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EUROPE/ITALY - The percentage of children affected by leprosy and the stigma that still marginalizes the sick remains high

Bologna (Agenzia Fides) - On January 27, we celebrate the 60th World Day of Leprosy, established by the French physician Raoul Follereau and recognized by the UN to focus the attention of the world to the plight of leprosy and the stigma associated with it. According to statistics, every day in the world around 700 people get sick and at least that many every day, are cases not identified. In 2011 patients worldwide were 219,075, while the cases being treated until December 2011 amounted to 181,941. Among them, the percentage of children remains high. It really is not possible to determine exactly how many there are. An estimated 10 million people suffer the physical and social consequences of the disease which, although perfectly curable, still sees people that have been affected, although healed completely, as diverse and socially marginalized.
In a statement sent to Fides Agency, the Italian Association Friends of Raoul Follereau (AIFO), claims to have witnessed, in 2011, 344,002 persons affected by leprosy and 16,133 new cases were diagnosed. Also in 2011, the activities of AIFO related to leprosy reached 44,634 people, including former patients followed by the projects of the association and the people treated for complications related to the disease. On the occasion of World Day, this year thousands of volunteers of AIFO, which in 51 years has contributed to the care of more than one million leprosy patients, on Sunday, January 27 will offer in the Italian squares the "Honey of solidarity." (AP) (Agenzia Fides 23/01/2013)

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