



EUROPE/ITALY - The rights of refugees and asylum seekers should be respected

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "The rights of refugees and asylum seekers should be respected. If they have the right to flee to save their lives, they should be granted the right to enter the Country of arrival. In addition, other rights of protection, as well as the right to free movement and right to work must be applied. Governments have the responsibility to protect those who flee from violence, persecution and discrimination." This was stated by Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò, President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, in his speech delivered at a prayer vigil in memory of the victims of voyages towards Europe, which was held in Rome at the Basilica S. Maria in Trastevere, on Thursday, June 21. The vigil was organized by: the Community of St. Egidio, Astalli Association Center, Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, Migrantes Foundation, Italian Caritas, ACLI, with the participation of communities and associations of immigrants, refugees, voluntary organizations, ecumenical representatives and relatives of the victims.

"Last year alone, about 2,000 people lost their lives while crossing the Mediterranean Sea," the Cardinal recalled, calling to question the reasons why so many people leave their country exposing themselves at considerable risk: "They are people who desperately try to reach another country because they are fleeing from persecution, from human rights violations, civil war or simply because they are seeking better economic opportunities to support their families." The Cardinal also noted that "many governments have responded to the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers with restrictive policies, lowering humanitarian standards in order to make entry more difficult ... The measure of repatriation is sometimes justified as a strategy to combat 'irregular migration. In reality, such a measure blocks the entrance of asylum seekers to the country. Moreover, little is done to decrease the number of asylum seekers and to reduce detention despite the existing rules on human rights. All this belongs to a policy of deterrence. In fact, we face problems like the presence of asylum seekers and refugees, instead of considering the causes for which they have fled from their country. This goes hand in hand with a major closure on behalf of the public, with consequent negative effects on the policies of refuge."

As a Christian community, knowing that the Gospel is a message of comfort and hope, and that Jesus identifies himself with those who suffer from poverty, deprivation and injustice, we are called to show solidarity in love, that is to practice the "works of mercy," urged Cardinal Vegliò: "If we want to unite ourselves to Jesus, we must begin to join those who are on the margins of society, to share their situation. " (SL) (Agenzia Fides 22/6/2012)