **I hope someone will build a memorial as a tribute to those who sought safety for their children and a new life in Australia, only to die within sight of that dream.**

I like to imagine that one day there will be a cairn on Rocky Point to remember SIEV 221 and that it will sit opposite the cairn with its rocks and river stones on the headland on the other side of Flying Fish Cove. The two would be like silent sentinels, each within sight of the other, reminding whoever passes of the ongoing flow of people forced from their homes by war, torture, persecution and fear for their lives, and risking everything to find a haven elsewhere and begin a new life.

But after this, let us hope and pray there will never again be a need to construct another such memorial on Christmas Island; And that the detention centre is dismantled and Australia welcomes refugees instead of fearing them.

Fr Jim Carty
1 March 2011





Sudanese-Australians

They fled from war. They went looking for peace. Instead, many Sudanese-Australians had found confusion and loss of identity. Many feel lost.



They fled from the second, but worse, civil war in Sudan. In 1983 the 1972 Addis-Ababa agreement was broken when the North tried to establish Sharia Law in the mainly Christian South. Peaceful life in the cities and villages was just beginning to flourish. It was shattered. Tribes were dispersed, clans were destroyed, skin groups (relatives) were no more and families were scattered over all the continents of the world. Single mothers fled with their children to look for safety. Fathers fought in a political, economic and religious war. Most of the people who left the country in the late 1980s were Christians. They found homes of a sort in refugee camps. Many children were forced to become child soldiers. Many young people were tortured in the “ghost

houses” of Khartoum by Islamic extremists because they would not reject Christ. Many of them died.

There are people who were tortured for their faith in Sudan who have lost their faith here in Australia.

In Africa, the Church was the only point of hope for many Sudanese in diaspora. They experienced discrimination, racism and violence in the camps. There were fights with local tribes who resented them being on their land. Hunger and hardship became part of the daily living. In all this, God was their “strength and refuge.” (Ps 46:1). Christian life flourished and Sunday worship was the sustaining fuel. Catechists became the ones to “strengthen and encourage” (1 Thess 3:2); they gave hope to the people.

In Sudan, the role of the catechists is unique – something like the role of permanent deacons, but not ordained. They are “true sharers in the church’s saving mission.” This role became important in diaspora because there were not many priests to “feed the people of God with knowledge and understanding” (cf Jer 3:15). Therefore, catechists “worked to evangelize the people”, sustained them and kept them faithful to the Gospel. They still try to continue this role in all the countries where Sudanese find themselves now.



In Australia, the Sudanese Catholic community suffers in many ways. Lack of good spiritual support has caused many to leave the Church. The younger generation of Sudanese has not just lost faith, but their Sudanese culture and identity as well. Some face racism and prejudice. In the community, one can find many young people who are confused with this new life in Australia. They have been terribly traumatized in the past. They have not found inner peace. They do not know what to do or which path to follow. They are looking for meaning but in wrong places. Many do not see the Church as the key to finding meaning anymore. Many



suffer from mental illness because of their past experiences and their present lack of direction. **All this has challenged the Sudanese Catholic leaders – the catechists – everywhere in Australia to rethink their role.** They feel the need to redouble efforts to help the young to recognize their vital and rightful place in the Church. Loss of identity is contributing to the suffering which this community has been facing since the outbreak of the war in 1983.

Many young people in the Sudanese community are facing cultural shock and identity crisis. There is a generation and a culture gap between them and their parents. Many parents, especially the women whose husbands have been killed or are still in Africa, understand only a little English. They do not understand Australian society or the pressures on their children. In this great South Land of the Holy Spirit, Sudanese youngsters are faced with issues which not even their parents have faced before: they have freedom! **Who would have thought that a beautiful gift like freedom could become an issue one day for our people?** In the camps there was no freedom, no opportunity to fend for yourself, no self-determination. Young people are expected to be responsible – after years of having no opportunity to accept responsibility. People could not hunt or grow food in camps in the desert. They became dependent on others. Now they are free, with no preparation for freedom. Freedom has been for some youngsters the cause for many troubles. We, the Sudanese community, need help to know how to use this great gift of freedom and “our only help is in the name of the Lord” (cf Ps 124:8) through the church.





Broadly, there are three types of young people in the Sudanese community today in Australia: those, a minority, who came with both parents, those who came with single mothers and those who came as unaccompanied minors. The ones facing more difficulties are the latter two.



One Sudanese-Australian social-worker says the problems in the community are “endless”. There is poverty, lack of housing, lack of employment. **There are language and cultural bars to education.** Many people are living on half a Centrelink income. They take the Centrelink payment, keep half, and send the rest to Africa to their family who are living in appalling conditions and utter poverty.

Sudanese-Australians are not assured that all will be well with their families when independence comes in July. **The peace is fragile. There have been outbreaks of fighting.** There is tension over boundaries, especially for the disputed Abyei region, which is rich in oil. Some commentators warn that there could even be another war before independence. We hope and pray that these commentators are wrong – but this is a real pressure on all Sudanese, wherever they may live.

The Church and Caritas have been generous in arranging prayers for peace on special occasions. **Our people also have stories of faith, of persecution, of suffering.** We would like the Church to make opportunities for people to hear these stories. Sharing them with the mainstream Church could help us become a more compassionate, generous Church demonstrating the love of Christ to people in desperate need throughout the world.





There is tension between young people and their families. Traditionally, families pay large bride prices. Young men in Australia are often expected to find the money for the bride price themselves. **This means they have to find work in places like factories or abattoirs when they hope to study.** Part of them wants to break away from the old traditions. Part of them says they must respect their families and especially their parents' culture.

Some of the elders here in Australia are preserving old political and cultural rivalries and involving young people in them.

Catechists, pastoral workers, community elders and families are faced with all these challenges. They try their best to work a way out – but in most cases, things do not work out.

The issues facing the Sudanese community in Australia are real and heartbreaking. **They demand urgent attention.**

Now as the Christian South approaches independence, there is hope. There is hope for the Church in Sudan and there is hope for the Sudanese faithful in Australia. What Sudanese-Australian Catholics need at this moment is a reconfirmation of their faith. They need to hear once again that “Jesus Christ is our only hope” (cf Tim 1:1)

Article By Deng Chuor

Photo's Deacon Nick Kerr



Libya, 26 April 2011

The UNHCR estimate that some 30,000 Libyan civilians have fled their homes in Libya's Western Mountain region and crossed to southern Tunisia over the past three weeks. UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic states that most of the refugees are ethnic Berbers who have fled the fighting and shelling of their towns and villages in Western Mountains. Many families are fleeing due to the close proximity of clashes and indiscriminate bombardments. Several towns in the Western Mountain region are now virtually deserted.

The UNHCR report that fewer than ten per cent of Libyan arrivals into Tunisia are staying in camps. Generous local Tunisian communities have hosted the majority of Libyan refugees. The Tunisia hosts are under increasing strain as their resources are quickly running out.

The UNHCR continues to assist displaced Libyan families, as well as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from other countries who have also fled from Ajdabiyya and Misrata. The situation in Misrata continues with devastating fighting destroying many homes and buildings and leaving many parts without electricity or water. The UNHCR report, that sniper fire, street clashes and shelling are preventing many people in Misrata from leaving their homes to get food and medicine.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office assured that Pope Benedict XVI and the whole Church "remember in prayer all the victims -- of every nationality and condition, including women and children -- who lose their lives in the terrible journey to flee situations of poverty or injustice or violence that afflicts them, in search of protection, welcome and conditions of life that are more human."

Haiti, 14 April 2011

The Jesuit Refugee Service has urged Latin American nations to protect Haitian victims of smuggling and trafficking networks in the region. The JRS report that in 2009 around 75,000 Haitians migrants were living in South America. Tragically, the worsening humanitarian situation in Haiti has forced many more to migrate, particularly to Ecuador and Chile.

The JRS lament how the slow pace of reconstruction of post earthquake Haiti has helped strengthen people smuggling operations in the region. In addition, the consequent tightening of migration policies has forced Haitians into even more precarious and vulnerable circumstances.

Thailand –Myanmar (Burma), 13 April 2011

Thailand has told the new Burmese government to begin preparations for the return of some displaced Burmese nationals currently in refugee camps in Thailand. The UNHCR estimate around 98,000 people are registered as living in the Thailand camps, with an additional 40,000 to 50,000 unregistered also living there.

Thai government spokes person Dr Panitan Wattanayagorn says the Thai government expects the UNHCR to be more responsible for the people in these camps and also wants western nations to work progressively with Thailand to make sure these people can be settled down in third countries or return to Myanmar.

The UNHCR remain concerned about the safety of those returning to Myanmar as they currently do not have access to certain areas such as eastern Myanmar. As such the UNHCR has not been able to accurately assess the security for returnees.

