

## Is border security more important than human life?

### World Refugee Day 2007

#### Inter-religious Prayer Vigil “Chemin sans Issue”

Since 1993 at least 8,000 migrants and refugees have died trying to enter ‘fortress’ Europe; that’s equivalent to three people every two days. Indiscriminate and inhumane border controls force desperate people to take even greater risks to flee extreme poverty, persecution and war.

On 20 June, World Refugee Day, Jesuit Refugee Service Europe (JRS) calls on governments to reflect on this needless loss of life and act to place human rights above tight border security. While governments have a right to manage their borders, this right is not absolute. They also have obligations to protect those fleeing persecution and serious human rights abuses, and do all in their power to prevent unnecessary loss of life.

To remember those who died, JRS, in cooperation with Kerkwerk Multicultureel Samenleven, will hold an inter-religious prayer vigil ‘Chemin sans Issue’ at 19.00 in Saint Roch Church, on 60 Antwerpsesteenweg in Brussels on 15 June. Christians, Moslems and Buddhists will pay their respects to those who never reached Europe alive.

“We wish to highlight these inhumane policies which give border security precedence to human rights protection. We hope by raising public awareness others will not suffer the same fate” JRS Europe Director, Jan Stuyt SJ, stated.

European policies increasingly restrict entry into Europe. Border fences are higher and patrols have been intensified. Air and sea companies are fined for carrying undocumented migrants and immigration officials are sent to countries of origin to prevent migrants and refugees from leaving in the first place. However, these policies do not deter people from trying to enter Europe. Rather, they force the most vulnerable individuals to seek more and more dangerous and desperate methods of entry.

Below are two real-life case studies which illustrate the risks that fleeing refugees are prepared to take.

For more information about the Prayer Vigil on 15 June or World Refugee Day (20 June) please contact Elizabeth Underhill, JRS Europe Media Officer, [press.europe@mail07.jrs.net](mailto:press.europe@mail07.jrs.net).

For more information about the victims of ‘fortress’ Europe, visit the following websites:

In English: [www.unitedagainstracism.org/pages/campfatalrealities.htm](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/pages/campfatalrealities.htm)

In French: [www.fortresseurope.blogspot.com](http://www.fortresseurope.blogspot.com)

#### CASE STUDIES

\* Ali, 26 years old from Sudan, is just one of many thousands of migrants who have taken the treacherous journey to Italy by sea. He spent one week crossing the desert to reach Libya before leaving for Italy on a rubber dingy with 16 other people. He was told the crossing would only take 12 hours: it actually took six days and five of the immigrants did not survive. Ali lost hope he would ever make it to Italy. He believed he was going to die.

As Ali's case illustrates, the tougher the sanctions and restrictions on entry, the more dangerous and extreme methods of entry are attempted by increasingly desperate groups of refugees and migrants. The suffering of those seeking sanctuary in Europe is masked by the rhetoric of border control. Refugees and migrants have died in deserts, at borders, crossing the sea and hidden in truck holds.

\* In May 2007, a group of 27 sub-Saharan Africans were found clinging to the fishing nets of a Maltese fishing boat. They had been there for three days and nights. The fishing crew had provided them with water and fruit but feared the consequences of granting them access to their boat. This is just one example of how a closed border policy forces individuals to take more extreme risks and hampers any offer of humanitarian support. A culture of fear, instilled by the state, forces those directly in contact with refugees and migrants to provide very little assistance or help.

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is a global Catholic organisation, which was founded in 1980 and whose mission is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people regardless of their religious affiliations. The regional office of JRS - Europe in Brussels networks with JRS staff in over 20 European countries. JRS personnel in Europe accompany inter alia detained asylum seekers and former detainees.