



ASIA/YEMEN - African migrants tortured by human traffickers until their ransom is paid

Hajjah (Agenzia Fides) - The discovery of 70 men and women battered, held prisoners in Hajjah, a remote area of the Governorate of Yemen near the Saudi border, led to an investigation into the torture and blackmail African immigrants have to deal with by criminal gangs. According to local authorities, these people, of ethnic Oromo and Somali of the region of Ethiopia Somalia, were held as prisoners, wearing only their underwear, in a house set up by human being traffickers in Sharqia area in the city of Haradh. Some of these, bypassing the high surrounding walls, managed to escape by giving the alarm and reporting to the authorities that they were savagely beaten with pipes by their captors, and were burned with cigarettes and other atrocities. Many of the victims, according to the head of the District Security of Haradh, were trying to find work in Saudi Arabia, but unfortunately they ended up in the hands of criminals who in order to release them asked them thousands of dollars in ransom. Immigrants continue to be tortured until family members pay, or until the arrival of new immigrants who fall into the net. According to a recent report by the Ministry of Interior, between January 2011 and February 2012, 170 Africans were held captive, tortured and abused by bandits in Haradh. The victims are 91 young men, 10 women, 50 children and 19 elderly men, often beaten until the loss of sight and hearing. The police in Haradh have arrested a couple suspected of holding in custody 49 and 79 Ethiopian illegal immigrants. Another 20 Ethiopian women are at risk of being tortured and raped. Rape is one of the most common methods of torture. According to witnesses, it seems that most of the 3 000 women held captive in Haradh over the past year, have been repeatedly raped, some were pregnant. Other victims have been mutilated in various parts of the body, eyes, back, legs, as well as being scarred on the face and head and left bleeding. Following other research, the district of security in Haradh has identified other detention centers in villages outside the city. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in spite of widespread discontent registered over the last year in Yemen, there was an increase of nearly 100% of Ethiopians from the Horn of Africa: more than 65 thousand compared to the 34,422 in 2010. The UNHCR said that every year between 10 000 and 15 000 immigrants enter illegally in Heradh, along the western coast of Yemen. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 12/03/2012)