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AFRICA/SOUTH SUDAN - The village of Rokwe is a refuge for leprosy patients

Yuba (Agenzia Fides) - At first glance, the village of Rokwe, on the outskirts of Yuba, seems like any other village in Southern Sudan. However it is not a common town, as it is a colony for people who have leprosy, assisted by members of a local church, entrusted to the Brothers of St. Martin de Porres. The small health center suffers from a chronic lack of resources, the war has also made the drug administration inconstant. However those involved in the colony have always been determined to take care of patients. Even after being treated, many leprosy patients prefer to stay in the village. They often suffer serious disabilities that make their lives complicated in what is considered one of the poorest regions in the world. In addition, during the Civil War, the colony seemed to be a safer place. In fact, the 350 inhabitants of Rokwe were often saved from violent raids that instead occurred in other places, because the soldiers were afraid of being infected. "It is a real stigma. People believe they can contract leprosy by simply waving to a patient, when in fact it is impossible. People are afraid even to approach a patient who was sick but now has healed", said one of the Brothers of the community of San Martin de Porres. Many lepers, live in fear because in the event of violent attacks they would not be able to defend themselves. Although most of the people of Southern Sudan have some hope for their country, which has recently been declared independent from Khartoum, many are skeptical because so far substantial improvements in the situation have not been seen. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 05/10/2011)

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