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AFRICA/TUNISIA - A refugee camp has been assaulted from Libya: "we need to accelerate the reception procedures," says the priest who assists them

Tunis (Agenzia Fides) - " The UNHCR's responsible have arrived from Genova to try and handle the situation. The problem is that if the Tunisian government does not guarantee security, a commitment that was made when it had authorized the establishment of the camp in its territory, the situation will remain explosive, " says Father Mussie Zerai to Fides, an Eritrean priest, President of the Habeshia Agency for the Development Cooperation, whose members assist the refugees welcomed in the Chouca camp, about 25 km from the town of Ras Ajdir, in Tunisia, near the border with Libya.
The Chouca camp welcomes about 3,500 people in precarious conditions. Africans have fled from Libya in recent months, due to the outbreak of the civil war. These people live in tents in the desert, in terribly hot weather during the day while at night it is cold. "Initially there was a movement of solidarity on behalf of Tunisians against the refugees, but everything has a limit, because if this situation is likely to become chronic, people are not willing to accept it. I am not saying that there has been lack of interest by international bodies, but very little has been done to resolve what was to be a temporary situation " denounces the priest.
"The Tunisian authorities have asked to speed up procedures to evacuate these people, both for those who can return to their country, and for those that can be accepted by other nations because they have the status of refugee- said Father Zerai -. There must be more willingness on behalf of those countries that had declared their willingness to accept refugees (European countries, USA, Canada, Australia) to increase the quota of refugees who can be accepted. "
Father Zerai reconstructs the latest episodes of violence. "Within the camp tension increased when a group of Sudanese tried to abuse a young Eritrean. His countrymen intervened in defense of the girl, triggering the reaction of the Sudanese. In the night between Saturday 21 and Sunday, May 22 they set fire to the tents of some Eritreans, killing four boys. " The following day, May 23, a group of West Africans who were guests at the camp, blocked the road linking Tunisia to Libya, thus preventing the passage to the inhabitants of the place who had to go to work and have their businesses. So the villagers near the camp attacked, ransacked what they could and set fire to the tents of refugees.
" There are Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis, Sudanese, Nigerians, Ivorians, Senegalese and other West African countries in the camp - said the priest -. It was precisely the people from West Africa to hold the demonstration because they had not been granted the right to seek asylum in a host country, since they do not have the status of refugees, but so far they have not even been given the opportunity to return home. So they felt neglected by the international institutions and wanted to draw attention regarding their situation. " (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 05/26/2011)

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